

Individual and Community, PHI 104 Fall Semester, 2006

Professor Deane Curtin
Gustavus Adolphus College
Class hour: 11:30 MWF
Class room: Old Main 205

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Office Hours: 3:30 – 4:20 MWF

Required Texts

Plato - *Euthyphro, Apology and Crito*
Niccolo Machiavelli - *The Prince*
John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*
Mahatma Gandhi, *Selected Writings*
Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations*

All texts are available in the Bookmark.

About This Course

Philosophy, as Aristotle said, begins to wonder. Philosophy begins from a condition of intellectual humility, or at least it should. It isn't likely that answers to life's most basic questions would come easily or quickly. College should provide a time when you begin to think seriously about these questions. Final answers, if there are such things, can wait until later.

The one thing I will never ask you for in this class is your final word on a problem. You will always be free to change your mind. In fact, there's nothing I admire more than a changed mind. It shows you've been thinking.

The one thing I will always require is an open mind, a mind open to new experiences, new ideas, and to the constructive criticism of others. Having an open mind does not mean you should believe everything anyone tells you. On the contrary, I will often be asking you for your *reasons* for believing what you do. Together we will develop *evidence* in favor of your attitudes.

The best way to introduce yourself to philosophy is to plunge in and begin grappling with the questions that have intrigued others. In this course we will be reading several of the most important philosophical works ever written. We will also read a book that was written with contemporary America in mind. While different in many ways, these books all raise the common themes: What kind of life is worth living, and What are our responsibilities to ourselves and to our communities? These questions will lead to a variety of others: What are the sources of human value? Fame? Fortune? Power? Contentment? Are human beings naturally social, concerned for the welfare of others, or are they naturally self-centered, egoistic? Who decides what's morally good? Each individual? The entire culture? The person with political power? God?

These questions will be asked both in a very abstract way (e.g., What is a human being by nature?) and in a most concrete way (Does the government have a right to draft young people? What right does the city of St. Peter have to issue you a speeding ticket? Should Gustavus invest in stocks of companies doing business with oppressive governments?)

Finally, the texts were chosen not only because they are important in themselves, but also because they each represent an important period in the history of our civilization. Plato spoke for the origins of philosophy in ancient Greece when the questions that have become our questions were asked for the first time. Machiavelli spoke for the pressing need of Italian city-states during the Italian Renaissance to develop a new foreign policy which was adequate to the demands of modern power politics. Mill first formulated the modern conception of the proper relationship between state and private citizen. Berry is a contemporary writer concerned with questions of nature, community and freedom.

This course satisfies the Philosophy/History and Writing requirements.

Course Requirements

Three papers. You will have a chance to write a paper after each of the five books we will be reading. Everyone will write a paper on Plato. You may choose the other two authors. The only restriction on which you choose is that you may not write on both of the last two authors. Papers will be due one week to the day from the time we finish an author, except for the last book, when a paper is due on the last day of class. Papers will be approximately four pages in length. No late papers will be accepted. When the time to write on Plato arrives you will receive a handout describing how to write a philosophy paper, and we will discuss possible topics in detail.

Two tests. There will be two essay tests in this class. The midterm will be one hour long, the final will be two hours long and will cover the entire semester.

Class contribution. You are expected to attend every day, and to participate when it seems appropriate. Attendance and contribution may be taken into account in determining your final grade. I will also ask for quick, written responses to class material, either as preparation for class discussion, or as a way of checking on what you have learned from class discussion. These responses are not graded, which is a way of encouraging you to express your thoughts freely. However, I do expect you to hand them in, and they will count toward your participation in the course.

Grading. The two tests and three papers will each count as one fifth of your final grade. I reserve the right to alter your final grade by up to 2/3 of a full grade depending on participation, attendance, and completion of informal writing assignments.

Schedule

9/6: class introduction

- 9/8 – 9/22: Plato, *Euthyphro*, *Apology* and *Crito*
- 9/25: Day spent on how to write a philosophy paper
- 10/2: **Plato paper due (everyone writes on this topic)**
- 10/4: Nobel Conference, no class
- 9/27 – 10/13: Niccolo Machiavelli - *The Prince*
- 10/20: **Machiavelli paper due**
- 10/16: review for midterm
- 10/18: Midterm Examination:** please note this date; it will not be altered
- 10/20 – 11/6: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*
- 11/13: Mill paper due**
- 11/8 – 11/29: Mahatma Gandhi, *Selected Writings*
- 12/6: Gandhi paper due**
- 12/1 – 12/11: Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations*
- 12/13: LaDuke paper due.** (Note that the deadline for papers on LaDuke leaves you less time than the other papers. Prepare in advance.)
- 12/13: Review for final examination

Final Examination: Monday, December 18, 10:30 – 12:20, in OM 205

(NOTE THIS TIME AND DATE. No adjustments will be made for early flights home, near death experiences, encounters with St. Peter's finest, etc.)