

PHI171 - 3 credits

PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY

time & venue

instructor **Marcello Di Bello**

M&W 11-12:15 in C-348

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office hrs M&W 2-3, Carman 365

Overview¹

This course explores fundamental questions about ourselves and the world. What is justice? What is our place in the world and in society? What makes us happy? Does God exist and can we prove it? As you engage with these questions, you will experience philosophy in different forms: (1) philosophy-as-dialogue; (2) philosophy-as-poetry; and (3) philosophy-as-proof. There is not just one way to do philosophy, and hopefully, you'll feel at home in one of them.

Materials

Course materials will include book excerpts, audios and videos, powerpoint slides, handouts and homework assignments.

Website

All course materials mentioned above will be available on the course website. Please check the website regularly

philosophy171.wordpress.com

PART I - PHILOSOPHY-AS-DIALOGUE

week 1: *Mon Aug 28 & Wed Aug 30*

We will begin by examining the nature of justice. What is justice? Is justice what benefits the strongest? Is justice better than injustice?

reading/watching

The Melian Dialogue

week 2: *Wed Sept 6* — No class on *Mon Sept 4*

We will read Plato's most famous philosophical dialogue, the *Republic*, beginning with *book I*. In it, Thrasymachus defends the view that justice is whatever benefits the strongest, while Socrates attempts to prove him wrong.

reading

Plato, Republic, book I

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| <p>assignment #1 due Sept 6</p> |
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¹ From the bulletin: Introduction to philosophic thinking via a discussion of questions such as "How should I live?," "What is the truth about reality?," and "Can God's existence be known?"

Requirements

You are required to

- ✦ complete seven assignments
- ✦ attend class regularly

Assignments

There will be seven assignments, each worth 10% of the grade (unless state otherwise):

- #1. due Sept 6
- #2. due Sept 25
- #3. due Oct 18 - worth 25%
- #4. due Oct 30
- #5. due Nov 8 - worth 25%
- #6. due Nov 20
- #7. due Dec 11

Assignment submission

A paper version should be handed in at the beginning of class and also an electronic version should be submitted through the appropriate link on course website.

Late policy

If an assignment is submitted late, you will not get credit for it.

week 3: Mon Sept 11 & Wed Sept 13

In order to better understand the nature of justice, in *book II* Socrates suggests that we draw a parallelism between justice at the level of the state and justice at the level of the individual.

reading

Plato, *Republic*, book II

week 4: Mon Sept 18 — No class on Wed Sept 20

Same topic as last week.

**assignment #2
due Sept 25**

week 5: Mon Sept 25 & Wed Sept 27

The parallelism between the state and the individual is further articulated in *book IV*. As the dialogue progresses, Socrates offers a definition of justice which does not reduce it to whatever benefits the strongest.

reading

Plato, *Republic*, book IV

week 6: Mon Oct 2 & Wed Oct 4

In *book VIII* Socrates compares four types of governments with four types of individuals. This comparison makes clearer why a parallelism exists between the state and the individual.

reading

Plato, *Republic*, book VIII

week 7: Wed Oct 11 — No class on Mon Oct 9

In *book IX* Socrates defends the claim that the just is happy, while the unjust is unhappy. If so, justice must indeed be better than injustice.

watching

Plato, *Republic*, book IX

week 8: Mon Oct 16 & Wed Oct 18

Same topic as last week.

**assignment #3
due Oct 18**

Course objectives

You will exercise and develop:

- ✦ analytical reasoning skills, in particular, the ability to weigh reasons for/against a claim
- ✦ analytical writing skills, in particular, the ability to formulate an argument and defend it from objections
- ✦ ability to write in differ registers and literary forms

Course etiquette

Just in case you forgot:

- ✦ do the reading and come to class ready to participate
- ✦ disagree with me and your fellow students, but always be polite
- ✦ don't be shy and don't think your ideas are not worth sharing
- ✦ when you're in class, don't get distracted by the other world – i.e. your phone, Instagram, etc.

No plagiarism!

You may not copy the work of others without proper acknowledgement, and if you do so, you will fail the class.

PART 2 - PHILOSOPHY-AS-POETRY

week 9: *Mon Oct 23 & Wed Oct 25*

We will read Lucretius' philosophical poem *The Nature of Things*. We will begin with *book I* which explains how indivisible atoms constitute the whole of reality, in its different forms and shapes, and why the universe must be infinite.

reading

Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*, book I

week 10: *Mon Oct 30 & Wed Nov 1*

Next, we will turn to human psychology, life and death. In book III, Lucretius explains why although our soul is mortal, we should not fear death.

reading

Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*, book III

week 11: *Mon Nov 6 & Wed Nov 8*

Finally, we will conclude with book IV which articulates a theory of perception, sexuality and love.

reading

Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*, book IV

assignment #4
due Oct 30

assignment #5
due Nov 8

PART 3 - PHILOSOPHY-AS-PROOF

week 12: *Mon Nov 13 & Wed Nov 15*

In order to understand the idea of "proof" or "demonstration", we will preliminarily familiarize ourselves with Euclid's axiomatic method by reading the first book of the *Elements*.

reading

Euclid, *Elements*, book I

week 13: *Mon Nov 20 & Wed Nov 22*

Same topic as last week.

assignment #6
due Nov 20

Tutoring services

The *Academic Center for Excellence (ACE)* is a tutoring center on campus.

ACE provides appointment based and drop-in tutoring in the humanities, social sciences, and writing, as well as general writing and academic skills workshops.

To obtain information about the ACE and the SLC, please visit their website at www.lehman.edu/issp or call the ACE at 718-960-8175.

Disability accommodation

Students who have a disability which may necessitate an academic accommodation or the use of auxiliary aids and services in a class should contact the *Office of Student Disability Services* located in Shuster, room 238, phone number 718-960-8441.

week 14: *Mon Nov 27 & Wed Nov 29*

Having mastered the axiomatic method, we will read *book I* of Spinoza's *Ethics*. This is a philosophical treatise that employs the axiomatic method to establish propositions about the nature of reality, the existence of God, the relationship between matter and soul, happiness and the good life. We will, however, only have time to read the parts about God's existence.

reading

Spinoza, *Ethics*, book I

week 15: *Mon Dec 4 & Wed Dec 6*

Same topic as last week.

week 16: *Mon Dec 11*

Final overview of the course.

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| <p>assignment #7 due Dec 11</p> |
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