

Philosophical Perspectives on the Humanities: The Individual and the Community

Castle Rock Institute
Philosophy 341
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Course Description:

An individual is often seen as both separate from and a part of a community. The individual, as separate, is even sometimes depicted as at odds with her or his community. In the extreme case, the individual becomes alienated. Yet, it has often been claimed that to know or understand an individual (be it yourself or another), one must understand both the community from which that individual stems, and the community in which he or she resides. And, indeed, this seems to be true. More importantly, some philosophers have even claimed that an individual's very essence (one's very self) is both defined by and created by one's community. What constitutes one's community and so the individual self, on this view, shifts throughout an individual's life, and from one century to another, and from one culture to another.

Not only does the term "community" apply to groups of other people to which one belongs (including cultural groups), but applies to moral, artistic, linguistic, religious, and even animal communities as well (to name only a few). The communities to which an individual belongs often are seen by that individual as the only or ultimate reality.

This course will examine attitudes toward community, and toward the relationship between the individual and community, as they are expressed in a variety of literary and philosophical texts. We will be concerned with what each writer has to say about community and its effect on individual identity, including its effect on an individual's view of morals, religion, and on the meaning and nature of reality.

Course Requirements:

1. Class participation and attendance (10%)
2. Class presentation (10%)
3. 1st essay (20%)
4. Midterm (20%)
5. 2nd essay (20 %)
6. Final exam (20%)

Required Readings:

Andrea Barret, "Servants of the Map"
Albert Camus, *The Stranger*
W. T. Jones, *Approaches to Ethics* (selections)
Doris Lessing, "The Old Chief Mshlanga"
John Stuart Mill and Harriet Mill, *Essays on Sex Equality* (selections)
Martha C. Nussbaum and Cass R. Sunstein editors, *Clones and Clones* (selections)
Plato, *The Republic* (selections)
James T. Sterba, *Morality in Practice* (selections)
Naomi Woolf, *The Beauty Myth* (selections)

Course Outline:

February 2	Introduction to Castle Rock
February 9	Plato, selections from <i>The Republic</i> ; selections from Machiavelli
February 16	Selections from Kant and John Stuart Mill
February 23	Selections from Marx and Singer

First Essay due February 23

March 1	Barret, "Servants of the Map"; Lessing, "The Old Chief Mshlanga"
March 8	Selections from John Stuart Mill and Harriet Mill, <i>Essays on Sex Equality</i> (selections); Naomi Woolf, <i>The Beauty Myth</i> (selections)
March 15	Selections from Peter Singer on Animal Rights

Midterm Exam March 15

March 22	No Class
March 29	Albert Camus, <i>The Stranger</i>
April 5	Selections from Nietzsche

Second Essay due April 5

April 13	Handout on Ageism
April 19	No Class
April 26	Selections from <i>Clones and Clones</i>
May 3	Final Exam
May 10	Final Dinner

Goals:

My approach to teaching is interdisciplinary in nature.

In the preface to his *Cyclopaedia* (1728), Ephraim Chambers described the organization of human knowledge as follows:

The distribution of the land of science, . . . is wholly arbitrary; and might be altered, perhaps not without advantage. Had not Alexander, Caesar, and Gengiskan lived, the division of the terraqueous globe had, doubtless been very different from what we now find it; and the case would have been the same with the world of learning, had no such person been born as Aristotle.

I agree with Chambers' view that the boundaries separating academic disciplines are the result of historical contingency, as I think are the boundaries between high and low culture, and even that between academic studies and the non-academic. My teaching and research, therefore, has tended to ignore or blur academic boundaries.

The goal of my teaching is to foster self-examination, and to enable you to competently scrutinize your own philosophical assumptions in all areas of thought and action. In this I am in the Socratic tradition. This is also in agreement with Vacal Havel's claim in *Living in Truth* that,

The main route by which society is inwardly enlarged, enriched and cultivated is that of coming to know itself in every greater depth, range and subtlety.

In order to accomplish this task, I will try to get you not only to think critically, but to try out perspectives beyond your habitual ones. I will suggest that in reading you should carry out an imaginative experiment in which you attempt to understand what it would be like to actually be the person whose work you are reading. How would it change how you live, how would it change how you look at the world?

This syllabus is subject to change.

Please note that assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day due.

Late assignments will have a one grade penalty.