

PHI 170 / PHI 150 - WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

(3 credits)

Professor : Dr. Don Nilson

Office : A-4-12

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e-mail: nilson@aiu.ac.jp

Office Hours: Mon. & Wed. 1:30 – 3:00 P.M

DESCRIPTION : Themes and thinkers that form the core of the Western philosophical tradition from the ancient Greek philosophers to philosophy in the 20th & 21st centuries. Attention is given to ways that Western religious traditions, as well as the arts and the sciences, have interacted with Western philosophy. Philosophers and philosophies to be discussed include : Socrates ; Plato ; Aristotle ; Augustine ; Descartes, Spinoza & Rationalism ; J. Locke & Empiricism ; Kant ; Nietzsche; W. James & Pragmatism; Heidegger, Sartre & Existentialism; The rise of Analytic Philosophy and Phenomenology ; Philosophy today. We aim to understand Western culture more fully by understanding the central place of philosophy in that culture.

OBJECTIVES : In this course students will develop an appreciation and understanding of what some of the central problems of philosophy are, how certain philosophers have answered these questions and you will take steps toward clarifying your own answers to these questions . During this course :

- You will gain an overview of the development of Western philosophy. You will learn about certain trends or basic styles of thinking in Western philosophy.
- You will learn about the major ideas of several of the great philosophers in Western tradition and how their ideas have helped shaped many parts of Western history, thought and culture.
- You will develop careful, thorough and precise ways of reading, and listening to, philosophical works. (These are general techniques that you will find apply well to other fields as well, and so will help improve your general reading, studying and listening skills.)
- You will learn about the basic areas or sub-fields within philosophy, the kinds of questions that arise in each area, as well as the importance of reasoning, experience and feeling for each area.
- You will improve your logical and critical skills. You will come to see more deeply the different ways that people disagree about such things as what is the right or the wrong thing to do or what we truly know and what we do not know.
- You will come to see how the continued study of philosophy can enrich your understanding of Western culture and various aspects of it, such as literature, art, science, politics and religion. Students of Western philosophy often say that this study has allowed them to better understand and appreciate Western culture. For example, study of American pragmatism may help you to better understand the emphasis on individual opinion and expression and the ways ideas are tested through social practices within North American culture.

STUDY MATERIALS:

1. Required text : Christopher Biffle - A Guided Tour of Rene Descartes' *Meditations*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Publications, 3rd Edition, 2000. [This paperback edition includes a complete translation of Descartes' *Meditations*. Note : you will not need the book until week 5.]

Recommended text : Robert C. Solomon & Kathleen M. Higgins – A Short History of Philosophy. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.)

2. Selected readings in the history of Western philosophy will be made available for photocopying or distributed throughout the course.
3. We will view and discuss some films or video material. We will also use some *audio recordings* of philosophers speaking about such recent topics as: psychology, body and mind, or existentialism. You will transcribe selections from these recordings in order to develop your skills in listening to spoken text in philosophy. You will have help and advice in doing this.
4. We will use some on-line resources in philosophy, such as the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* at Stanford University: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>

ASSESSMENT : (Evaluation and Grading)

Evaluation will be made on the basis of exams, 2 short papers, homework, class participation and presentations. These are:

- 1) Exams: There will be a mid-semester exam and a final exam consisting of multiple choice, short-answer and short essay questions. The mid-term exam counts as 20% of the final grade, and the final exam counts for 20%, but may count more if you do especially well on the final exam. Fundamentally, the final exam will function to allow you to improve your final grade .
- 2) Papers : Students will write two short, critically and logically structured papers. Detailed instructions will be provided separately. Papers will count 15% each and papers *must be* turned in on time.
- 3) Homework, Class Participation and Presentations: You are expected to do all readings on time and all assigned homework on time . You are expected to fully participate in class and to be prepared for each class and especially for in-class discussions or presentations that you will do. Together these parts of the course will count for 30% of your grade.

PREPARATION : This is a course for beginners : no prior background or courses in philosophy are required. A sincere interest in gaining a deeper and better understanding of Western thought and culture is expected .

POLICIES :

Attendance and participation : students are expected to attend and participate in all classes and complete all assigned work for the course.

Plagiarism or cheating : In accord with AIU policies and good practices in higher education, plagiarism or cheating on a paper, examination, test, or other assignment will result in the failure on that assignment as a minimum. Cases of plagiarism or cheating will be reported to the Dean of Academic Affairs for relevant action.

Plagiarism is the taking of words or ideas of another person and presenting them as your own. It is acceptable to use someone else's words or ideas as long as you give the person or source proper credit. If you have doubts or questions about how to give credit to someone else in your own writing, please check with the course instructor or EAP faculty.

Cheating is making use of any assistance on an examination, paper, assignment or other class project beyond what has been authorized by the instructor for the assignment. If you have any questions about what is acceptable, please ask.

CLASS ACTIVITIES / CLASS FORMAT – Lecture / discussion is the main format of the class, however we will also be using a few videos and audio listening assignments in this course, as well as including some student presentations on selected themes. These presentations involve group work and are usually a particularly enjoyable part of the course. Also, we expect to have a guest lecturer presenting his or her ideas at least once during the course. We hope this additional perspective will further enrich what you gain from the course.

SPECIAL NOTE : This course is one of the courses which can be used by students to meet part of the required university coursework for the **TEACHERS' CERTIFICATION PROGRAM** . (Details available in the AIU Academic Affairs Office.)

SCHEDULE :

TOPICS BY WEEK OF SEMESTER

1. Introduction. What is philosophy? What are the parts or branches of philosophy? Basic ideas of major Western philosophers. The importance of logic and argument in philosophy. What is a “worldview”? Philosophy as a global phenomenon, an historical phenomenon and a sociological phenomenon. Philosophy and Western culture.
2. Philosophy, myth and the ancient sources of philosophical thought. The Pre-Socratics : Thales, Heraclitus and others. Introduction to Socrates : What is “examining your life”?
3. Socrates : the trial and fate of Socrates. Plato’s metaphysics & epistemology.
4. Plato’s ethics and politics. Aristotle’s epistemology & metaphysics. Aristotle’s ethics.
5. Reason and Medieval Philosophy. Christian and Islamic philosophy in the Middle Ages. The Renaissance. Montaigne and skepticism. The political philosophy of Hobbes.
6. The Philosophy of Descartes and the method of doubt.
Descartes’ *Meditations* : The self, certainty and the existence of God
7. Descartes’ *Meditations* : Mind and body. The thought of Spinoza and the rationalism of Leibniz.
8. Descartes on the existence of God. Problems in Descartes’ philosophy. Spinoza. Pascal.
9. Midterm Exam. / Seeing is believing: John Locke and empiricism.
10. Kant’s philosophy as an alternative to rationalism and empiricism.
11. Kant’s Ethics and J.S. Mill’s Ethics : How shall we decide? Rules or results?
12. Creativity and the arts as interpreted in Western and Non-Western philosophy
Guest lecture / presentation.
13. Kant’s “Copernican revolution.” / Reactions to Kant. / Nietzsche
14. Philosophy in the 20th Century : Pragmatism / Analytic Philosophy /
Phenomenology & Existentialism
15. Philosophy today. / Summary & review. / Final Exam