

**Great Philosophical Questions**  
IS 370

**Guidelines**  
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**College of Professional Studies**  
**University of San Francisco**  
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Great Philosophical Questions  
IS 370  
Course Description  
Undergraduate - 3 units

An introduction to the classic texts of philosophy, focused on major philosophical issues including the problem of knowledge, the existence of God, the mystery of evil, free choice vs. determinism, and the essence of human nature.

*University of San Francisco General Catalog, 2000-2002.*

**Assigned Text**

Gail M. Presbey, Karsten J. Struhl and Richard E. Olsen, *The Philosophical Quest: A Cross-Cultural Reader*, Second Edition (San Francisco: McGraw Hill, 2000) ISBN 0-07-289867-4

**INTRODUCTION**

These guidelines are for students and faculty to develop an appreciation for the fundamental questions of life. Questions of life are basically philosophical questions, common to human beings. These questions arise when human beings find themselves already in the world reflecting upon what is the meaning of it all.

This self-reflective activity is what constitutes philosophy. As we reflect on our experience of life and via of our death, we wonder about the meaning and value of life.

For Western and non-Western cultures the questions are universal yet each has emerged in unique ways. By overcoming suffering or just plain wonder itself, each culture addresses these questions: what is real?; what is true?; what is the meaning and value of it all?

These basic questions that every person seeks to answer, questions arising out of wonder or human suffering, when answered, provide the fundamental ideas and values that guide our development. Within the Jesuit tradition, our efforts are to improve the conditions of human existence. The fundamental

guiding themes for this academic setting will be: responding, reflection and dialogue.

David Robinson, S.J., Director of Educational Mission and Spirituality of Learning in the College of Professional Studies at the University of San Francisco, puts this to clarity, “Nothing like a little wonder, a little reflection, and a little dialogue to get some transformative ideas into circulation!”

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## OVERVIEW OF COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Dialectic Participation
- Articulation of Ideas
- Mini Paper Presentations
- Final Presentation
- Optional Paper

During the first session, the professor will set the guidelines for the course. This will include the approach to be taken in each class session. There will also be a discussion of mini papers and the final presentation. Guidelines are not rules. Identity and variation are inclusive aspects within guidelines. The professor will prepare and deliver the essential lectures and choose from among the suggested ideas for lectures or provide appropriate alternatives. Within these guidelines the professor's personality, passion and intellect will call all of this into place.

- Reading assignments are to be completed *prior* to each class session.
- Topics that are covered in the Social Ethics course are not included in these assignments. These Social Ethics topics are covered in the textbook in pages 250-290; 387-484.

## **DIALECTIC PARTICIPATION**

Discussion based on readings is essential to the success of the course. Everyone should come to class prepared to contribute thoughtfully and to listen and respond respectfully to the contributions of others. At times, individuals may be asked to act as discussion or dialogue leaders, to carry out specific functions in small groups or to engage in some other important way in class activities.

## **ARTICULATION OF IDEAS**

To bring about the articulation of ideas is a guiding intention of the course. This will be accomplished by utilizing the approach of responding, reflection and dialogue. To articulate a theme one can say, "This is what I see and this is what it means to me." Basically, a theme is that which stands out in the readings, in dialogue, in life itself. One identifies a theme and immediately amplifies it by saying what it means; this is then placed in the wider context in dialogue with others.

The articulation of ideas will be built upon the ground that relationships are reciprocal and not necessarily symmetrical. People see things differently. This displays the inexhaustible richness of each culture as well as each person. Dialectic participation recognizes that there is richness in diversity.

## **MINI PAPER PRESENTATIONS**

For each of the class meetings subsequent to the first, participants will select a theme or an idea from the text for that week to be presented in class. An important aspect of the educational experience is to learn to develop and to share one's own thoughts and ideas. In this class, participants will prepare verbal presentations of personally-selected themes or ideas found in the text. These mini paper presentations are to be typed, double spaced and one-page only. This will provide an opportunity to learn to share one's thoughts with others rather than to merely put them in writing to the professor. In addition, the valuable feedback and input received from colleagues is a significant contribution to learning.

For any class that is missed, the participant is to write out the particular theme or idea selected which is to be typed, double spaced, one-page only and turned in to the professor at the next class meeting. During that class

meeting, the participant should be prepared to verbally present the theme or idea to the class.

### **FINAL PRESENTATION**

The theme of the final presentation must be discussed with the professor before the end of the third class meeting. This 10-15 minute presentation, with a 3-5 page annotated outline, is to be presented extemporaneously and is not to be read.

### **OPTIONAL PAPER**

In place of the final presentation, the professor has the option to ask for a 7-10 page paper, typed and double spaced, due within ten days after the last day of the course. The theme of the paper must be discussed with the professor before the end of the third class meeting.

### **GRADING**

Attendance and Participation	25%
Mini Paper Presentations	50%
Final Presentation	25%



## ACTIVITIES FOR EACH CLASS SESSION

The Learning Community  
“Knowledge, skills and flexibility.”  
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University of San Francisco

### Session One

#### Readings

- First Class Assignment: Preface; Introduction; Appearance and Reality, pp. 3-66.

#### Lectures by Professor

##### Essential Lecture

- An overview of philosophy describing metaphysics, epistemology and axiology

##### Suggested Ideas for Lectures

- Elucidation of Plato’s allegory of the cave
- Samkara’s view of the rope and the snake
- Reality in Idealism and Realism
- Appearance and reality in the Upanisads\*
- Hermeneutics as going beyond the given
- Chuang Tzu on being and non-being

#### Class Discussion of Questions at the End of Readings

\*Indian scholarly spelling

The Catholic and Jesuit Identity  
“Tolerant dialogue among all participants.”  
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## Session Two

### Readings

- Knowledge and Science, pp. 69-124.

### Lectures by Professor

#### Essential Lecture

- Rational and non-Rational ways of knowing

#### Suggested Ideas for Lectures

- The Afrocentric idea
- The difference between understanding and knowledge
- Knowledge in Idealism and Realism
- Prajna knowledge and Vijnana knowledge
- Eurocentric vs. Afrocentric view of obtaining knowledge
- The difference between approach and method
- D. T. Suzuki's view of Zen

### Mini Paper Presentations by Students

### Class Discussion of Questions at the End of Readings

Pluralism

“Diversity provides a rich educational opportunity for individuals.”

*Building a Bold Tomorrow: The Vision*

University of San Francisco

### Session Three

#### Readings

- Philosophy of Religion, pp. 125-204.

#### Lectures by Professor

##### Essential Lecture

- Conceptions of God

##### Suggested Ideas for Lectures

- The soul from the view of epiphenomenalism; interactionism; substantialism
- Agnosticism and atheism
- Immortality
- Vedanta

#### Mini Paper Presentations by Students

#### Class Discussion of Questions at the End of Readings

The University Community  
“Mutual support among members of our community will inspire us to create  
a truly unique community of respect, trust and growth.”  
*Building a Bold Tomorrow: The Vision*  
University of San Francisco

## Session Four

### Readings

- Human Nature, pp. 205-249; Destiny, Determinism and Freedom, pp. 361-386.

### Lectures by Professor

#### Essential Lecture

- Thomas Aquinas on the Human Person: Nature, Being and Final End

#### Suggested Ideas for Lectures

- On the meaning of substance philosophy and process philosophy
- On the difference between rebirth and reincarnation
- Jean Jacques Rousseau's view of freedom
- Jean-Paul Sartre on freedom and action
- Differences between essence and existence
- Behaviorism: Determinism and Freedom

### Mini Paper Presentations by Students

### Class Discussion of Questions at the End of Readings

The Broader Community  
“Informative dialog”  
*Building a Bold Tomorrow: The Vision*  
University of San Francisco

## Session Five

### Readings

- Self, Mind, and Body, pp. 291-360.

### Lectures by Professor

#### Essential Lecture

- The Mind-body problem

#### Suggested Ideas for Lectures

- The self in Christianity; Judaism; and Islam as distinguished from the self in Buddhism
- The problem with Rene Descartes’ “I think therefore I am”
- Sri Aurobindo’s view of consciousness
- Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s view of body subjectivity
- Ethnophilosophy
- Bertrand Russell on mind and body
- Alfred North Whitehead on modes of thought

### Mini Paper Presentations by Students

### Class Discussion of Questions at the End of Readings

Human Resources  
“Excellence to which we aspire.”  
*Building a Bold Tomorrow: The Vision*  
University of San Francisco

## Session Six

### Readings

- The Meaning of Life and Death, pp. 485-554.

### Lectures by Professor

#### Essential Lecture

- How the Western and non-Western views make sense out of death

#### Suggested Ideas for Lectures

- Viktor Frankl’s view of self-transcendence
- The meaning and value of life
- Taoist view of life and death
- Confucian view of life and death
- Buddhist view of life and death
- American Indian Spirituality

### Mini Paper Presentations by Students

### Class Discussion of Questions at the End of Readings

## **CONTRIBUTION OF THE COURSE**

Each person will have an appreciation of the great philosophical ideas that guide our life and livelihood. This will be recognized through responding, reflection and dialogue. With dialectic participation, each person will have found that relationships are reciprocal but not necessarily symmetrical, meaning that each person has something to offer. In this situation each person will have had the opportunity to bring about the articulation of ideas in dialogue and to understand that each person contributes ideas, values and beliefs that can enrich us all.

This course will enhance:

- growth in awareness of values and issues of diversity as they affect personal and communal life;
- a deepening of understanding of one's own values and culture in relation to those of others.

## **GEC: PHILOSOPHY**

To foster an:

- ability to apply philosophical insights to personal, professional and social living;
- ability to identify philosophical themes in works of major philosophers;
- ability to understand the practical and speculative accounts of reality.

## **INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES MISSION**

- emphasize the interconnectedness of knowledge and bring value-centered, ethical and humanistic aspects of learning into dialogue with the metaphysical and epistemological foundations of personal and religious value systems.

### **CPS/USF MISSION**

- provide a rich educational opportunity for individuals to grow in understanding and respect for others;
- challenge students to develop the knowledge, skills and flexibility needed to gain the wisdom required to become leaders in service to others in a pluralistic community.

### **WRITER'S MISSION**

My specific mission is to teach the dynamic aspects of reflection to each and every person. Upon the primordial ground that relationships are reciprocal and not necessarily symmetrical, I will amplify the inexhaustible richness of each culture as well as each person.

James W. Kidd, Ph.D.



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