NOTE: Please refer to the online version of this syllabus for changes and updates. Occasional changes may be made in the readings and other assignments over the course of the term. Such updates will be announced in class, but be sure to check the on-line version regularly.


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**PHIL 201: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY**  
**Iowa State University Spring 2013**  
**MWF 10:00-10:50 Morrill Hall rm 1030**

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**Instructor:** Clark Wolf, Department of Philosophy  
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**Texts:**

1) Cahn: Classics of Western Philosophy

2) Other readings will be available as links from the web-version of the syllabus.

3) Students should purchase a packet of 3 by 5 index cards to be used in daily argument analysis exercises.

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**FINAL EXAM DATE:** 8 May 9:45-11:45

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**Power Point Slides Used in Class:**

1) [Intro and Arguments 101](http://www.public.iastate.edu/~jwcwolf/ClassSyllabi/Syll201S13.pdf)
2) [Plato](http://www.public.iastate.edu/~jwcwolf/ClassSyllabi/Syll201S13.pdf)
3) [Plato on Love in Republic, Symposium, and Phaedrus](http://www.public.iastate.edu/~jwcwolf/ClassSyllabi/Syll201S13.pdf)
4) [Aristotle](http://www.public.iastate.edu/~jwcwolf/ClassSyllabi/Syll201S13.pdf)
5) [Epicurus & Epictetus](http://www.public.iastate.edu/~jwcwolf/ClassSyllabi/Syll201S13.pdf)
6) [Sextus Empiricus and Descartes](http://www.public.iastate.edu/~jwcwolf/ClassSyllabi/Syll201S13.pdf)
7) [Arguments Concerning the Existence of God](http://www.public.iastate.edu/~jwcwolf/ClassSyllabi/Syll201S13.pdf)
8) [Mind and Body](http://www.public.iastate.edu/~jwcwolf/ClassSyllabi/Syll201S13.pdf)
9) Justice:
   - [Mill Handout](http://www.public.iastate.edu/~jwcwolf/ClassSyllabi/Syll201S13.pdf)
   - [Rawls Handout](http://www.public.iastate.edu/~jwcwolf/ClassSyllabi/Syll201S13.pdf)
10) [Meaning of Life?](http://www.public.iastate.edu/~jwcwolf/ClassSyllabi/Syll201S13.pdf)

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**Objectives:** All thoughtful persons, at some point in life, consider the problems that have been the subject of philosophical investigation for thousands of years. Some of these
questions are fairly abstract, and rarely pose practical difficulties for us as we live our lives. Other of these problems are inescapable, and face us, whether we realize it or not, in every aspect of our lives. This course will introduce a few of the central problems of philosophy. We will read and discuss some of the most interesting works of some of the most brilliant people who have ever used reason and philosophical analysis to try to find answers to these questions.

Our purpose is (at least) twofold. First, in examining the history of these intensely interesting philosophical questions, we learn the roots of some of our own cultural traditions. These roots are enormously rich, and learning about them as issues in intellectual history is surely a valuable and enjoyable endeavor in its own right. But second, and perhaps most importantly, the problems of philosophy involve questions in which we are all (or should all be) deeply interested at the most basic level. They are important to us as we make decisions about what to believe, and how to be critical of our own naively held beliefs. Philosophical investigation may help us to determine what kinds of choices we should make, and what kind of person to be. They are important to us as we try to understand what we are and to determine our place in the scheme of things. And they are important to us as we try to choose right actions in a complicated and difficult world, and to find meaning in our lives. These are not trivial projects.

If this class goes well, it should sometimes be frustrating: we will raise many more questions than we can possibly answer, more than we can even completely discuss in a short class. My aim, after all, is to introduce the problems of philosophy, and to spark interest that may lead to further study. But many students are left, after an introductory class, with the impression that philosophical questions are answerless, and that serious philosophical investigation is therefore fruitless. In fact, there is considerable progress in philosophy, and in at least some cases there really are rationally discoverable answers to the questions we will raise, and reasonable conclusions to be drawn from the arguments we will consider. This is not because philosophy is a mass of questions without answers, but because our time is short and this class is only an introduction. Sometimes there are quite satisfactory answers to philosophical questions, though most such answers bring new questions along with them. Ideally, frustration experienced in this class should spur your interest in the frustrating questions considered, and cause you to take more classes in this department. For those of you who do not go on to study philosophy further, this class should give you some acquaintance with a few central problems, and how to think about them in an organized and rational way. The philosophical virtues of disciplined thought, clarity of language, and careful consideration of available evidence should be valuable in any context.

**ASSESSMENT:**

**Quantitative:**

**Daily Argument Analysis:** Each class meeting will begin with a brief assignment to be handed in on a 3X5 index card. The assignment will either require you to analyze an argument, to answer a question from the reading, or some similar task. Since we will
discuss the answers in class, you will not receive these back from me. But I will be glad to discuss your answers with you in my office hours.

(1) Writing Assignment: There will be a short writing assignment, distributed in the second month of the term and due one week later. It will be worth about 10% of your final grade. Late papers will be marked down one full grade for each day they are late.[ex: B+ = C+]

(2) Tests: In addition to a cumulative final exam, there will be a midterm exam, given on Friday March 15. The midterm will count for 40% of your final grade, and the final exam will count for the remaining 45%.

The final will be cumulative: it will cover material from the beginning of the course to the end. However, it will focus more heavily on material covered since the Midterm. Tests will include short answer questions, simple definition questions, and essay questions. Some of the test questions will be distributed in advance, and you are encouraged to discuss them with your classmates or with me during my office hours. The tests will not be easy, and will surely require extensive study, but there will be few surprises. Some of the material on which you will be tested will (of course) be in lecture and discussion sections only, and not in your reading.

Optional Paper: Any student who either (i) excusably misses an exam, or (ii) would like to do additional work may write a term paper in consultation with me. If you elect to write a paper, you need to discuss it with me and turn in an outline of your topic by March 8. You will need to work through at least two drafts with me, and first drafts must be submitted by April 15. Papers will be worked in as 25% of your total grade, with other assignments (weighted proportionally as stipulated above) accounting for the remaining 75%.

Non-Quantitative Assessment:

(1) Attendance: Attendance at lecture and discussion is mandatory. Two absences from lecture over the course of the term are permissible, but since material from each class meeting will appear on the exam, even two absences is not advisable. Barring exceptional circumstances, if you miss more classes than this, your absence from class will be reflected in your grade. If you know that you will need to miss class, you need to let us know in advance. If you miss an excessive number of classes or discussion periods, you will be dropped from the course and will receive either a W or a WF as your course grade.

(2) Homework: I reserve the right occasionally to hand out or write out questions on the upcoming reading assignment. When I do so, you are required to prepare written answers for the following session. Answers will be occasionally and randomly collected to check your work. Homework will not be given a letter grade, but only a check (minus or plus) or a zero.
Power Point Slides Used in Class:
1) Intro and Arguments 101
2) Plato
3) Plato on Love in Republic, Symposium, and Phaedrus
4) Aristotle
5) Epicurus & Epictetus
6) Sextus Empiricus and Descartes
7) Arguments Concerning the Existence of God
8) Mind and Body
9) Justice
10) Philosophy and the Meaning of Life?

Weekly Schedule with Reading Assignments:

Week 1: On Analyzing Arguments and On Reading Philosophy

Mon Jan 14: Introduction to the course
No reading assignment.

Wed Jan 16: Recognizing and Analyzing Arguments
Reading: Notes on Logic and Critical Thinking (Web)

Fri Jan 18: Deductive Arguments.
Reading: Notes on Logic and Critical Thinking (Web)

Week 2: Inductive and Deductive Arguments, on Reading Philosophy

Mon Jan 21: No Class: MLK Day

Wed Jan 23: Inductive Arguments, On Reading Philosophy
Reading: Notes on Logic and Critical Thinking (Web)

Fri Jan 25: Plato on Virtue and Justice
Plato: Republic, Book I, pp. 113-130
NOTE: Page numbers refer to the 7th edition of Cahn’s Classics of Western Phil.

Note: Most of this chapter (Book I of the Republic) is an extended discussion between two characters: Thrasymachus and Socrates. Try to express Thrasymachus’s view in your own words: according to Thrasymachus, what does it mean to behave justly toward
other people? What reason do we have to behave justly? Does Socrates offer convincing arguments against Thrasymachus’s position?

Week 3: Plato on Justice, The Good, and on “What There Is”

Mon Jan 28 Plato on the Just Person
Republic, Books I-II pp. 113-140

Note: In Book II, pay special attention to the story of the Ring of Gyges—why does Glaucon take this story to be a re-statement of Thrasymachus’s argument? What are the main elements of Socrates’s initial response? Why does Glaucon describe the “perfectly just person” as oppressed and miserable?

Wed Jan 30 Plato on the Just State
Republic, Books III-IV, pp. 141-154

Fri Feb 1: Plato’s Metaphysics:
Republic, Books VI-VII pp. 154-163

Note: These chapters contain the core of Plato’s theory of ideas. Pay special attention to the discussion of the divided line on p. 185 (see if you can figure out on your own what Plato has in mind!). The Myth of the Cave, at the beginning of Book VII is the most famous part of the Republic. Can you relate the Myth of the Cave to the earlier account of the divided line at the end of Book VI? Through the end of Book VII, Plato offers a theory of education. What is the relationship between his theory of ideas (what there is to be known) and his theory of education (how to teach people what there is to be known)?

Week 4: Plato on Freedom, Ideas, Beauty, Reality, and Love
Republic, Books VI-VII pp. 154-163

Mon Feb 4: Plato on the Forms
Republic, Continued

Wed Feb 6: Plato’s Ideal: The line and the Cave
Republic, Continued

Fri Feb 8: Plato’s Republic--Final issues
Republic, Continued.

Mon Feb 11: Love as a Philosophical Problem (or a “Serious Mental Disease?”)
Handout on Plato

Wed Feb 13: Platonic Love in Symposium
Handout on Plato

Fri Feb 15: Love as Divine Madness
Handout on Plato

Week 6: Aristotle’s Ethics

Mon Feb 18: Aristotle on the Good Life
Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, Book I. pp. 260-269

Note: Consider how different Aristotle’s writing style is from Plato’s: While Plato writes dialogues, Aristotle writes in prose. In the early sections of Book I, Aristotle argues that ‘good things’ must be arranged in a hierarchy according to their significance. What reasons does he give for this claim? He further argues (like Plato) that most people are confused about what is good, and that this leads them to make foolish decisions. In Section 6 of Book I, Aristotle argues against Plato’s theory of ideas. What are his objections, and what is his alternative? What are the defining characteristics of The Good, according to Aristotle? What is the significance of Aristotle’s discussion of the different parts of the human soul, in Section 13? How is this related to his conception of the Good? How is it related to his concept of ‘virtue?’

Wed Feb 20: Virtue and the Good Life
Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, Book II-III. pp. 269-282

Note: In NE Book II, Aristotle offers a theory of ‘virtue.’ If his account works, why might one think that he has given a response to Thrasymachus and Glaucon’s challenges in the first books of Plato’s Republic? What are the ‘virtues of character?’ What is the structure of an Aristotelian virtue? What is the relationship between ‘virtue’ and ‘Good’ and ‘happiness,’ on Aristotle’s view? What does it mean to say that a ‘virtue’ is a ‘mean’ or middle place? Does Aristotle’s Doctrine of the Mean amount to the advice that we should be “moderate” in all things? What is the relationship between the ‘mean’ and the two extremes? Why does Aristotle take so much time discussing voluntariness of action? According to Aristotle, when are actions ‘voluntary’ in the right sense? Why does ignorance undermine voluntariness? Why does Aristotle need to argue that we can sometimes voluntarily do wrong? Can you explain the structure of the virtue of courage?

Fri Feb 22: Aristotelian on Justice and the Best Life
Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, Book X. pp. 303-312

Note: Aristotle begins Book X with a discussion of pleasure and its relevance to happiness. But pay special attention to Sections 6, 7 and 8 of Book X: Many people regard them as the most important sections of the book. According to Aristotle, is happiness the same as pleasure? If pleasure is not to be equated with happiness, what is the relevance of pleasure anyway? According to Aristotle, what is complete happiness, and what activities will be involved in a happy life?

Week 7: The Good Life: Plato, Aristotle, Epirucus, Epictetus

Mon Feb 25: Hedonism and Epicureanism
Reading: Epicurus, pp. 315-320.

Notes: According to Epicurus, what kind of life is best? In his letter to Menoeceus, Epicurus distinguishes among different kinds of desires (see p. 420, first column). Why does he think it relevant to make these distinctions, and what is their significance? Why, according to Epicurus, is it unnecessary for us to fear death?

Wed Feb 27: Stoicism
Reading: Epictetus, pp. 323-334

Note: Epictetus was a Roman slave. Does knowing this influence your understanding of the first two sections of the reading? According to Epictetus, you can make yourself fully self-sufficient, happy, and invulnerable to hardship if you take the right attitude toward life. According to Epictetus, what is the right attitude toward life?

Fri March 1: Virtue and the Good Life in Ancient Philosophy
No new reading assignment.

Week 8: Knowledge, God, and Mind

Mon March 4: Knowledge and Skepticism
Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism. Pp. 337-354

Wed March 6: Descartes Method of Doubt
Descartes, Meditation I and II, pp. 490-496

Note: Descartes’s project is to find out what he knows for sure. Why does he begin by discussing the different things he can doubt? Is he right to think that we can’t be certain
about things that we can doubt? What is the relevance of the “evil genius” Descartes introduces near the end of Meditation I? What is the significance of the discussion of the piece of wax in Meditation II?

Fri March 8: Knowledge and Disbelief
   Descartes, Meditation III, IV pp. 496-506

Note: In Meditation III, Descartes offers what he believes to be a proof that god exists. Why does he believe that the idea of god could not have originated in him? How many arguments concerning the existence of god does Descartes offer in this section? How does Descartes move, in Meditation IV, from his beliefs about God to subsequent beliefs about the reliability of his own perceptions? Why does his argument seem to lead him to conclude that he must be infallible, and how does he reconcile his own fallibility with his earlier arguments?

Week 9: God, Mind and Matter

Mon March 11: Mind, Matter, and God
   Descartes, Meditation V-VI, pp. 506-516

Wed March 13: *Preparation for Midterm Exam*

Fri March 15: MIDTERM EXAM (PPN Atlanta)

SPRING BREAK: MARCH 16-24

Week 10: Mind, Matter, and God

Mon March 25: Descartes on Mind, Matter, and God
   Descartes, Meditation V-VI, pp. 506-516 (No new reading)

Wed March 27: Mind and Matter

Fri March 29: Is belief in God irrational?
Mon April 1 Rationality and Religious Belief: Pascal’s Wager
    Reading: James, The Will To Believe. Pp. 1149-1160

Note: Like Descartes, James is concerned to explain when it is rational to believe something, but unlike Descartes, James does not believe that certainty is necessary for knowledge. Under what circumstances, according to James, is it rationally permissible to believe something when there is no evidence that it is true?

Wed April 3: James, “Will To Believe”
    Reading: James, “Will To Believe.”

Fri April 5: Problem of Evil
    Dostoievski: Rebellion and The Grand Inquisitor (web)

Mon April 8 Mind and Body
    Nagel, “Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness.” (web)

Wed April 10 Mind and Body
    Gutting, “Mary and the Zombies: Can Science Explain Consciousness?”
    NY Times 12 March 2013
    URL: http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/03/12/mary-and-the-zombies-can-science-explain-consciousness/

Fri April 12 Discussion. (No new assignment)

Mon April 15 Political Liberty

Wed April 17 Political Justice
    John Rawls, from Theory of Justice

Fri April 19 Justice and Liberty
    Rawls and Mill, Continued-- No new reading.

Mon April 22 Philosophy and the Meaning of Life?
    Schopenhauer: The Vanity of Existence
    NOTE: Both Schopenhauer readings are together in the same pdf file.

Wed April 24 Philosophy and the Meaning of Life?
    Schopenhauer: The Suffering of the World

Fri April 26 Philosophy and the Meaning of Life?
    Tolstoi: My Confession
Mon April 29
   Joel Feinberg: Absurd Self-Fulfillment

Joel Feinberg: Absurd Self-Fulfilment

Wed May 1 TBA

Fri May 3

FINAL EXAM DATE: 8 May 9:45-11:45