**Introduction to Philosophy**

MWF 2-3pm / Fall 2018

Professor: Dr. Aaron Simmons

Email: [asimmons@marywood.edu](mailto:asimmons@marywood.edu)

Office: IMMAC 110A

Office Hours: MW 3-4pm & 5:30-6:30pm, F 3-5pm (or by appointment)

“The value of philosophy is…to be sought largely in its very uncertainty. The man who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the co-operation or consent of his deliberate reason. …Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts which it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom.

---Bertrand Russell

**Course Summary**

Philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom regarding fundamental questions of existence: questions about the nature of reality, how we can know things, what it means to be human, and how we ought to live our lives. Since the beginning of philosophy, the task of philosophers has been to question commonly held beliefs and to use reason and argument to decide what we *ought* to believe about ourselves and the world around us. We are all philosophers insofar as we are all capable of using reason to question and evaluate our own and other people’s beliefs in order to decide what we ought to think about things. Our primary focus in this course will be to examine in detail a few significant topics in philosophy:

The Problem of Evil – There is a vast amount of human and animal suffering in the world. Some of this suffering is human-inflicted and some of it is naturally caused. Yet, many people believe in the existence of an all-powerful, perfectly good creator. Is the amount of suffering that we witness in the world a good reason to believe that probably there is not a God? Or is there a way to explain how the world’s suffering is compatible with the existence of a perfect creator?

Free Will and Moral Responsibility – A common belief about being human is that we are in control of the choices we make and, therefore, that it makes sense to blame people for making bad choices. Yet it also seems that biology and environment shape our personalities and that we are not in control of how they do so. If none of us gets to choose why we are the way that we are, how can it make sense to hold people morally responsible for their choices?

Moral Status – What kinds of entities deserve to be treated with some level of moral respect in our actions? Do we have moral obligations to living things other than human beings, such as animals or plant life? How strong are our obligations to treat animals with respect? Is it wrong to use them as our resources for food or medical research? Are humans worthy of a higher respect than other living things? What is it about being human that makes us worthy of respect?

**Course Goals**

1. To enhance your critical thinking skills, including the ability to evaluate arguments for holding certain beliefs and to construct good arguments for your beliefs
2. To improve your writing skills, particularly your ability to write a good argumentative paper
3. To enhance your ability to communicate complex ideas and arguments clearly
4. To learn about important questions in the study of philosophy and gain greater insight on the possible answers to those questions

**Grading**

Papers

You will be required to write two formal philosophy papers for this course: a midterm paper and a final paper. Papers should be approximately 1200-2000 words long (roughly 4-6 pages double-spaced). In your papers you will be expected to *analyze and evaluate readings* from the course and to *construct an argument* for some philosophical belief you hold. We will spend time in class discussing how to properly write a philosophy paper. Each paper counts for 40% of your final grade. After the midterm paper, you will be given the option of writing a second midterm paper to improve on the grade you received on the first paper.

Attendance, Participation, Preparation, and Effort (APPE)

Your attendance, participation, preparation, and effort in this class count for 20% of your grade. To earn an A for this portion of your grade, you must have good attendance, regularly volunteer to participate in class discussions, come to each class period having done the reading assignments, and demonstrate good effort in the class. The following behaviors, among others, will count against your APPE grade: texting in class, using your computer in class for non-class purposes, sleeping in class, and frequently coming to class late or leaving class early. If you are not comfortable participating in classroom discussions, you can also earn participation credit by typing up a short paragraph or two in which you comment on (or raise questions about) the readings and/or the classroom discussion. Written participation should be submitted to me on paper no more than one week after we have discussed a particular reading or topic in class.

Grade Breakdown

1. Midterm Paper 40%
2. Final Paper 40%
3. Participation and Effort 20%

**Classroom Etiquette**

Philosophy, by its nature, involves debate and disagreement on questions that are controversial and sometimes personal. As we examine philosophical questions in this class, we will sometimes disagree with each other. Class time will include discussions in which your beliefs may be questioned, challenged, and debated by other students or the professor. That being said, everyone in the class is expected to follow basic rules of respect for one another. Criticism and disagreement with one another’s opinions should be expressed in a respectful manner. Personal attacks are not acceptable. Additionally, I ask that students raise their hands to speak and try to avoid interrupting one another.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism on paper assignments will not be tolerated in this class. Plagiarism consists of passing off another author’s words or ideas as your own without giving the author proper credit. Before your first paper assignment, we will discuss plagiarism in greater detail and the proper way to cite authors. Students who are caught cheating or plagiarizing will be punished accordingly. Punishments may include failing the assignment, failing the entire course, and/or being reported to the University. For further information, please consult Marywood’s policy on “Academic Honesty” in the policy manual located at <http://www.marywood.edu/policy/academic-affairs.html>

**Accommodations for Students with Documented Disabilities**

Marywood University complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as amended by the ADA Amendments Act of 2008. Students with disabilities who need special accommodations must submit documentation of the disability to the Office of Disability Services, Learning Commons 166, in order for reasonable accommodations to be granted. The Office of Disability Services will partner with students to determine the appropriate accommodations and, in cooperation with the instructor, will work to ensure that all students have a fair opportunity to perform in this class. Students are encouraged to notify instructors and the Office of Disability Services as soon as they determine accommodations are necessary; however, documentation will be reviewed at any point in the semester upon receipt. Specific details of the disability will remain confidential between the student and the Office of Disability services unless the student chooses to disclose or there is legitimate academic need for disclosure on a case-by-case basis. For assistance, please contact Diane Webber, Associate Director of Disability Services, at 570.348.6211 x2335 or [dtwebber@marywood.edu](mailto:dtwebber@marywood.edu).

**Texts**

1. *Five Dialogues*, by Plato
2. *The Problem of Evil*, by Peter van Inwagen (also available on Google Drive)
3. *Moral Status*, by Mary Anne Warren
4. Electronic readings available through Google Drive (E): <https://goo.gl/XKqtd9>

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

This schedule of readings and assignments is subject to change based on my discretion and how quickly we work our way through the readings. Any changes in the schedule will be announced in class.

Week One

8/27 – 8/31

Introduction

*Evaluating Arguments*

A handout will be given in class

*The Legacy of Socrates*

Plato, “Apology” pp. 21-44

Week Two

9/3 – 9/7

**Labor Day – No class on Monday, September 4th**

*The Legacy of Socrates*

*The Problem of Evil*

Peter van Inwagen, “The Global Argument from Evil” pp. 56, 62-74

Week Three

9/10 – 9/14

*The Problem of Evil*

Van Inwagen, “The Global Argument Continued” pp. 75-77

*The Problem of Evil*

Van Inwagen, “The Global Argument Continued” pp. 80-94

*The Problem of Evil*

Van Inwagen, “The Local Argument from Evil” pp. 95-112

Week Four

9/17 – 9/21

*The Problem of Evil*

Van Inwagen, “The Suffering of Beasts” pp. 113-115, 118-128

Week Five

9/24 – 9/28

**Discuss Midterm Paper Assignment**

*Free Will*

John Hospers, “The Range of Human Freedom” (E)

Week Six

10/1 – 10/5

*Free Will*

W.T. Stace, “Compatibilism Defended” (E)

Week Seven

10/8 – 10/12

*Free Will*

C.A. Campbell, “On Selfhood and Godhood” (E)

**MIDTERM PAPER DUE – Friday, October 12th (No class)**

Week Eight

10/15 – 10/19

**Fall Break – No class on Monday, October 16**

*Free Will*

Radiolab podcast in class: “Blame”

Week Nine

10/22 – 10/26

*Moral Status*

Mary Anne Warren, Ch. 1, “The Concept of Moral Status” pp. 3-17

*Moral Status*

Warren, Ch. 2, “Reverence for Life” pp. 24-49

Week Ten

10/29 – 11/2

*Moral Status*

Warren, Ch. 3, “Sentience and the Utilitarian Calculus” pp. 50-89

Week Eleven

11/5 – 11/9

*Moral Status*

Warren, Ch. 4, “Personhood and Moral Rights” pp. 90-121

Optional Further Reading: Tom Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights”

Week Twelve

11/12 – 11/16

*Moral Status*

In-class video: “Peaceable Kingdom”

Week Thirteen

11/19 – 11/23

*Moral Status*

Warren, Ch. 5, “The Relevance of Relationships” pp. 122-147

**Thanksgiving Break – begins Wednesday November 21th (No class)**

Week Fourteen

11/26 – 11/30

*Morality and Happiness*

Plato, selections from *The Republic* (E)

Week Fifteen

12/3 – 12/7

*Morality and Happiness*

Aristotle, selections from *Nicomachean Ethics* (E)

**FINAL PAPER DUE – Friday, December 7th (No class)**

Week Sixteen

12/10

Monday, December 10th – course wrap-up and evaluations