Philosophy asks big questions: What is it to be a fully developed human being? Am I in control of my destiny? What kind of world are we living in—for example, do gods or a God exist? How do we know these things—should we believe based on tradition, feelings, faith, evidence? And what difference does it make—what is the best kind of life to live? We will grapple with fundamental philosophical issues and discuss the views of major thinkers in the Western intellectual tradition.

Course Readings

With one exception, the course readings are linked below to “Introduction to Philosophy — course modules” (http://www.stephenhicks.org/courses-2/introduction-to-philosophy-course-modules/).

Topics and Assignments

Topics: In this course, we will cover six topics and approximately 14 philosophers, spending three weeks on each topic as follows:

(a) one week on lecture and in-class discussion of the readings,
(b) one week on group debates, and
(c) one week on independent writing.

Debates:

(a) At the start of the semester, you will form your own groups of four. This will be your group for the semester. If you haven’t formed a group by Friday, August 25, I'll assign you to a group.
(b) With the exception of one topic, each group will research, prepare, and present a 15-minute debate on each topic.
(c) Half of your group will argue the pro side, and half will argue the con side.
(d) Everyone else in the class will evaluate your group’s debate performance using the provided Debate Evaluation Rubric. You will also evaluate each other group’s debates. Everyone will turn their evaluations in to me at the end of the class period.
(e) You can print your own copies of the Rubric here: https://tinyurl.com/y9f4kohm.
(f) The exceptional topic is the final unit of the course, which will not be debated in class but will be an individual assignment only.

Essays:

(a) You will write an individual essay of 1500 words on each topic.
(b) Recommended breakdown: 500 words on the argument for, 500 words on the argument against, and 500 words defending your informed opinion on the topic.
(c) Your essay should be high quality in content, rhetoric, and editing.
(d) Email your essays to philosophy.103.writings@gmail.com.
(e) Please don’t attach your essays. Instead, paste them into the body of your email.
Goals
To improve your Knowledge, Skills, and Habits.
Knowledge: Major issues and major thinkers in Philosophy.
Skills: Listening, Note-taking, Reading, Interpretation, Argument, Speaking, Writing, Technology-use, Sociability.
Habits: Commitment, Perseverance, Self-reliance, Dependability, Timely completion.

Evaluation
Debates: My evaluation: 30%. Peer student evaluations: 20%. My evaluations of your evaluations of other groups' debates: 20%.
Essays: My evaluations of your writings: 30%.
I use the University’s standard scale. 90-100% is the excellent A range, 80-89 is the good B range, 70-79 is the average C range, 60-69 is the poor D range, and below 60 is failing.
Formal and informal evaluation:
I will give you a formal grade at only two times during the semester: midterm and final.
But I am happy to give you as much informal feedback as you want during the semester.
(a) To get informal feedback from me, please schedule either an office or Skype appointment.
(b) If you'd like general discussion or advice about your writing, we can do that either in my office or via Skype.
(c) If you'd like detailed feedback on your writing, then bring a printed-out copy of your writing to our office appointment so we can go over it together.
(d) Each week a sign-up sheet is posted outside my office door for you to schedule an appointment with me.
(e) Mostly Thursdays will be available for appointments, but appointment sheets for other days will be posted regularly outside my office door.

Four Principles of Respect in Class
1. As your professor, I am a resource and not your boss, father, or enforcer.
2. If I have not read the material and prepared for class, I will not come. If you have not read the material and prepared for class, you will not come.
3. If I do not have the reading material with me, I will not come to class. If you do not have the reading material with you, you will not come to class.
4. I will keep my personal electronic devices turned off and put away. You will keep your personal electronic devices turned off and put away.

Schedule and Readings
With one exception, the course readings are hyperlinked below reading or downloading at my website at “Introduction to Philosophy — course modules” (http://www.stephenhicks.org/courses-2/introduction-to-philosophy-course-modules/).
Unit One (approximately August 23 to September 8)
Who behaved better or worse—Arachne or Athena?
“Arachne and Athena.”
Stephen Hicks, “Why Philosophy Begins with Thales.”
[Optional: The movie Troy (2004), roughly based on Homer’s Iliad and starring Brad Pitt, Eric Bana, and Orlando Bloom.]

Unit Two (approximately September 11 to September 29)
Was Socrates’ verdict just?
Plato, Apology of Socrates. The Internet Classics Archive.

Unit Three (approximately October 2 to October 17)
Can God’s existence be proven?
William Paley, "The Watch and the Watchmaker" (1802).
Galileo Galilei, "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina" (1615).

Unit Four (approximately October 23 to November 10)
What is the relation between mind and body?
Dualism quotations from Martin Luther, St. Paul, and Lucretius.
Scott Calef, "Dualism and Mind." The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
[Optional journalism: Heart Transplantation, Artificial Kidneys, Brain Transplants.]

Unit Five (approximately November 13 to December 1)
What is selfishness, and is it good or bad?
Ayn Rand, Book One of The Fountainhead.
Plato, "The Myth of Gyges."
[Optional: Less Wrong, “Why Men Wear Pink.”]

Unit Six (approximately December 4 to December 13)
Is life meaningless?
The Meaning of Life—Selected Quotations (from Psalms, Shakespeare, Brooke, Marvell, Thoreau, and others).
Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus" (1942).
Stephen Hicks, "Would Immortality Be Worth It?" (1992).
Syllabus Statements Mandated by Administrators and Accreditation Agency

Accommodations Statement
If you believe you are eligible to receive any type of academic accommodation, through such federal laws as the ADA, please contact the Lang Center for Health, Wellness, Counseling and Disabilities Services at 815-226-4083. The Lang staff manages disability services for Rockford University.

Academic Honor Code Statement
In this course, the policies and procedures concerning the Honor Code, including the definitions of cheating and plagiarism as they appear in the current Rockford University Handbook, will be applicable.

Senior Day Policy Statement
All students are excused from class for “senior day.”

Academic Concern with this Course
From the Provost’s office: “Meet with the course professor to discuss your concern. If the issue is not resolved, then you may follow the chain-of-command: Department Chair, the Dean of your College, and the University Provost, in that order. To appeal a final course grade, complete the grade appeal form (located on the Portal under forms/undergraduate student documents or graduate student documents). A description of the grade appeal process is included on p. 55 of the Academic Catalog.”

Workload Expectations
This 3-credit course will meet for 50 minutes per session three times a week throughout the semester. A minimum of 2-3 hours of student preparation time outside of class is expected for each credit hour. Thus, please be prepared to devote 9-12 hours per week to this course (range includes in- and outside-class time).

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A copy of this syllabus and schedule can also be found at www.StephenHicks.org.