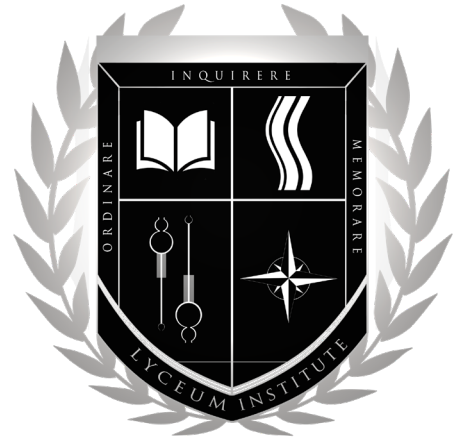


INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING

SEMINAR SYLLABUS



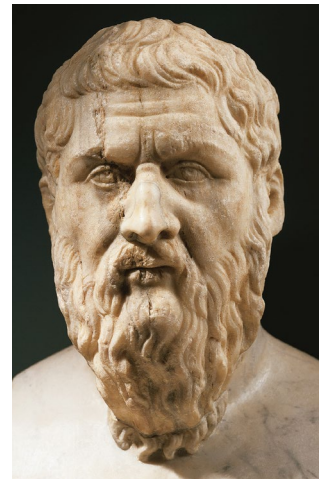
[2024 Q1]

DESCRIPTION

What *is* philosophy? Is it something we study—as subject, like biology or literature? Is it something each of us has, individually—as in, “my personal philosophy”? Is it a relic of history? An intellectual curiosity? A means to impress at cocktail parties and on social media? The “love of wisdom”? An engagement with the very mystery of being itself?

Or perhaps—as this seminar will attempt to demonstrate—philosophy is a way of thinking relatively easy to identify but very difficult to practice. Mere description of the practice does not suffice for understanding it; one must, rather, engage in the practice itself.

This engagement requires discipline of the mind and the consistent willingness to pursue philosophy not merely as a hobby, but as a **habit**. For those who have the will, this seminar will provide the means: namely through a schedule of carefully-selected readings and persistent dialogue—both in the seminar discussion sessions and through the Lyceum platform. The incipient practice of philosophy pursued in this seminar will not make you a philosopher; but it will engender in those who receive it thoughtfully the germ of a true **philosophical habit**, without which no one, regardless of how wide or deeply learned, can become a philosopher in fact.



METHOD

The seminar is 8 weeks long (with a break at the midway point), including one recorded lecture and one discussion session each week. Each discussion session is structured around a reading from three different Platonic dialogues (*Apology*, *Crito*, *Meno*) and my own *Introduction to Philosophical Principles*, as well as some additional secondary readings. **Digital editions of all texts are provided for free.** Participants are expected to have read the assigned reading and listened to the lecture prior to the session, so that they may engage in a semi-structured discussion directed and moderated by the instructor. Moreover, *continual discussion* will foster this participation and enhance our engagement throughout the week. Participants will be expected to take an active part in these discussions and will be challenged to do so directly. The **practice** of philosophy requires *praxis*—thoughtful action undertaken in pursuit of a good.

READING

The primary texts for this seminar are three dialogues from Plato (*Apology*, *Crito*, and *Meno*)—which may be found in many different editions of Plato’s collected works, such as the Hackett *Five Dialogues*, as well as online for free—as well as an *Introduction to Philosophical Principles* (PDF available for free, [hard copy from Amazon](#)), as well as a few short supplemental readings via PDF that will be provided via Teams.

LECTURE

Each week there will also be an audio lecture of approximately 40–60 minutes, posted to Teams at the beginning of the week. This lecture will be based upon the assigned reading, but will also stray into related topics, or may use the reading as a launching point for addressing some related issue (perhaps one more general, or perhaps one more specific). The primary (but not sole) purpose of these lectures is to help clarify some of the more difficult concepts and arguments contained within the reading, as well as to raise specific questions that should help structure and guide our discussion sessions.

One *should* be able, in most cases, to simply listen to the lecture (and perhaps consult the visual aids later). This should allow more flexibility: making the lectures suitable accompaniment for a commute, while doing chores, going for a run, etc.

DISCUSSION

The heart of the seminar is the discussion session (**Saturdays at 11:15am-12:15pm ET**): where all the thoughts emergent and encountered throughout the week—via the reading, lecture, and on-going conversations in the Teams channel—are brought into explicit conversation. This allows us to attempt a concerted effort at bringing resolution to our difficulties, and—failing such a resolution—to direct our inquiry further.

Each discussion session will begin with a brief synopsis of the week’s material and a focusing on whichever aspects of that material seem most pressing. Beyond the direction provided by the instructor, participants are encouraged to bring their own concerns explicitly into view and to engage with the instructor and one another in civil debate and collective inquiry.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Week I 01/07–01/13	Opening the Door to Inquiry Lecture: The Importance of Philosophy Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kemple, “Misconceptions”.• Wagner, “Our Philosophy of Learning and Teaching”.• Schall, “Introduction” to <i>The Universe We Think In</i>.
Week II 01/14–01/20	The Examined Life Lecture: Discovering the Philosophical Attitude Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plato, <i>The Apology</i>.• Pieper, selection from <i>Leisure: The Basis of Culture</i>.

<p>Week III 01/21–01/27</p>	<p>Controlling Desires</p> <p>Lecture: Power or Virtue</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plato, <i>Crito</i>. • Han, “The Logic of Power” in <i>What Is Power?</i>
<p>Week IV 01/28–02/03</p>	<p>Seeking Knowledge</p> <p>Lecture: Τι ἔσται – Discovering What Is</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plato, <i>Meno</i>. • Pieper, c.9 from <i>Happiness and Contemplation</i>.
<p>Week V 02/11–02/17</p>	<p>Thinking</p> <p>Lecture: Scientific Philosophy – Logic</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kempel, <i>Introduction to Philosophical Principles</i>, c.1: Logic
<p>Week VI 02/18–02/24</p>	<p>Thinking about the World</p> <p>Lecture: Scientific Philosophy – Nature</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kempel, <i>Introduction to Philosophical Principles</i>, c.2: Physics
<p>Week VII 02/25–03/02</p>	<p>Thinking about the Self</p> <p>Lecture: Scientific Philosophy – The Human Person</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kempel, <i>Introduction to Philosophical Principles</i>, c.3: Person
<p>Week VIII 03/03–03/09</p>	<p>Fulfillment or Servitude</p> <p>Lecture: The Useless Utility of Philosophy</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kempel, “Inconclusions”. • Spaemann, “The Paradoxes of Love” in <i>Love and the Dignity of Human Life</i>.