

First-Year Seminar: Philosophy as a Way of Life (FYSEM-110WL)

Mount Holyoke College

Fall 2014

Instructor: Daniel Hagen
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MEETINGS:

Tuesday/Thursday, 8:35–9:50 a.m., Skinner Hall, Room 210

DESCRIPTION:

This seminar is about what it means to live a philosophy. The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates—(in)famous for living and dying according to his beliefs—will provide our central case study. Through a close reading of various historical texts, we will critically examine how Socrates' philosophical views directed his life. We will engage with the philosophical questions raised in these texts, including questions about the demands of political participation, the place of friendship in an examined life, and the proper attitude toward death. And through class discussions and frequent writing assignments we will develop our skill at articulating our own answers to these questions.

(This is a Writing- and Speaking-Intensive course.)

OBJECTIVES:

One of the aims of this course is to introduce you to the figure of Socrates and to the philosophical issues with which he grappled. But another aim of this course—perhaps even more important than the first—is to hone your skills at reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking like a philosopher. In addition to this, my hope is that you will not only develop these skills, but also cultivate certain habits of thought and of feeling characteristic of a philosophical life.

TEXTS:

Books are available for purchase at the Odyssey Bookshop. There is also a copy on reserve at the MHC Library.

- Reeve, C.D.C., ed. and trans., *The Trials of Socrates: Six Classic Texts*, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. (March 1, 2002), ISBN-10: 0872205894. Abbreviated as 'TS' on the schedule, below.
- I will distribute additional readings and other class resources through the course Moodle site.

READINGS:

Readings listed on the schedule below are required unless otherwise noted. You should plan to do the readings in advance of the session for which they are listed. Be sure to give yourself ample time to complete the readings. Philosophical writing often makes for—and benefits from—slow reading. This is especially so for historical texts. You should expect most of these readings to be difficult and dense. So plan ahead and when you do approach them, do so slowly and carefully. *We will discuss reading strategies in more detail during the first weeks of the course.*

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

Note: any handouts used during sessions will be distributed in hardcopy but will also be available at that time in an electronic format (typically a .pdf available through the course Moodle site).

Part I: Introducing Socrates

Who was Socrates and what sort of life did he lead? This part of the course will offer an introduction to the figure of Socrates. We will encounter him examining philosophical questions about friendship and virtue. We will also take a look at a famous satire of Socrates: Aristophanes' *Clouds*.

- Session 1 (Th, 9/4): Introduction
 - *Readings:* none
- Session 2 (T, 9/9): Plato's *Lysis* (on friendship)
 - *Readings:* Plato's *Lysis* [Moodle]
- Session 3 (Th, 9/11): Plato's *Lysis*, cont.
 - *Readings:* reread Plato's *Lysis* as needed.
- Session 4 (T, 9/16): **in-class paper workshop**; begin Plato's *Meno*
 - *Readings:* selections from Plato's *Meno* [Moodle]
- Session 5 (Th, 9/18): Plato's *Meno*, cont.
 - *Readings:* reread Plato's *Meno* as needed.
- Session 6 (T, 9/23): Aristophanes' *Clouds* (on humor)
 - *Readings:* first third of Aristophanes' *Clouds*—to the *parabasis* [TS pp. 89–118]
- Session 7 (Th, 9/25): Aristophanes' *Clouds*, cont.
 - *Readings:* the final two-thirds of Aristophanes' *Clouds* [TS pp. 118–176].

Part II: The Trial and Death of Socrates

This part of the course will focus on the trial and death of Socrates. In particular, we will give Plato's *Apology*—his representation of the defense speech Socrates gave at his trial—a slow and careful read. We will also consider the final days of Socrates and the philosophical questions raised by his acceptance of the death sentence he faced.

- Session 8 (T, 9/30): Plato's *Apology* (the defense of Socrates)
 - *Readings:* The *Apology* [TS pp. 26–61]; try to read all of it, but focus on the first quarter.

- Session 9 (Th, 10/2): Plato's *Apology*
 - *Readings*: reread the *Apology* as needed; focus on the second quarter.
- Session 10 (T, 10/7): Plato's *Apology*
 - *Readings*: reread the *Apology* as needed; focus on the third quarter.
- Session 11 (Th, 10/9): Plato's *Apology*
 - *Readings*: reread the *Apology* as needed; focus on the fourth quarter.

Mid-semester break: 10/11–10/14

- Session 12 (Th, 10/16): **in-class paper workshop**
- Session 13 (T, 10/21): Plato's *Crito* (on political obligation)
 - *Readings*: Plato's *Crito* [TS pp. 62–78].
- Session 14 (Th, 10/23): Plato's *Crito*, cont.
 - *Readings*: reread the *Crito* as needed; also read King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail." (Recommended reading: Harte, "Conflicting Values in Plato's *Crito*")
- Session 15 (T, 10/28): Plato's *Phaedo* (sel.) (on death)
 - *Readings*: Plato's *Phaedo*, sel. [TS pp. 79–83; add'l. sel. on Moodle]
- Session 16 (Th, 10/30): Xenophon's *Apology* (another defense of Socrates)
 - *Readings*: Xenophon's *Apology* [TS pp. 178–184]

Part III: Reflections on Socrates

Socrates has been a central figure in Western philosophy since antiquity. In this part of the course we will consider historical reflections—both complimentary and critical—on Socrates and on the study of ancient Greek philosophy more generally.

- Session 17 (T, 11/4): The Stoics as Socratics
 - *Activity*: "Live like a Stoic" week
 - *Readings*: material from the Stoic Week handbook [Moodle]
 - *Recommended reading*: Epictetus's *Encheiridion* [Moodle]
- Session 18 (Th, 11/6): The Stoics, cont.
 - *Activity*: "Live like a Stoic" week
 - *Readings*: material from the Stoic Week handbook [Moodle]
 - *Recommended reading*: Epictetus's *Encheiridion* [Moodle]
- Session 19 (T, 11/11): Nietzsche on Socrates
 - *Readings*: Nietzsche, "The Problem of Socrates" (required); selection from *The Birth of Tragedy* (recommended) [both on Moodle]
- Session 20 (Th, 11/13): Nietzsche, cont.
 - *Readings*: Nietzsche, "The Free Spirit"; selection from *The Gay Science* [both on Moodle].
- Session 21 (T, 11/18): Feminist perspectives on Socrates

- *Readings*: Witt and Shapiro, “Feminist History of Philosophy” (required); Haslanger, *et al.*, “Topics in Feminism” (recommended); Wider, “Women Philosophers in the Ancient Greek World: Donning the Mantle” (recommended)
- Session 22 (Th, 11/20): Feminism, cont.
 - *Readings*: Plato’s *Menexenus* and selections from his *Symposium*; Wider (from previous session—read sections on Aspasia and Diotima); O’Dwyer, “The Unacknowledged Socrates in the Works of Luce Irigaray” (recommended).

Part IV: Philosophy and our lives

This final part of the course will offer an opportunity to expand our discussion of philosophy as a way of life by drawing in topics of our own interest.

- Session 23 (T, 11/25): student presentations—*rescheduled to Friday, 12/5*
 - *Readings*: none

Thanksgiving break: 11/26–11/30

- Session 24 (T, 12/2): student presentations
 - *Readings*: none
- Session 25 (Th, 12/4): student presentations
 - *Readings*: none
- Session 26 (T, 12/9): conclusions
 - *Readings*: Russell, “The Value of Philosophy” (optional) [Moodle]

Reading period: noon, 12/16–7 p.m., 12/12

Finals period: 7 p.m., 12/12–noon, 12/16

REQUIREMENTS:

- Attendance & participation: 15%
- Short writing assignments: 15%
- Papers: 60%
 - Paper #1: 10%
 - Paper #2 + revision: 30% (draft = 10%, revision = 20%)
 - Paper #3: 20%
- Portfolio: 10%

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION:

Your attendance and participation is essential to the success of this course. We’re going to be exploring these texts and issues together. Thus:

- Attendance is required. (Also: be sure to bring the readings to class with you.) If, for whatever reason, you cannot attend a class, please contact me *as soon as possible* and *in advance of the class you expect to miss*.
- Participation in class is required. There are many ways to participate: you could ask a question about the text we're discussing, you could introduce a new perspective on the issue we're discussing, you could even just interject to say "I feel completely lost right now!" (If you're thinking this, you're probably not the only one.)
 - One of the aims of this course is to develop your skills at speaking and at listening. Throughout the semester we will discuss strategies for both. I don't assume that you enter this class already knowing how to participate in a philosophical discussion.
 - *Note*: I will be setting up a discussion forum on the course Moodle site. Posting questions/comments to the forum or responding to other people's questions/comments will count toward your participation grade, but neither is required. Think of the forum as another way to participate.
- You should expect to disagree from time to time—with things we read or discuss, with other people in class (including me), and perhaps on occasion even with yourself. These disagreements may be *vigorous* but must always be *reasoned* and *respectful*.
- **Student presentations**: In the final weeks of the semester, each of you will lead a short discussion on a topic of your choosing (but related to the over-arching theme of the course—*philosophy as a way of life*). This will count toward your participation grade. (More details on this assignment forthcoming later in the semester.)
- *A note on gadgets*: laptops, iPads, and so forth are permitted in class as long as you're using them to take notes, to refer to assigned readings, or to run software that assists with either of these functions.¹

SHORT WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:

- Approximately once per week I will ask you to submit a short writing assignment, typically about one page. (I will provide detailed instructions with each assignment.)
- These assignments will ask you to reflect on a philosophical question or to examine a bit of text or an argument in some detail. The aim of these assignments is to stimulate your thinking about the issues we will be grappling with and to help you to begin to articulate those thoughts in writing.
- These short writing assignments will be graded pass/no pass. They will generally receive only brief comments. (I'll be giving extensive comments on the papers you write.) You should submit them through Moodle. They will typically be due on Monday mornings at 8:00 a.m.

PAPERS:

- Over the course of the semester you will write three papers of about 3–5 pages each. (I will provide detailed instructions for each paper.)
- These papers will offer an opportunity for more sustained engagement with the texts and issues we'll be studying in the seminar. The papers will also offer an opportunity for you to put to work the skills you've been developing in the course.

¹See <http://bit.ly/1ihJUxL> for some evidence that suggests multitasking (e.g., looking at Facebook during class) is bad for learning.

- You will do a substantial revision of one of the papers (paper #2).
- The papers will generally be due on Moodle. See “Important Dates,” below, for due dates. These papers will receive letter grades.

PORTFOLIO:

- At the conclusion of the semester I will ask you to review all of the work you have done for the seminar (writing assignments and papers).
- After reviewing your work, you will write a retrospective reflective essay. This essay will offer you the opportunity to critically reflect, in light of all you’ve learned during the semester and employing the skills you’ve developed, on the key question of the course: what it means to live a philosophy, or to lead a philosophical life.
- (More details forthcoming later in the semester.)

EXTENSION POLICY

- Three “no-questions asked” 24-hour extensions per semester. (For use on writing assignments, papers—including the revision of paper #2—and on the final portfolio.)
- These may be combined for a three-day extension on one paper or broken up among multiple papers; they may not combined on the short writing assignments (*i.e.*, any given short writing assignment may at most be extended by one day). *You must request the extension in advance of the original deadline.*
- No other extensions (except for exceptional circumstances)
- Unexcused late papers lose 1/3 grade per day or portion thereof (*e.g.*, an “A” paper turned in during the first 24 hours after a deadline will receive an “A–”). Unexcused late short writing assignments receive a grade of “no pass.”

SOME IMPORTANT DATES:

- Monday, 9/22: Paper #1 due as a .pdf on Moodle (by 8:00 a.m.)
- Monday, 10/20: First version of Paper #2 due as a .pdf on Moodle (by 8:00 a.m.)
- Monday, 11/10: Rewrite of Paper #2 due in hardcopy in my mailbox in Skinner 217 (by noon)
- Monday, 12/8: Paper #3 due as a .pdf on Moodle (by 8:00 a.m.)
- Tuesday, 12/16: Portfolio due by noon.

For other important college-wide dates, consult the Registrar’s academic calendar.²

ACADEMIC HONESTY:

As students at Mount Holyoke College, you have each agreed to live by the following code of honor: “I will honor myself, my fellow students, and Mount Holyoke College by acting responsibly, honestly, and respectfully in both my words and deeds.” Pages 55–59 of the Student Handbook³ describe the application of the

²<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/registrar/calendar>.

³<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/sites/default/files/deanofstudents/docs/mhcstudenthandbook.pdf>.

Honor Code to academic matters. In particular, note that “It is the responsibility of each student to read *A Guide to the Uses and Acknowledgment of Sources* and the *Student Handbook*, which define the standards adopted by the College; to observe the established procedures in preparing assignments and writing papers and examinations, and to submit as one’s own only that work that she or he has originated” (p. 56). I will expect you to be mindful of these responsibilities when producing work for this course. Additionally, I will expect you to have reviewed *The Proper Use of Sources Tutorial*.⁴ Remember: when in doubt, cite—and, of course, you can always check with me. Whatever you do, don’t plagiarize. ***Plagiarism could result in failure on the assignment or in the course as a whole.***

ASSISTANCE:

- You should always feel free to contact me about any questions or concerns you have about the course. Write me an email, visit my office hours, intercept me on campus!
- The SAW (*Speaking, Arguing, Writing*) Center can provide assistance with, well, your speaking, arguing, and writing. You can schedule an appointment or swing by during their drop-in hours.⁵
 - This course will also have a dedicated SAW Mentor: Olivia Justynski.
 - Olivia will be your first line of defense if you feel you need extra help with your writing this semester. She can meet with you at the brainstorming stage of a paper, she can give you feedback on complete drafts, and she can meet with you at any point in between.
 - Olivia will be holding regular office hours in the SAW Center on Thursdays from 6–9 p.m. and will also be available by appointment. She will also be joining our class on a semi-regular basis.
- The English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program⁶ provides support for Mount Holyoke students whose first language is not English. For more information, contact the ESOL Coordinator, Mark Shea (markshea@mtholyoke.edu).
- If you have a disability and would like to request accommodations, please contact AccessAbility Services, located in Wilder Hall B4, at (413)-538-2646 or accessability-services@mtholyoke.edu. If you are eligible, they will give you an accommodation letter which you should bring to me as soon as possible. That way we can work together to make sure all of the course content is accessible to you.⁷

⁴<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/ris/Plagiarism/>.

⁵You can find out more here: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/saw/peer/center>.

⁶<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/esol>.

⁷More information on AccessAbility Services here: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/accessability>.