Philosophy 105: The Western Philosophical Tradition

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

A general overview of the history of philosophical development in the West from its inception with the Pre-Socratic philosophers of ancient Greece to the 20th Century Anglo-American and Continental traditions. The course considers the contributions of seminal thinkers and innovators such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant, Mill, and Nietzsche. Major works by these and other important philosophers are read, analyzed and discussed with the aim of understanding what they argued for and against in regard to metaphysical, epistemological and ethical issues. The course investigates to what extent they influenced their own and subsequent periods, how these philosophical systems create varying views of the world and human life, and how they address the perennial questions humans universally ask, existential questions such as, “Is there purpose and meaning in life?”; epistemological questions such as, “What are the limits of human knowledge?”; metaphysical questions such as, “What is the ultimate nature of the reality in which we live?”, “Is there life after death?”, “Are human minds identical to human brains?”; and ethical questions such as, “What is the fundamental criterion of right and wrong human action?” In short, the course examines the main Western philosophical thinkers and traditions in an effort to understand what they have taught, why they have so taught, and how they have helped form and shape Western civilization.

MAJOR GOALS and THEMES:

1) General Goals:
   a) Present an overall picture of the progress of Western philosophy.
   b) Introduce students to philosophy as a specific discipline by familiarizing them with the basic areas of philosophy (metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics), clarifying and expounding central philosophical concepts, ideas and terms, and training them how to read, understand and critique philosophical texts and arguments.
   c) Discuss the philosophical implications of the major metaphysical, epistemological and ethical positions.
   d) Discuss the broader implications of the major philosophical positions, their influence on Western society, politics, religion and education.

2) Part I: Ancient Philosophy
   a) Explore the development of philosophy as a rational discipline, i.e., an attempt to explain the world in terms of its fundamental substance and the natural causes that arise therefrom.
   b) Explore how some of the early philosophers and the major schools of thought attempted to achieve this end.
   c) Explore the difference between this way of understanding the world as opposed to the prior mytho-poetic approach.
i) Examine the Socratic method and the turn from physics to ethics as the central philosophical concern.

ii) Explore the major metaphysical views and the issues involved therein.
   (1) Monism, Dualism and Pluralism; Idealism, Materialism and hylomorphism.
   (2) The nature of universals and essences.
   (3) The nature and explanation of change.

d) Explore the basic ethical positions.
   i) The various ethical views of the major philosophical schools.
   ii) The common assumptions of Greek philosophical ethics.
   iii) The changes which developed during the Hellenistic period and how they provided a preparation for Christianity.

e) Explore the basic epistemological issues
   i) What are the ultimate objects of knowledge?
   ii) Explore the basic theories of knowledge: Rationalism, Empiricism, and Skepticism.

3) Part II: Medieval Philosophy
   a) The metaphysical, epistemological and ethical implications of the Christian notion of God. How Christian thinkers utilized and incorporated philosophical concepts into their development of Christian theology and in so doing altered, developed and invented new philosophical concepts.
   b) How the Christian concept of God changed/influenced metaphysics.
      i) The nature of God and the world in Theism.
      ii) How Theism introduced new concepts for philosophical reflection, such as free will, and transformed others, such as the concept of infinity.
      iii) How the Christian notion of God affected debates over Nominalism, Essentialism, Rationalism and Voluntarism.
   c) How the Christian concept of God changed/influenced ethics.
      i) The changes in the concepts of personhood.
      ii) The purpose of human life, the notion of free will.
      iii) The nature and ground of the moral good.
      iv) How the Christian view of creation and redemption transformed the philosophical understanding of history.

4) Modern Philosophy
   a) Identify the central features of modern philosophy.
   b) Examine the impact of modern science on philosophy.
   c) Examine the transformation that Descartes established and the nature of the philosophical problems which it raised.
   d) Examine the Rationalist and Empiricist developments.
   e) Examine Kant’s “Copernican Revolution” as an attempt to transcend and thereby resolve the philosophical problem Rationalism and Empiricism could not.
   f) Examine Kant’s deontological ethical theory.

5) 19th and 20th Century Philosophy
   a) Explore the division between Continental and Analytic Philosophy, and consider how both contribute to “post-modernity.”
b) Consider fruitful responses to our present philosophical situation in light of the wisdom of the tradition.

**READINGS:** (Those highlighted will be read in every class, the rest will be utilized as each professor determines. In addition, other readings and secondary texts may be added at the professor’s discretion.)

**Ancient Philosophy:**

1. Socrates: *Euthyphro/Apology/Crito*
2. **Plato, Phaedo OR selections from Republic**
   1. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I.1-4 AND *Physics* II.1-3 AND *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.1-10, 13; II.1-7 AND *De Anima* II.1

2. Hellenistic Philosophy
   a. Epicurus *Letter to Menoeceus*
   b. Epictetus: Selections from *Manuel*

**Medieval Philosophy:**

1. St. Augustine: Selections from *On Free Will* and/or *The Confessions*
2. St. Anselm, *Proslogion* Ontological Argument from 3-4
3. **St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae** I.1.2, I-II, 94

**Modern Philosophy:**

1. **Rene Descartes: Meditations on First Philosophy**
2. Spinoza: *Ethics*: Definitions through Proposition XXI
3. Locke: Selections from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
4. **David Hume**: *(An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* 4-8 OR Hume’s Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature*) AND/OR *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 10-11
5. **Immanuel Kant**: Introduction to *The Critique of Pure Reason; Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* 1-2

**Nineteenth Century Philosophy:**

1. Thomas Reid: Selections
3. Kierkegaard: *Fear and Trembling*
4. Marx: *Alienated Labor*
5. John Stuart Mill: *Utilitarianism*

**Twentieth Century Philosophy:**

1. Logical Positivism: Selections from *Language, Truth and Logic*
2. Existentialism: Sartre: “Existentialism Is a Humanism”