“Philosophy consists in relearning to look at the world” – Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Instructor: Sarah McLay
Office: 154 Susan Campbell Hall
Email: smclay@uoregon.edu
Office hours: By appointment

Course Description

In this course, we will take up philosophy as the practice of thinking meaningfully and rigorously about ourselves and the world(s) that we find ourselves in. Through readings and careful discussion, we will examine some of the problems that have occupied (and continue to occupy) philosophers throughout its millennia-old history: What is philosophy? What does it mean to be a philosopher? What is knowledge, and how is knowledge possible? Does my life and existence have a meaning and – if it does – where does this meaning come from? What is personal identity, and how is a person able to have a stable identity across time? Is there personal identity? What is the relationship between my self, others and society? What is the relationship between the self and the body?

Throughout this course, students will be encouraged to use philosophy as a tool or framework to help them think critically about the prejudices and social norms that shape their experiences and environments. Ultimately, students will be introduced to philosophy as a discipline that demands that we thinking carefully, clearly and responsibly about human life and ideas.

Organization of Classroom and Readings

Classes will incorporate both presentation of material by me, and discussion. The balance and relation of these components will vary (we might start with discussion or end with it, or move in and out of it). For each class, a reading is assigned and it is expected that you read and study it before class so that you are prepared to think about it and questions arising from it.

Course Requirements

(1) Readings (see reading list below). During class, I will presuppose your familiarity with the readings. Take notes on readings, *bring the relevant texts to class*, and come with questions. All readings are available on Canvas, or I will provide the link on the syllabus.

(2) Attendance/Participation (see rubric below). Class discussion will provide you with the space to try out and experiment with new and old ideas, and work through the assigned reading. I expect you to come to class prepared to contribute to discussion. Note that participation is not the same as simply being present in class. Nor is participation a substitute for attendance: you will neither learn more nor sound smart by skipping often, and then dominating the class when you return. Participation will be worth 15% of your final grade.

(3) Questions for Consideration (QFC). Throughout the term, you are responsible for writing eight “Questions for Consideration” on the assigned readings. These must be turned in at the beginning of class. An explanation of this assignment can be found on Canvas, and we will also go over it on the first day of class. Questions for Consideration will make up 25% of your final grade.
(4) **Student-led Discussions.** During the term, you and another classmate (or more) will be responsible for facilitating a 30-minute class discussion. This will be worth 20% of your overall grade. 15% will be based on the discussion that you facilitate. 5% will be based on your participation in your other classmates’ student-led discussions throughout the term. See Canvas for more information.

(5) **Papers.** During the term, you must write two 4-5 page papers. There will an opportunity to submit a paper for each week of the class, but you should only submit two (i.e., it’s up to you to decide when you want to turn in your two papers). Further instructions and paper prompts are available on Canvas. Note that, if you want, instead of turning in a second paper, I’m giving you the option of doing a creative assignment instead. If you decide to do a project in place of the second paper, the project must be approved by me 07/15. In total, these papers make up 40% of your final grade.

**Grading**

**Paper assignments**
A = Excellent. No mistakes, well-written, distinctive in some way or other, and making an attempt to offer an original argument.
B = Good. No significant mistakes, well-written, but not distinctive in any way.
C = Okay. Some errors, but a basic grasp of the material.
D = Poor. Several errors. A tenuous grasp of the material.
F = Failing. Problematic on all fronts indicating either no real grasp of the material or lack of effort.

**Participation**
A = To achieve an A grade the expectations are that the student has near perfect attendance, they are recognized as a leader in discussion and consistently contribute to and bring the conversation to a deeper level, without dominating the discussion to such an extent that it inhibits participation by other students. They are also prepared: namely, they have completed the assigned readings before class, and bring these readings to class.
B = To achieve a B grade expectations are that the student will have very good attendance at lectures (around 95% of the time). Takes a very active role in discussion and remarks are consistently helpful and on topic.
C = To achieve a C grade expectations are that the student will have good attendance (present around 90% of the time). Participates in discussions, but not consistently.
D = To achieve a D grade expectations are that the student will only attend class around 80% of the time. Participates in discussion sporadically.
F = Student has poor attendance and/or is not a positive contributor to discussion.

**Guidelines and Procedures**

*Important Advice:* If a condition or circumstance in your life may or will affect your performance, please me know about it as soon as possible. *It will be treated with the strictest confidence.* Please do not wait until the condition or circumstance is impending or has already happened before telling me about its impact on you. If something unanticipated occurs, bring it to my attention and we will work out a way of dealing with it.

*Another Important Note (Managing Your Time):* This is a 10 week course condensed into 4 weeks. Therefore, we will be covering a lot of difficult material over a short period of time. In order to do
well in this course, you should expect to spend around **two hours per day** completing the readings and writing weekly assignments. Before days leading up to paper or presentation due dates, more time may be needed to complete the assignments.

*Technology.* You may use laptops or tablets in class, but if I notice that you are using these forms of technology for something other than taking notes/doing the readings, you will no longer be able to use technology in class and may be asked to leave.

*Plagiarism.* Plagiarism is unacceptable, and will result in your failing this course.

*Late Policy.* Late assignments will only be accepted without penalty for a reason (e.g., sickness, family emergency, mental health, etc.) If possible, I must be informed 48 hours before the paper is due. Late papers will suffer a grade penalty, and after a week I will not accept them. Late QFCs will not be accepted.

*Gender language and human diversity.* In addition to all the other reason for using gender inclusive language and language that attends to human diversity, there are philosophical reasons for this as well. Philosophy demands that we think very carefully, clearly and rigorously about human life and ideas. To do this well, we have to attend to the diversity of human life. Otherwise, we build in reinforce prejudices that betray who we are as human beings. Using gender inclusive language in your writing and speaking reminds us that human beings are diverse in gender, and that not all of them are “he.” And this reminds us of other differences in mind, e.g., substituting “she” where “he” might have been traditionally expected, alternating systematically between the two, using “she/he,” and so on. Also note that you can go beyond “she” and “he” pronouns, using “zie” instead of “he/she,” or “hir” instead of him/her. For helpful discussion and guidelines, google: Warren, Virginia L. “Guidelines for the Nonsexist Use of Language.”

*Accessibility.* If you need accommodations in this class, I will work with the Accessible Education Centre to find a solution for you.

**Assigned Readings** (Class schedule and readings are subject to revision. I will let you know ahead of time if this happens.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic(s)</th>
<th>Assigned Readings</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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| 1    | ● What is Philosophy?  
● The Examined Life | **M:** Introduction to the course  
**T:** Plato, *Euthyphro*, 2a-16a (pg. 2-16)  
**W:** Plato, *Apology*, 17a-42a (pg. 18-36)  
**H:** Student-led discussion; Plato, *Republic*, 507b-521e (pg. 1128-1138); Sontag, “In Plato’s Cave”, 3-24 | ● First student-led discussion on 06/27.  
In the PDF of Plato’s dialogues, I’ve included Cooper’s short summaries of the assigned dialogues. These may be helpful for context. |
| 2  | • Who and What am I?  
  • Being, Knowledge, and Reality  
  • Existence Precedes Essence: Existentialism | **M:** Descartes, *Meditations*, 108-143, 160-175  
**T:** Elizabeth, Princess of Bohemia, “Correspondence Between Descartes and Princess Elizabeth”, 1-13.  
**W:** Student-led discussion; Berkeley, “Three Dialogues”, 1-32  
**H:** Enjoy the holiday | • Paper due 07/01 by noon if you are submitting for week 2.  
• Second student-led discussion on 07/03 (WED) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3  | • Bad Faith and Authenticity  
  • Lived Experience and Oppression  
  • The Problem of the Other  
  • Race  
  • Gender | **M:** Ryle, *The Concept of the Mind*, 1-12, 14-47  
**T:** Sartre, “Existentialism is a Humanism”, 287-311; Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 47-49, 55-60  
**H:** Student-led discussion; Fanon, *Black Skin Whites Masks*, xi-xviii, 89-119  
Recommended: Fanon, 1-23 | • Paper due 07/08 by noon if you are submitting for week 3.  
• Third student-led discussion on 07/11  
Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* is notoriously difficult to read. If you feel frustrated and have a difficult time reading it your first time, know that you are not alone. |
| 4  | • The Problem of Dichotomous Thinking  
  • Rethinking Identity and Reality  
  • Health and illness  
  • Intersectionality | **M:** Beauvoir, “Introduction” to *The Second Sex*  
**T:** Crawford, “Boundaries of the Self and the Unhealthy Other”  
**W:** Anzaldúa, “Towards a New Consciousness” | • Paper due 07/15 by noon if you are submitting for week 3.  
• Paper due 07/22 by noon if you are submitting for week 4 |
| **H:** Student-led discussion; Lugones, “Playfulness, ‘World’-Travelling, and Loving Perception” | Fourth student-led discussion on 07/18 |