

Introduction to Philosophy (Historical)

Syllabus Précis

Instructor: Dr. Aaron Smuts

Description

The goal of this course is to introduce students to some of the major problems and figures in the Western philosophical tradition. It follows a historical rather than a problem based format, allowing us to focus on works that have had a significant cultural impact. Some of the topics we will discuss in this course are: What is philosophy? What is virtue? What is the appropriate attitude toward death? Could all of our beliefs be false? What is knowledge? What can we know with certainty? Does God exist? What makes actions right or wrong? What makes some statements meaningful and others nonsensical?

Texts

For the most part, we will be reading entire philosophical works, rather than excerpts or mere synopses. Seven small books are required:

1. Plato. *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito*. Trans F. J. Church (Prentice Hall, 1948).
2. Epictetus. *The Handbook*. Trans. Nicholas P. White (Hackett, 1983).
3. Rene Descartes. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Trans Donald A. Cress. (Hackett, 1993).
4. David Hume. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. (Hackett 1980).
5. Berkeley. *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*. (Prentice Hall, 1954).
6. John Stuart Mill. *Utilitarianism*. (Prentice Hall, 1983).
7. A. J. Ayer. *Language Truth and Logic*. (Dover, 1952).

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction — What is Philosophy?

Week 2: The Beginning — The Pre-Socratic philosophers | Plato, *Euthyphro*

Week 3: Facing Death — Plato, *Apology* | Plato, *Crito*

Week 4: Stoics — Epictetus, *The Handbook*

Week 5: Modern Philosophy and Skepticism — Descartes, *Meditations* I and II

Week 6: God and Evil — Descartes, *Meditations* III and IV

Week 7: Mind and Body — Descartes, *Meditations* V and VI

Week 8: The Existence of God — Hume, *Dialogues* I-V

Week 9: The Problem of Evil — Hume, *Dialogues* V-X

Week 10: Idealism — Berkeley, *Dialogue* I

Week 11: Ethics — Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapters 1 and 2

Week 12: Pleasure, Preference, Value — Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapters 3 and 4

Week 13: Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapter 5

Week 14: Logical Positivism — Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, Chapter 1