

# FRAMINGHAM STATE UNIVERSITY

## COURSE SYLLABUS

PHIL 101 **Invitation to Philosophy**  
Summer 2018

### General Information:

Session: Summer 2018(July 2nd,2018-August 3rd,2018)

Credit: 4

Teaching Hours: 50 Hours

Time: 2 hours/day, Mon.-Fri.

Instructor: Dr. Charles Bonner

Home Institution: Framingham State University

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

Two additional short articles will be given as class handouts.

### 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, by various distortions, 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. We will also focus throughout the course on the importance of this kind of discussion – called “philosophizing” – for human life in general.

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.

The central theme of the course can be indicated by quoting a famous remark made by Socrates at his trial in Athens in 399 BCE (as reported by Plato): “The unexamined life is not worth living” – is not “fit for human beings.”

### 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, about five 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 *necessity* of philosophical reflection. One crucial aim of this course will be to convince students that there are indeed contemporary problems and developments – such as globalization, climate change, artificial intelligence, and biotechnology – that demand philosophical reflection.

Students should gain some insight into the fundamental features that distinguish Western thinking from the “wisdom traditions” of other cultures and civilizations. They will also develop some basic skills in critical thinking, organization of ideas, and practice in verbal and written presentation of their own insights and questions.

### Assessment

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 + writing exercise will be given each week to ensure - and check - students’ engagement with the readings. In addition to these quizzes and writing exercises, Grades will be based on a Midterm Exam, and a Final Exam at the end of the course.

Overall grades will consist of quiz scores (25%), writing exercises (25%), midterm (25%) and final exam (25%). Class Participation, or the lack of participation, will also be counted as an official component of the final grade, and will influence the outcome by raising or lowering the grade calculated on the basis of test scores, etc.

### Grading

Letter grades correspond to percentage value ranges as follows:

$0\% \leq F < 60\% \leq D- < 62\% \leq D < 68\% \leq D+ < 70\% \leq C- < 72\% \leq C < 78\% \leq C+ < 80\% \leq B- < 82\% \leq B < 88\% \leq B+ < 90\% \leq A- < 92\% \leq A \leq 100\%$ .

Attendance is mandatory for this course. Up to three classes can be missed but more than three absences will result in lowering your overall grade as calculated above. Use of technology in philosophical discussion is strongly discouraged: except for those occasions when students will be allowed to use smartphones, etc. in class the use of digital devices will result in being marked absent – with potential effect on your final grade.

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**Weeks 1 and 2 (July 2-13)** will be devoted to readings from Plato and Aristotle. The origins of the Western philosophical tradition. Selections from Cottingham’s *Anthology* will include excerpts from Plato’s *Republic* and other dialogues as well as Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and *Ethics*.

A film will be shown in class and a written assignment on mimesis will be assigned, analyzing the film with concepts provided by Plato and/or Aristotle.

**Week 3 (July 16-20)** Greek and Roman thinkers of the Hellenistic period (Epicurus, Lucretius, Seneca, etc.) will be introduced and discussion topics will include the ways in

which the rediscovery of these works at the time of the European Renaissance prepared the way for the Scientific Revolution of the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Descartes will be our representative thinker for the emergence of the scientific worldview and the beginning of modern philosophy. (Excerpts from Descartes' *Meditations* and *Discourse on Method* will be read and discussed.)

A midterm exam will be given at the end of Week 3.

**Week 4(July 23-27)** will focus on political philosophy and modern theories of the state. Hobbes, Rousseau and Marx will be our main authors.

**Week 5(July 30-August 3)** 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 authors included in our textbook (Freud, MacIntyre, Taylor).

A brief article by Alphonso Lingis will be given as supplementary reading.