

Humanity 200-04: Philosophy and Skill

Fall 2022

Course Information

Time: MW 11:25A–12:40P

Instructor Name: Ge Fang

Email: gfang1@iit.edu

Instructor office: Siegel Hall 235

Office Hours: W 3:30P–5:30P or by appointments

Classroom: Siegel Hall 202

Course Description

This course is designed to let student understand what philosophy is and to believe more fully in the value of philosophy, even if we do not pursue it in the same degree.

The primary theme of this semester is skill. Skill might appear to be of little concern to philosophers. Philosophers care first and foremost about theoretical issues, while skills are about practical issues. Within practical issues, philosopher debate the deliberation of the selection of worthwhile ends, while skills contribute to the realization of those ends. Consequently, most prominent western philosopher today pay little attention to skill. However, if we look back in history of philosophy, or expand our horizons to include philosophical thoughts from other cultures, we would see that skill has always occupied a central place in philosophy. While the philosophical traditions from different times and places vary in their modes of presentation, they all care about the question of “how to live a good life?”. A frequent answer to this question is that a good life, a virtuous life, or an intelligent life is in part a skillful life.

Doing philosophy does not consist in the activity of memorizing a set of viewpoints. In many ways, philosophy itself is like the skill of dancing. Both are not merely pastimes. Just as dance might change the way you move *all the time*, so too might philosophy change the way you think *all the time*. I would like every student who completes this course to develop philosophical skills in

- Identifying theses and define key terms from philosophical articles.
- Reconstructing important arguments from readings in a charitable way.
- Evaluating arguments written by other authors.
- Constructing valid arguments to support or counter a thesis.
- Writing clear academic essays to communicate philosophical arguments.

Prerequisites

Curiosity. Sympathy in treating others' views. Diligence in reading puzzling texts, thinking about difficult questions, and writing up to very high standards. Courage to volunteer new ideas and to overturn these ideas later.

Grading

Eight quizzes: 20% in total. These are surprise quizzes; the dates for the quizzes are not announced beforehand. Each quiz will comprise four multiple-choice or true/false questions about the day's required reading. You will get 2 points for writing your first and last name on the quiz, and 0.5 point for each correct answer. The final score will be based on the 5 highest scores out of 8. There will be no makeup quizzes.

Two essays: 25% each. Each essay is to be around 1500 words (12pt Times New Roman font, double spacing, standard margins). Prompts for the essays will be distributed at least two weeks before the respective deadlines. The first essay will concern one of the assigned readings before Fall Break. You may choose any claim from that week's required reading, or select one of the claims in the prompts. Your task is to explain what reason or argument is offered for that claim, and to critically evaluate that reason or argument. But of course this task provides the material for your essay, but not its form. The form of your essay is determined by your ultimate goal of arguing well for your own contestable thesis.

The second essay will concern texts from the second half of the course. You have a choice regarding its task. You may write the same kind of essay as the first one: find a claim from required reading, explain the arguments for it, and critically evaluate the argument. Alternatively, you may compare two readings as long as one of them is from the required reading. The task is to find the disagreements between the two readings, arguing in favor of one or the other of the conflicting claims or contrasting reasons for a similar claim. Or you can find an apparent disagreement that masks a significant similarity. Whatever matter you choose, the essay should be organized in a way that allows *you* to make the best case for *your* contestable thesis.

The essay will be evaluated on 1) the adequate grasp of the issue, the understanding of the argument, the accuracy in interpreting readings, 2) novel insights and creativity, and 3) exposition (grammar, prose, composition). Papers should be submitted via Blackboard. Late papers will drop in final score by one letter grade per day.

Weekly assignments: 30% in total. These are text analyzing tasks designed to hone one's skill at analyzing difficult readings. These assignments will be scattered throughout the semester, while avoiding the times before paper due days. Instructions to these tasks will be published on the blackboard at least a week before its due. Exercises include identifying keyword, searching for key points in a text, paraphrasing definitions, brainstorming examples, locating the thesis, paraphrasing the thesis, finding supporting/undermining reasons for a thesis, spotting inconsistencies in the same text or author, etc. The assignment from information literacy module will occupy 5% among the 30%.

Discretionary bonus and penalty points: Students who contribute regularly to class discussions will get one grade higher (B to A, C to B, etc.). Students who disrupt the learning environment will lose points. Causes of disruption include arriving late or departing early, leaving the room during class without a medical emergency, **having a computer or other electronic device on during the class**, having a cellular phone or other electronic device beep or ring during class, or otherwise engaging in activities other than attending to class during class.

Attendance: I understand that students sometimes have very good reasons to miss class: religious obligations, illness, a commitment to family or teammates. I will not excuse some absences and not others, and we have designed our procedures to make it possible to score a strong participation even if one falls ill or has multiple religious obligations. I simply ask that you make your decisions

as you think wise, and live with the consequences.

Required Texts

I have ordered the following four required texts at IIT's bookstore:

Plato, *Laches and Charmides*, tr. Rosamond Kent Sprague (Hackett)

Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, tr. Annas and Barnes (Cambridge)

Śāntideva, *The Bodhicaryāṭāra*, tr. Crosby and Skilton (Oxford)

Anscombe, *Intention* (Harvard)

All the readings not in the above list are uploaded onto Blackboard (BB below). You will need to download and print these, except for the contemporary readings after Oct. 24. (Since electronic devices are not permitted in the classroom, you need to print these readings out to be able to refer to them in class. If you want to save paper by printing out just one copy that you will share with your neighbor in class, you may arrange to do this. If you want to study the essay on the screen and then print out the paper in small format, two or more pages to each sheet of paper, you may do that. But you need access to these texts in the classroom.)

Course Schedule (tentative)

Ancient Greek thoughts on skills

8/22 M: Introduction.

8/24 W: Plato, *Apology of Socrates* (entire, and re-read especially 17a-28b)

8/29 M: Plato, *Apology of Socrates* (entire, and re-read especially 28b-42a)

8/31 W: *Laches* (entire, especially 178a-194c)

9/5 M: Labor day. No class.

9/7 W: *Laches* (entire, especially 194c-201c)

9/12 M: *Charmides* (entire, especially 153a-162b)

9/14 W: *Charmides* (entire, especially 162c-176d)

9/19 M: *Charmides* and *Apology*, Guest lecture by Jeremy Henry

9/21 W: Sextus Empiricus I 1-30 (chps. i-xii)

9/26 M: Sextus Empiricus I 31-99 and 145-179 (chps. xiii-xvi [parts])

9/28 W: Sextus Empiricus III 168-280 (chps. xxi-xxxii)

10/3 M: Information literacy module, visit the Library Learning Center (LLC)

10/5 W: Information literacy module, visit the Library Learning Center (LLC)

10/10 M: Fall break day. No class.

Ancient Eastern thoughts on skills

10/12 W: Xunzi, chapters 1, 2, 19, 20 (BB)

First Paper due on 10/14, 23:59pm (Fri)

10/17 M: Zhuangzi, chapters 1, 3, 7, 19 (BB)

10/19 W: Śāntideva, The Bodhicaryāṭāra, ch.1, 4, 5

10/24 M: Śāntideva, The Bodhicaryāṭāra, ch.7, 8, (optional ch.9)

Modern and contemporary thoughts on practical knowledge

10/26 W: Descartes, meditation on first philosophy I, II (BB)

10/31 M: Kim, “Mind and behavior” (Chapter 3 of the book *Philosophy of Mind*) (BB)

11/2 W: Ryle, “Knowing how and Knowing that” (BB)

11/7 M: Class canceled

11/9 W: Anscombe, Intention, sections 1, 5-6, 8, 16

11/14 M: Anscombe, Intention, sections 8-16

11/16 W: Anscombe, Intention, sections 1, 20-26

11/21 M: Anscombe, Intention, sections 28-33, 45-48, 52

11/23 W: Thanksgiving. No class.

11/28 M: Stanley & Krakauer, “Motor skill depends on knowledge of facts” (BB)

11/30 W: Brownstein, “De-biasing, skill, and intergroup virtue”, (BB)

Second Paper due on 12/2, 23:59pm (Fri)

12/5-10: Exam week. No exam for this course.

Academic Honesty

Students are bound by the IIT policy on academic integrity in all aspects of this course. One of the most common violations of academic integrity is plagiarism. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, copying someone else’s exact words, paraphrasing their sentences, or summarizing their thoughts or ideas, without giving credit to the original author. Here is a web resource on when to cite:

http://tiger.uic.edu/~edelberg/crediting_others/index.htm

Disability

Students with disabilities may request accommodations to ensure equal access and equal academic opportunities. Requests for accommodation are coordinated through Center for Disability

Resources. The Center for Disability Resources is located in Suite 3F3-1, 10 W 35th St. You can also call them at 312-567-5744 or email them at disabilities@iit.edu. Should accessibility issues arise, be sure to reach out to your instructor about your Accommodation Plan.