

First-Year Inquiry Seminar
The Examined Life
(An Introduction to Philosophy)

Philosophy 190
Fall 2008

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Office hours: M 12:30–3:30
W 12:30–2:30
(also gladly by appointment)

The Program

Inquiry Seminars are part of the university's First-Year Experience Program. (Other components are a Writing Seminar and a January-term course, perhaps one reserved for freshmen only.) The program's guidebook says that "FYE Inquiry Seminars [are] specially designed for First-Year students, [and] will introduce you to the methods and topics of study within a particular academic discipline or field." As a whole, the program greatly supports PLU's theme (which you will remember from Admission materials) of "**Challenge, Support, Success.**"

This Course

This course offers an introduction to **the discipline of philosophy**. By "discipline," I mean of course the subject matter – what topics or questions are explored – but also the way of doing that exploring: the methods involved in doing philosophy. So this course will provide you with an introduction to a set of questions and to a way of attempting to answer those questions.

The Greek philosopher Plato quotes his teacher, Socrates, as saying that "The unexamined life is not worth living." Part of what we will do this semester is consider what it might mean to live an "examined" life. This will include investigating the three main kinds of philosophical questions; here is an example of each:

- ◆ Who am I?
- ◆ How should I live?
- ◆ How can I know any of this?

We will also see how answers to such questions weave together to form the core of a person's **worldview**, or perspective on life. (What is perhaps most distinctive about philosophy, in my judgment, is its formulating and criticizing of worldviews.)

Students will not be expected to agree with any specific "right answers" (although I intend to tell you what some of them are!), but rather to think carefully and critically about the issues we discuss and to provide rational support for their views. By the end of the course, you will have a better idea of what "**living the examined life**" means for you; the rest is in your hands.

This course satisfies the Philosophy GUR, one of your graduation requirements. It also gets you one-quarter of the way to a philosophy minor! (And my colleagues are much more interesting than I am.) More about that as the semester progresses.

Main Objectives

In addition to your learning about philosophy (and trying it out for yourself), the course will focus on building skills, and strengthening dispositions, in the FYEP's three main areas of **thinking, literacy, and community**. (1) You will learn what critical reflection means in philosophy, and why critical thinking is "housed" within philosophy. (2) You will "practice the skills of active, critical reading and effective communication" (to quote again from the program guidebook). This will include a significant amount of writing, always tied closely to assigned readings and class discussion and conceived of "as a process of intellectual discovery." (3) You will work together with others as a collaborative learning community (including through the online tool Sakai). Part of what we will explore is how to be respectful of others while disagreeing with, or at least questioning, their views. (Hint: in large part, this involves both careful listening and putting the focus on reasons and evidence – the right kind of academic argument.)

The general objective of this course, one might say, is to help freshmen to become sophomores! You will have the opportunity to develop a variety of academic skills and habits of character, to think about the purpose and focus of your undergraduate education (in that regard, see the cartoon at the end of this syllabus), and to build relationships with your peers.

Required Textbooks

1. Thomas F. Wall, *Thinking Critically About Philosophical Problems*. [A related website is available, as Wall notes on p. 17: www.wadsworth.com/product/0534574203s. (See also our Sakai site.) Click on the "Companion Site" link near the image of the front cover.]
2. Douglas J. Soccio, *How to Get the Most Out of Philosophy* (6th edition). ["so-see-OH"]

Course Requirements

1. **Class attendance and participation.** [15% – with excessive absences penalized further]
Philosophy is the sort of thing that one improves at, and comes to appreciate more, through interaction and discussion with others. So regular attendance in class is important, along with faithful attention to the readings. There will be plenty of time for discussion and conversation, and throughout each class session you should seek to be an active learner – thinking for yourself about what we encounter. In this way you will be doing philosophy, not just learning about it, as you discuss the issues and consider new insights.
2. **Group Discussions and Presentations.** [10%]
Throughout the semester, there will be many opportunities for small-group discussion. Sometimes, group members will share individual insights when we reconvene; sometimes groups will "report out" in a more formal fashion; and occasionally groups will prepare for a presentation to the class. You are expected to be a helpful, involved member of whatever group you are in at the moment, striving for excellence no matter how small the task. There will be an opportunity near the end of the semester for you to evaluate both your own involvement in these group activities and the contributions of others.

3. **Short Papers.** [50%]

You will write five (5) papers in this course, ranging in length between four and seven pages. Some will involve a draft and then final version; some will involve peer responses. Instructions for each paper will be handed out at least nine days before it is due. Tentative due dates are **Oct. 3, Oct. 23, Oct. 31, Nov. 17, and Dec. 5**. Ordinarily, all assignments must be completed to pass the course.

4. **Final Exam.** [25%]

This will be a take-home exam consisting of just two (2) essays. The first of these will, in effect, be a sixth short paper. The second will be a personal, “synoptic” essay in which you draw together various pieces of the course and begin to reflect on your own philosophical worldview. The exam is due no later than 6:00 p.m. on **Tuesday, December 16** (the day the in-class final would have occurred), and will be submitted electronically. Detailed instructions will be distributed on or before Wednesday, December 3.

Schedule of Topics and Assigned Readings

[This schedule is flexible, and may well be adjusted. Students are responsible for knowing what is expected for each class session. Textbook authors’ names are underlined; other readings will be handed out in class and/or available online. Note: readings listed for a given day should be read carefully before that day’s class, and reviewed afterward.]

Sept. 10, 12

Introductions: to each other, to philosophy, and to the course.

- (a) Wall, Preface. (b) PLU Philosophy Faculty, “Why Philosophy as a General Undergraduate Requirement?”, *Prism* (Spring 2007).
- Soccio, Introduction and chapter 1. *[Be prepared in class on Friday to discuss the question, “Why am I in college?”]*

Sept. 15, 17, 19

The Nature of Philosophical Inquiry.

- (a) Wall, Introduction: “What is Philosophy?” (b) Explore the “Fields of Philosophy” portion of the Wall textbook’s online Companion Site (accessible through our course Sakai site); look carefully at the Basic level – including the sections on similarities, differences, and notes – and, if you wish, browse a bit in the Intermediate level.
- Michael Bratman, “Theory, Action, and Acting Against One’s Better Judgment,” *The Stanford Observer* (November 1981).
- Soccio, chapter 4. *[Be prepared in class on Friday to discuss the question, “What is at the heart of philosophy, and how does it differ from other areas of study?”]*

Sept. 22, 24, 26 **Reasoning and Being Reasonable.**

- Wall, Part 1: “What Is an Argument?”
- Wall, “Glossary of Important Philosophical Terms.” [Read carefully the definitions of the terms on the list you will be **e-mailed** (and any others you would like). Note any problems or questions you have with the way Wall explains things – *for our discussion on Wednesday*. And promise yourself that you will consult this glossary as needed during the semester.]
- (a) Wall, Part 3, Introduction and Units 1-2: “What Can I Know?”
(b) Soccio, chapter 3. [Be prepared in class on Friday to discuss the question, “What counts as plagiarism, and how can I avoid falling into the temptation to cheat?”]

Sept. 29 – Oct. 3 **Morality: Its Nature and Source.**

- Wall, Part 6, Introduction and Unit 1: “What Is Right and What Is Good?”
- Carlton D. Fisher, “Because God Says So,” *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy* (1990)
- Soccio, chapter 7. [Be prepared in class on Friday to discuss the question, “What did I learn from this chapter about good academic writing?”]

Oct. 6, 8, 10 **Assumptions Influencing Our Moral Judgments.**

- (a) Wall, Part 6, Unit 3. (b) William Tolhurst, “Situational, Cultural, and Ethical Relativism,” *Conduct and Character: Readings in Moral Theory* (1990).
- Paul Taylor, “Moral Responsibility and Free Will,” *Problems of Ethics: An Introduction* (1975).
- Soccio, chapters 5-6. [Be prepared in class on Friday to discuss the question, “How can I be a better reader/learner – and what tips do I have to share with others?”]

Oct. 13, 15, 17 **Normative Moral Theories.**

- Wall, Part 6, Unit 2.
- Wall, Part 6, Unit 4.
- Wall, Part 6, Unit 5.

Oct. 20, 22 **Our Human Nature: Mind and/or Body?**

- (a) Wall, Part 4, Introduction and Unit 1: “What Is Real?” (b) Wall, Part 5, Introduction and Units 1-2: “What Kind of A Being Am I?”
- Wall, Part 5, Unit 3.

October 24 *MID-SEMESTER BREAK – No classes meet.*

- Oct. 27, 29, 31 **Mind and Body (continued).**
- Wall, Part 5, Unit 4.
 - Wall, Part 5, Unit 5.
 - Soccio, chapter 2 and Conclusion. [*Be prepared in class on Wednesday to discuss the question, "What has been different so far about college from what I had expected?"*]
- Nov. 3, 5, 7 **God and Evil.**
- Wall, Part 2, Introduction and Unit 1: "Is It Reasonable to Believe That God Exists?"
 - Wall, Part 2, Units 2-3 **and** pages 91-100 of Unit 4.
 - William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil," *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction* (2007) – read **just** pages 112-119.
- Nov. 10, 12, 14 **The Problem of Evil (continued).**
- Rowe, "The Problem of Evil" – complete this article, reading pages 119-131.
 - Marilyn McCord Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Suppl. Vol. (1989).
 - (No new reading assignment.)
- Nov. 17, 19, 21 **Evidences of God?**
- Stephen T. Davis, "What is a Theistic Proof?", *God, Reason and Theistic Proofs* (1997).
 - Wall, Part 2, Unit 4 and the remainder of Unit 5.
 - Richard Swinburne, "The Argument from Design," *Philosophy* (1968, as reprinted).
- Nov. 24, 26 **Evidences of God (continued).**
- Robin Collins, "A Scientific Argument for the Existence of God: The Fine-Tuning Design Argument" (1999).
 - (a) Richard Swinburne, "Miracles," *The Philosophical Quarterly* (1968, as reprinted) (b) Robert Larmer, "Miracles and Criteria," *Sophia* (1984). [*Yes, class meets on the day before Thanksgiving. You are as expected to be there as any other day – no more, no less.*]
- Nov. 27-28 **THANKSGIVING BREAK – University holiday.**

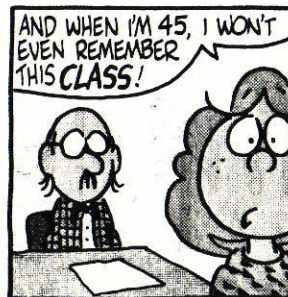
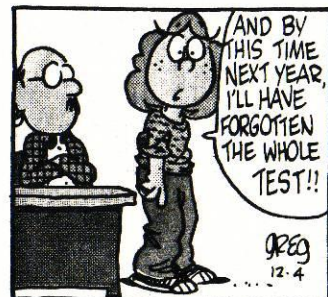
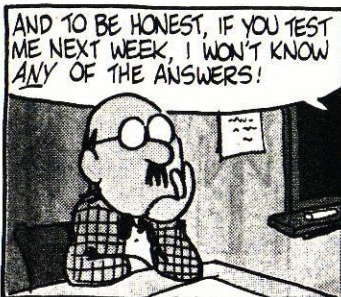
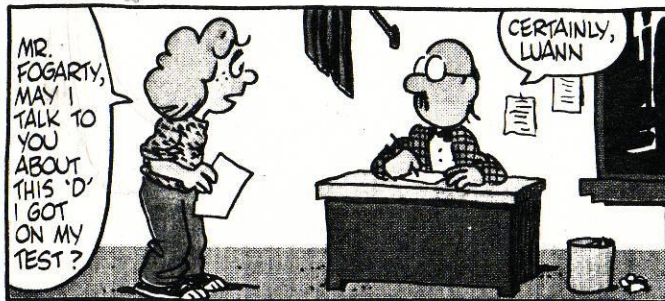
- Dec. 1, 3, 5 **Faith and Reason.**
- (a) Wall, pages 100-105, 113-116. (b) Read Wall's online Additional Reading on "Science and Religion" (the URL will be posted on Sakai).
 - Louis P. Pojman, "Can Religious Belief Be Rational?," *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology* (1998). [In addition, a short story will be read in class: George Mavrodes, "The Bible Buyer," *Reformed Journal* (1968).]
 - (No additional reading assignment; continue with the Pojman article.)
- Dec. 8, 10, 12 **Constructing a Worldview.**
- Wall, Part 8, Unit 1: "How Is A Worldview Constructed?"
 - Wall, Part 8, Unit 2: "Evaluating Worldviews."
 - John Kekes, "The Rationality of Metaphysics," *Metaphilosophy* (1973).
- Dec. 16 (Tues.) **FINAL EXAM due (electronically) by 6:00 p.m.** – *Class does not meet.*

Friendly Fine Print

- a. In case of inclement weather, you may call (253) 535-7100 to find out if classes are being held. Unfortunately, your instructor lives within walking distance!
- b. Cell phones, pagers, and preferably hats should be off during class, please . . . as should WiFi devices without checking with me first.
- c. You are expected to check your PLU e-mail regularly.
- d. Sept. 19 is the last day to drop a class, typically with tuition refund if you are part-time. If you withdraw between then and Nov. 26, a 'W' grade will apply; after Nov. 26, a letter grade will be assigned. The deadline for deciding to take the course Pass/Fail is Oct. 24.
- e. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the policy on academic integrity, available online. PLU's expectation – and mine – is that students will not cheat or plagiarize, and that they will not condone these behaviors or assist others who plagiarize. Academic misconduct not only jeopardizes the career of the individual student involved, but also undermines the scholastic achievements of all PLU students and attacks the mission of the university. Academic honesty is simply expected throughout this course, and violations will be dealt with severely.
- f. Civil conversation is central to the university's academic enterprise. The Student Code of Conduct says, "Faculty and university are committed to protecting the rights of community members to engage in dialogue and express ideas in an environment that is free from harassment, discrimination, and exploitation. . . . Students are therefore expected to treat every individual with respect and civility" (p. 12).
- g. If you have emergency medical information to share with me, or need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please speak with me right away. If you need

course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or for information about issues relating to disabilities, please visit the Disability Support Services office in Ramstad 106 (x7206).

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BY GREG EVANS