

Philosophy and Literature: Phil 486

Spring 2012

Dennis Cooley
Putnam 18
Phone #: 231-7038
E-mail: Dennis.Cooley@ndsu.edu
Office Hours: 8:00 am – 8:50 am MWF or by appointment

Course Description:

Philosophical elements of selected works from Western literature, such as those of Plato, Cicero, Dante, Shakespeare, Swift, Goethe, and Walker.

Course Objectives:

Not only is this course designed to increase each student's knowledge and understanding of the main ideas that have shaped philosophy, history, and world culture for well over 3,000 years, it is also geared to help hone his or her critical reasoning skills.

Americans with disabilities statement about students with special needs

Any students with disabilities or other special needs, who need special accommodations in this course are invited to share these concerns or requests with the instructor as soon as possible.

Academic honesty statement:

All work in this course must be completed in a manner consistent with NDSU University Senate Policy, Section 335: Code of Academic Responsibility and Conduct

(<http://www.ndsu.nodak.edu/policy/335.htm>)

Required Texts:

1. Sophocles, *Antigone*
2. Plato, *The Republic*
3. Bible, New Revised Standard Edition
4. Cicero, "On Friendship"
5. Dante, *The Inferno*
6. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*
7. Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*
8. Goethe, *Faust*
9. Sartre, *The Flies*; Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. (Excerpts provided)
10. Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*.

(Might be best to buy them online at <http://www.campusbooks.com/> or other used textbook seller.)

Tentative Schedule:

1. Organizational Business and Introduction.
2. Sophocles
3. Plato
4. Bible
5. Cicero
6. Dante
7. Shakespeare
8. Swift
9. Goethe

10. Nietzsche
11. Walker.

Grading:

In-class discussion:

Since understanding the material requires reading and discussing it, you will be evaluated on how well you respond to questions, ask questions, and think about issues. 100 points.

Papers:

The four papers will consist of 5-8 pages of 11 point font, double spaced critical reasoning. Each will be worth 100 points.

$$[(P1+P2+P3+P4)+ \text{in-class discussion points}]/5 = \text{final grade.}$$

An “A” grade is any grade equal to or greater than 89.5. A “B” grade is any grade equal or greater than 79.5 and less than 89.5. A “C” grade is any grade equal or greater than 69.5 and less than 79.5. A “D” grade is any grade equal or greater than 59.5 and less than 69.5. A failing grade is any grade less than 59.5.

Attendance:

In order to be able to understand the material that we will be covering, it is vital to attend class every day. Philosophy is a very difficult area, much like mathematics. Even a loss of one day may result in an inability to follow the flow of the material.

Paper Topics:

1. Should governments maintain a wall between themselves and religion?
2. What is the role of art and literature in a properly functioning society?
3. What, if anything, is the most important characteristic of human nature?
4. Can belief in a divine being be ethically justified?

How to write a 5-10 page Philosophy paper.

1. Number each page.
2. 11-12 point New York Times or equivalent font.
3. Factory set margins or 1”.
4. 1½ line spacing.
5. Each paper should be a minimum of 5 pages, and a maximum of 10 pages. (Partial pages do NOT count as full pages.)
6. Insert paper title as a header.
7. Use a formal, respectful style of writing.
8. The Principle of Charity must be used at all times:
 - a. Assume the person is intelligent and has something important to say.
 - b. Interpret what the person said in the best possible light. Strengthen the argument if possible.
 - c. Work only with the best interpretation.
9. Use endnotes rather than footnotes.
10. Reference bibliography, but only use works cited in your paper. Do not pad!
11. Alphabetize reference bibliography per the 15th Chicago Manual of Style.

12. References in main body of paper should be (Last name, p. X) If more than one reference to the same person, then order by date of publication in Reference bibliography and reference in paper as (Last name (2001), p. X) and (Last name (1999), p. X) as needed. If more than one for same publication date, then alphabetize after ordering per date. (Last name (2001a), p. x) and (Last name (2001b), p. X).
13. No contractions, e.g., won't.
14. Use simple language whenever possible. Large vocabularies are good, but you should be writing so that any thoughtful person can understand you.
15. Since the papers are so short, never use more than one or two secondary sources. The paper is graded on how well you reason, not how well you use someone else's work.
16. Never use a quote of more than 3 lines.
17. If you quote, paraphrase, or use an idea by another person, you MUST give that person proper reference. Please see the *15th Chicago Manual of Style* if there are questions.
18. Do not waste space establishing the credibility of someone you reference. The work you cite should establish credibility on its own.
19. Only use secondary sources that are experts in the area and have published in peer reviewed avenues in the area in which you are working. Albert Einstein might be best for physics, but he is worthless as a source for social and political philosophy. Internet sources are usually bad.
20. Make sure any thoughtful reader can follow what you are arguing. You might know the material extremely well, but you must explain everything to your audience. Never assume the reader knows more than any other thoughtful person off the street.

21. **Paper formats (Pick only one):**

a. **Critical Evaluation Paper (Appendix A)**

- i. Introduction-1 paragraph.
- ii. Present and defend interpretation/central thesis-3-6 pages.
- iii. Attack your position-1-2 pages.
- iv. Either defend your position from the attack by providing additional insights or showing the attack has its own problems, or alter your position to accommodate the attack-2-3 pages.
- v. Conclusion-1 paragraph.

b. **Compare and Contrast (Appendix B)**

- i. Introduction-1 paragraph
- ii. Compare and contrast two arguments, positions or ideas/central thesis-3-6 pages.
- iii. Argue in detail for which position is stronger-2-4 pages.
- iv. Conclusion-1 paragraph.

Appendix A:

Introduction: Introduce the problem you are considering-who is involved and the main ideas you will be comparing and contrasting-and then say what you are going to do in the paper. Philosophy papers are not mysteries, the reader should know how the paper is going to progress after reading the introduction.

Present and defend interpretation/central thesis: Compare and contrast the two philosophers, their ideas, arguments, or whatever serves as the core to your paper. Explain in detail why you think you are correct by using representative quotes from the work you are

examining, drawing inferences, etc. Basically, you are trying to convince the reader you are correct. (Since this is the main part of the paper, take special care to develop your ideas in detail.)

Attack your position: Every good philosopher looks for the weaknesses in her position. Carefully evaluate your position for the best criticism you can find. Explain it in detail.

Defend your position: Develop an new argument or line of reasoning to show that either the plausible attack on you is wrong or that develop criticisms of the attack to show that it is too flawed to hold against your position.

Alter your position to accommodate the attack: You can acknowledge that your position was weaker than it could have been. By adding certain features it bypasses the attack or incorporates the attack in the position. For example, your reasoning might only work in certain cases. Acknowledge that fact and limit the position to only those cases.

Conclusion: Summarize, and then point out some new area to examine now that you have succeeded in developing your position. Philosophy should always be building the human knowledge base.

Appendix B:

Introduction: Introduce the problem you are considering, and then say what you are going to do in the paper. Philosophy papers are not mysteries, the reader should know how the paper is going to progress after reading the introduction.

Present and defend interpretation/central thesis: You should take a position you think is plausible, and then develop and defend it using your critical reasoning. Explain in detail why you think you are correct by using representative quotes from the work you are examining, drawing inferences, etc. Basically, you are trying to convince the reader you are correct. (Since this is the main part of the paper, take special care to develop your ideas in detail.)

Argue in detail for which position is stronger: Which of the two things being considered is the stronger. Explain why you think this way in detail. Do NOT merely re-use the information you have already presented in the paper. Come up with fresh justifications and arguments.

Conclusion: Summarize, and then point out some new area to examine now that you have succeeded in developing your position. Philosophy should always be building the human knowledge base.