

Course Outline
Course Title: Philosophy for Everyday Life
Instructor: Rob Merker, PhD
Fall 2018

Synopsis:

We all face questions every day. They range from the metaphysical such as 'what is the purpose of life' and 'is there life after death', to the mundane such as 'should I give a dollar to the homeless person on the street'. Philosophers have been thinking for thousands of years about many of these questions. But philosophical ideas have often been presented in ways that are difficult to understand and make the topic seem irrelevant.

The goal of this course is to take the ideas of philosophers, from antiquity to present day, in answer to the important questions that we all think about as we go through life. The questions we explore will be divided into three broad categories: 1-Who am I and why am I here; 2-Making decisions: Ethics in the 21st century; and 3-Political philosophy, and truth in the age of Trump. The questions and topics to be covered in each category are outlined below. This class is designed to challenge and satisfy your intellectual curiosity.

1-Who am I and why am I here?

- Is there a god? Three enduring arguments for the existence of god; the problem of evil; the implications of atheism and theism
- What is the purpose of life, and what does it mean to be happy? How existentialism challenges us to live a full life (Nietzsche, Sartre); Aristotle's teleology; modern philosophers look at the meaning of life.; happiness after retirement
- Descartes skepticism, how that led him to "I think therefore I am", and does it matter to us.
- How are life after death, the mind/body problem, and computers that take over the world all related?

2-Making decisions - Ethics in the 21st Century

- What are the best ways that have been conceived of to think of right and wrong?
 - Deontology (Kant), Consequentialism (Bentham, Mill), Virtue Ethics (Aristotle)
- What ethical challenges does the future hold?
 - Artificial intelligence: the ethical challenges of self-driving cars
 - Designer babies: Should they be allowed and can we stop them?
 - Will we live for ever? Would we want to?
- Do we have free will and can we really make decisions?
- How have philosophers approached ethical issues that are politically polarizing such as abortion, euthanasia, and animal rights?
- What can philosophers teach us about End-of-life decisions?
 - What happens when we die

- Facing dementia and planning for death
- Ethical estate planning

3-Political philosophy, and truth in the age of trump

- A philosophical analysis of nationalism, patriotism and cosmopolitanism
- What is the best way to organize our society:, a three thousand year debate including Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Mill, Marx, Rawls and Nozick. What they believed and what they would say about President Trump.
- What is truth?
 - How philosophers define truth (Tarski, James, Rorty, Derrida)
 - What the history of science teaches us about truth

Course Design:

The course will begin with an explanation of what philosophy is, and a very brief history of philosophy that will enable students to put the philosophical ideas we will discuss in their historical context. Each of the three categories listed above will be covered in four 40 to 50 minute lectures for 12 total lectures to be delivered in 6 two-hour classes. To provide some variety there will be a number of 3 to 10 minute philosophical nuggets during the sessions. These will include paradoxes, perplexities, and dilemmas. They will also introduce the many areas where philosopher's have created a rich "Philosophy of" literature. These include philosophy of sports, philosophy of sex, economics, art/aesthetics, humor, etc. All lectures will be done with power-point outlines including photographs and videos where applicable