Classic Thinkers

Code and section: PHIL*1000*01

Term: Fall 2023

Instructor: John Russon

Method of Delivery:

This course will have two components, both of which are in-person. Each week, there will be lectures, in which you will be introduced to the texts and ideas, and a discussion section, in which you will engage in more focused study of the texts in a more intimate setting. It is important for you to be present at all sessions.

Course Synopsis:

In philosophy, we study the great writings from human history that contain the insights behind the great developments of human civilization and the wisdom that can guide us in living well in our personal, interpersonal and social lives. The study of philosophy is especially about taking these ideas and developing the ability to reflect creatively and critically on your own world and your own life. In the first half of this course, we will study the nature of human development. We will begin with ancient works by the Buddha, from India, and Aristotle, from Greece, and we will study their ideas about personality and the development of healthy character—ideas that are as fresh and engaging today as they were 2500 years ago. We will then turn to the 20th Century American philosopher John Dewey and his book Democracy and Education, which draws on these insights to analyze the crucial role of education in human life; in addition to being an important study of human culture in general, this section will be especially relevant to helping you think about and understand your own situation as you become involved in university-level studies. In the second half of the course, we will study contemporary ideas about politics and culture. We will begin with short selections from the 19th Century philosophers Hegel and Marx, which will focus especially on issues of exploitation and oppression, especially in the context of economic life. We will use John Berger’s book Ways of Seeing to analyze the nature of sexuality and especially to look at exploitative ways sexuality is taken up and developed in contemporary culture. We will conclude the class with Audre Lorde, who will tie together these issues of sexuality, economics and oppression with the themes of healthy human development with which the class began. The class will introduce you to these powerful thinkers and it will especially focus on developing your ability to read demanding texts and to express yourself in writing and speaking.

Assignments:

In addition to attending the lectures and participating in seminar discussions, your main responsibility is to read the texts, and you should not expect to do well if you do not do this. You will be graded based on in-class tests, writing assignments that include a critical essay, and your participation in seminar discussions.
**Required Textbooks:**

*It is important that you get the correct edition or translation.*

*Early Buddhist Discourses*, edited by Holder, (Hackett Publishing).


**Disclaimer:**

*Please note: This is a preliminary web course outline only. The Philosophy Department reserves the right to change without notice any information in this description. The final, binding course outline will be distributed in the first class of the semester.*