

*Disclaimer: This syllabus is intended to give the student guidance in what may be covered in the course and will be followed as closely as possible. However, the professor reserves the right to modify, supplement and make changes as needs arise.*

Instructor: Charles Bonner  
Office: TBD  
Credit: 4  
Time: 2 hours/day, Mon-Fri

Required Text: John Cottingham, ed., *Western Philosophy, An Anthology*. (Blackwell, 2008)

Also, brief excerpts or short articles will be given as class handouts, or URL addresses will be given for on-line readings. A feature length film will be shown in class in the latter part of the course, in connection with the **contemporary ethical issues** to be dealt with.

### Course Description

We will begin with an attempt to understand so-called Socratic method, introduced at the beginning of Western philosophy (in Plato's dialogues) and continued, in various more or less distorted versions, throughout the history of our philosophical tradition. Socratic method is a form of philosophical discussion aiming at mutual insight into the matter discussed. The course will stress the importance of this starting point of philosophy for the whole tradition of Western thinking. About half of the selected readings from the *Anthology* will be from the ancient Greeks, with the last two weeks devoted to a survey of modern and contemporary philosophical readings, with particular focus on issues of ethical controversy.

Every effort will be made to conduct class meetings along the lines of Socrates' way of posing questions and critically assessing purported answers to the fundamental questions that Western philosophers have dealt with: questions about the ultimate nature of reality (ontology), the grounds for human beings' capacity for knowledge (epistemology) and, particularly important in our own times, questions about the meaning of human existence, the nature of "the good life" (ethics), etc.

### Aims of the Course

No attempt will be made to present a systematic overview of Western philosophy, either historically or thematically. Instead, the course will try to *introduce* (from the Latin word meaning "lead into") the Western philosophical tradition to non-Western students who are engaged in Western higher education.

Cottingham's *Anthology* is composed of short excerpts, no more than five to ten pages each, of classic texts spanning the history of philosophy (ancient, medieval and modern) and also includes a selection of contemporary philosophical reflections on current issues such as environmentalism and biomedical ethical controversies. Our purpose in reading these materials will be to gain an appreciation for the relevance, importance and *value* of philosophical reflection. (One crucial aim of this course will be to convince students that there are indeed contemporary problems and developments that demand philosophical reflection.)

The course will proceed from week to week focusing on relatively short assigned texts, which are to be read closely and discussed in open, informed, and serious ways. No more than 20 to 30 pages will be assigned for any given week, and a short quiz or writing exercise will be given each week to ensure - and check - students' engagement with the readings. In addition to these quizzes and short writing exercises, Grades will be based on a Midterm Exam, and a Final Paper due at the end of semester. [Details to follow.]

Class Participation will also be counted as an official component of the final grade, and some degree of active engagement is necessary for getting anything out of the course.

**Weeks 1 and 2** will be devoted to readings from Plato and Aristotle. The origins of the Western philosophical tradition. Selections (from Cottingham's *Anthology*) TBA. Readings will include excerpts from Plato's *Republic* and other dialogues as well as Aristotle. *Metaphysics* and *Ethics*.

A short "reaction paper" assessing the figure of Socrates will be due at the end of Week 2. (Additional writing exercises or mini-papers will be assigned for each subsequent week.)

Later Greek and Roman thinkers (Epicurus, Lucretius, Seneca, etc.) will be introduced, along with a brief survey of the Western philosophical tradition, from Saint Augustine to Descartes and Nietzsche, will occupy **Weeks 3 and 4**.

Short excerpts (and useful introductions) from Cottingham's *Anthology* will constitute the core readings, with a few short supplementary readings given as class handouts. Special attention will be given to the origins of modern political philosophy (Hobbes, Rousseau, etc.)

A midterm exam will be given at the end of Week 4.

**Weeks 5 and 6** will be devoted to contemporary (20th c.) philosophical problems and traditions. (Both the "analytic" tradition and so-called Continental Philosophy will be presented, with readings drawn from representative figures included in our textbook.

Important "real world" problems will be discussed from the perspectives of environmental philosophy and biomedical ethics – the two most important branches of "applied philosophy" in today's world. Students will be encouraged to formulate final paper topics relating to these issues of contemporary concern – and will bring in relevant themes and figures from the Western philosophical tradition in a thoughtful engagement with / reflection on these issues.

[A detailed schedule of readings, quizzes and short writing exercises will be available before the course begins.]