

## **GREAT PHILOSOPHERS**

Philosophy 125C. Section 01

Fall 2006

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:30-1:00

Duncker 101

### **Instructors**

Mr. Eric Brown

Wilson 213

Office hours:

Thursdays, 1:30-3:00,  
and by app't.

935-4257

eabrown@wustl.edu

Mr. David Bauman

Wilson 116

Office hours:

Wednesdays, 3-4,  
Thursdays, 3-4,  
and by app't.

935-7913

dcbauman@artsci

Ms. Emily Crookston

Wilson 116

Office hours:

Tuesdays, 10-11,  
Wednesdays, 10-11,  
and by app't.

935-7913

emcrooks@artsci

### **Description**

The Great Philosophers course is designed to introduce some of the most important texts in the history of western philosophy in order to discuss a wide range of central philosophical problems. We typically consider, for example, the existence of God, the justification of claims to knowledge, and the requirements of a good human life, including the demands of morality. Among the philosophers most likely to be studied are Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Marx, Nietzsche, and Wittgenstein. Our goal is not just to appreciate the genius of some great philosophers but also to grapple with the current philosophical problems that they have bequeathed to us.

In this particular section of Great Philosophers, we will be concentrating on texts that address death. The most general question here is, How should we think about death? Among other things, is it reasonable to fear death? We will read a wide range of great philosophical works that treat a wide range of central philosophical questions, but death will be a persistent theme throughout everything that we read.

### **Grading and Requirements**

The goal of this course is to gain an appreciation for what philosophy is and how philosophy is done. To achieve this goal, the course uses three main tools. First, lectures will sharpen the reading experience, by illuminating and reconstructing the the arguments of the great works we are reading. The lectures are the primary means by which to get help in appreciating what is philosophical about these readings. Second, at four points in the semester, we will divide into three sections for discussion, and at one point, we will divide into two sections. (The rooms and the division of the class will be announced in advance in class and by email.) Although there will be discussion during the lectures, and although questions are always welcome (in class, during office hours, and by email), these smaller sections will permit some more open discussion during which each of us can try to argue constructively with the great philosophers we are reading (and with each other). The point of the sessions is to stimulate our abilities to grapple with a set of questions and another person's approach to those questions for ourselves. Finally, apart from the class sessions, there will be assigned essays, the point of which is to improve one's skills in writing a succinctly, cogently argued essay. There is a very important

handout about the writing assignments, and each of the instructors will be available to help each student make progress through the course of the semester.

The grades will be based on the following factors.

(1) Participation. Students participate well by contributing to the lecture and discussion sections with concise questions or comments that stimulate clarification or further the conversation. The instructors will give up to 20 bonus points to students who participate well.

(2) Five discussion questions. Each student is required to email **all three** instructors with a discussion question by noon the day before the discussion sections meet. (It is quite acceptable to send the question as soon as it occurs to you, even weeks before the scheduled discussion section.) Please put "discussion question" or "DQ" in the subject line of the email. Each question is worth 20 points, and will be assessed crudely: the default grade of 18 points shows thoughtful engagement with the readings; 16 shows weak engagement with the readings and lectures; 20 is exceptional; and 0 is for failures to satisfy the assignment.

(3) Five quizzes. Each discussion section will start with a brief, ten-question quiz that is designed only to keep everyone honest and reading the texts. (Attentive readers should ace each quiz.) Each quiz is worth 20 points, 2 points for each question.

(4) Three short essays. We will post topics for each of the five units of great philosophers, and every student is required to submit an essay addressing one of these topics for three of the five units. We encourage every student to choose his or her writing time carefully: we hope that you will write when you have special interest in the topic and when you do not have a pile of other exams and papers to do. Each essay, worth 100 points, will be assessed in accordance with the handout distributed on the first day of class, with the following qualifications. First, any paper that fails to meet the length requirements (900-1200 words) is subject to a penalty at the discretion of the instructors. Second, any paper that is late will be penalized by 10 points for every 24 hours or fraction thereof. This point holds without exception: because the schedule for paper assignments in this class is flexible, we grant no extensions. If you decide to postpone your paper until the last possible weekend, and then you come down with mononucleosis (or your computer crashes repeatedly), you will suffer the consequences of the risk you intentionally took. Each essay should be submitted to the appropriate file (for Philosophy 125, section 01) in the filing cabinet for submitted work in the philosophy department office (Wilson 208), and it **must** contain a word count on the first page. Please note that the essays are due by **noon**, and the office typically closes for lunch at noon.

These factors yield 500 possible points, and your total will be converted to a quality grade for the course according to a scale using the following minima:

A+ = 483	A = 463	A- = 448	B+ = 433	B = 413	B- = 398
C+ = 383	C = 363	C- = 348	D+ = 333	D = 313	D- = 298

Pass/fail students must achieve at least 383 points to pass. In converting numerical totals to final quality grades, the instructors reserve the right to disregard a student's grade on one paper in exceptional circumstances (e.g., death in the family or severe medical difficulties) or to disregard the grade on a student's first paper if that student shows remarkable progress. We also reserve the right to adjust the

above scale in order to make it more generous. As with all rights reserved, their exercise is not guaranteed.

Last, but not least, any student whose work does not conform to the University policy on academic integrity, printed in the Course Listings, will automatically fail the course, and will be subject to University disciplinary action. Each question, quiz, and essay you turn in must be your own work, and it must have been written specifically for this class. This should not be difficult, as you should not be doing extra research on any of these assignments.

### Required Texts

Most of our readings will come from the following inexpensive paperbacks that have been ordered at Mallinckrodt:

Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and the Posthumous Essays, ed. Popkin (Hackett)

Lucretius, On the Nature of Things, tr. Smith (Hackett)

Plato, Laches and Charmides, tr. Sprague (Hackett)

Plato, Phaedo, 2nd. ed., tr. Grube (Hackett)

Plato, The Trial and Death of Socrates, 3rd ed., tr. Grube, rev. Cooper ( )

Spinoza, Ethics, tr. Shirley (Hackett)

At the end of the semester, we will also read three essays by two philosophers widely considered to be among the best of the last fifty years. Each of these will be available via the internet from an on-campus computer (or from an off-campus computer that uses Olin's proxy server, for which see <http://library.wustl.edu/about/proxy.html>). You can find the two JSTOR articles via <http://www.jstor.org/search/>, and the one E-Res article via <http://eres.wustl.edu/>. For the latter, you will need to find the page for this course (by using Eric Brown as the instructor's name), and you will need the password that will be announced in class and distributed by email. For all three essays, you need Adobe Acrobat Reader (a free download from [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)) or some other software that displays and prints pdf files (e.g., Preview in Mac OS X).

### Syllabus of Readings and Assignments

Procedural note: discussion sections will be assigned and rooms will be announced during class and circulated by email by the third week of classes, after the roster solidifies.

Th Aug 31                      Introduction

#### UNIT ONE: PLATO

Tu Sept 5                      Plato, Laches

Th Sept 7                      Plato, Euthyphro

Tu Sept 12	Plato, <u>Apology</u>
Th Sept 14	Plato, <u>Phaedo</u> 57a-95a
Tu Sept 19	Plato, <u>Phaedo</u> 95a-118a
W Sept 20	Plato Discussion Questions due by noon
Th Sept 21	Plato Discussion Sections
M Sept 25	Plato essays due by noon

UNIT TWO: LUCRETIUS

Tu Sept 26	Lucretius, <u>On the Nature of Things</u> , Book One
Th Sept 28	Lucretius, <u>On the Nature of Things</u> , Book Two
Tu Oct 3	Lucretius, <u>On the Nature of Things</u> , Book Three
Th Oct 5	Lucretius, <u>On the Nature of Things</u> , Book Four
Tu Oct 10	Lucretius, <u>On the Nature of Things</u> , Books Five and Six
W Oct 11	Lucretius Discussion Questions due by noon
Th Oct 12	Lucretius Discussion Sections
M Oct 16	Lucretius essays due by noon

UNIT THREE: SPINOZA

Tu Oct 17	Spinoza, <u>Ethics</u> I
Th Oct 19	Spinoza, <u>Ethics</u> II
Tu Oct 24	Spinoza, <u>Ethics</u> III
Th Oct 26	Spinoza, <u>Ethics</u> IV
Tu Oct 31	Spinoza, <u>Ethics</u> V
W Nov 1	Spinoza Discussion Questions due by noon
Th Nov 2	Spinoza Discussion Sections
M Nov 6	Spinoza essays due by noon

UNIT FOUR: HUME

Tu Nov 7	Hume, <u>Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion</u> I-IV
----------	---------------------------------------------------------

Th Nov 9	Hume, <u>Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion</u> V-VIII
Tu Nov 14	Hume, <u>Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion</u> IX-XII
Th Nov 16	Hume, "Of the Immortality of the Soul" and "Of Suicide"
M Nov 20	Hume Discussion Questions due by noon
Tu Nov 21	Hume Discussion Sections
Th Nov 23	NO CLASS — THANKSGIVING BREAK
M Nov 27	Hume essays due by noon
	UNIT FIVE: CURRENT PHILOSOPHERS
Tu Nov 28	Nagel, "Death," <u>Nous</u> 4 (1970) (JSTOR)
Th Nov 30	Nagel, "The Absurd," <u>Journal of Philosophy</u> 68 (1971) (JSTOR)
Tu Dec 5	Williams, "The Makropolis case: reflections on the tedium of immortality," in <u>Problems of the Self</u> (Cambridge U.P., 1973) (E-Res)
W Dec 6	Nagel/Williams Discussion Questions due by noon
Th Dec 7	Nagel/Williams Discussion Sections — Only Two Sections!
M Dec 11	Nagel/Williams essays due by noon

PLEASE EVALUATE THE COURSE and INSTRUCTORS!

<http://evals.wustl.edu>

(We are always working to improve their teaching in general and this course in particular, and you can help us by providing valuable feedback.)