

Program Review Update

Outcomes Assessment of Written
Papers in a Philosophy Course

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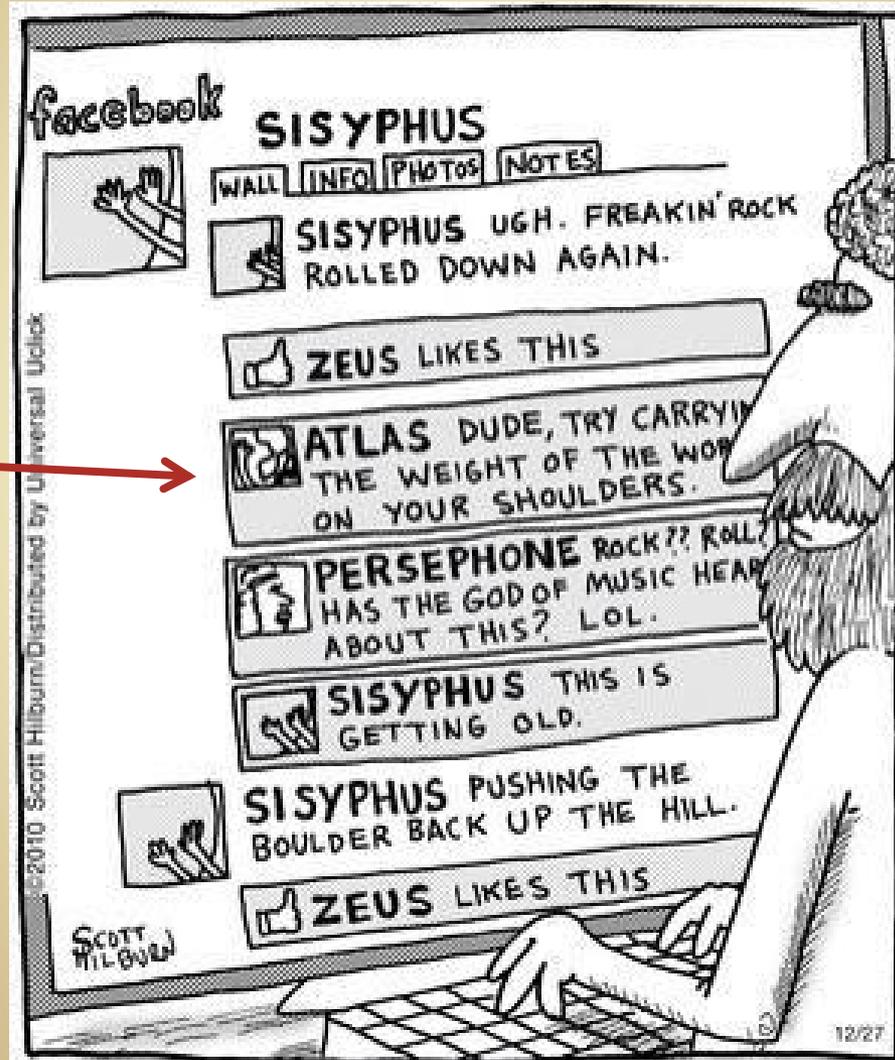
Reviewing a program and projecting toward the future seems like an impossible task

Me



You!

Philosophy Linking Past with Present



Note, Atlas carried the celestial sphere, not the earth!

Mission Driven

- Mistaken to seek only utilitarian value of philosophy, but...
- Prepares students to develop key skills
- Lead reflective lives
- Critical thinking
- Historical development of human thought
- Cultural awareness
- Analysis of philosophical texts
- Application to contemporary issues
- Transferable to baccalaureate level

Two years after publishing his *Republic*, Plato was ready to launch the next phase...



Objectives of LA:Phil Option- 1

- Effective written and oral communication skills

1 Effective written and oral communication skills	Produce clear and well organized writing that responds appropriately to an assignment using standard American English.	Midterm and final papers in all philosophy courses, including World Religions. Journal entries and discussion boards
	Produce clear and well organized oral reports that respond appropriately to an assignment using standard American English.	Periodic organized debates in PHI 110 (Ethics)
	Employ basic philosophical vocabulary.	Midterm and final papers in all philosophy courses, including World Religions.

Objectives of LA:Phil Option- 2

- Critical thinking skills

2 Critical thinking skills	Effectively research information relevant to a topic of inquiry.	Final term papers
	Evaluate and analyze the evidence and data relevant to a topic of inquiry.	All readings in philosophical courses demand evaluation and analysis of evidence and data
	Develop a hypothesis or thesis and test or support it by applying logical, scientific, or quantitative reasoning.	Midterm and final paper topics in all philosophy courses. Development of debate and discussion positions

Objectives of LA:Phil Option- 6

- Creative thinking

6 Creative thinking and behavior as well as knowledge concerning the creative process	Demonstrate creativity (thinking and acting in new, different, and imaginative ways).	Students display their creativity in their development of a personal philosophy of life that builds upon their study. It is articulated in journal submissions, discussion board postings, and term papers
	Analyze the creative process and works of various thinkers or artists.	Assessed through term papers and final cumulative examination
	Analyse creative works and narratives as a means to communicating important philosophical ideas	In ethics courses and Philosophy of Film students will display through class discussion and written submissions (journal submission, discussion boards, term papers and final exams) an understanding of the ability of visual images, narratives and stories to communicate an important issues without having adopting a particular position on the issue.

Objectives of LA:Phil Option- 7

- Knowledge and skills related to philosophy

7 Knowledge and skills related to Philosophy	Compare and contrast major areas of philosophy, such as philosophy of human nature, ethics, social and political philosophy, metaphysics, epistemology, and logic.	In historical courses students exhibit relationship between conceptions of human nature and ethical thinking, and the implications for social and political philosophy through term papers and final exam primarily. In ethics courses students show relationship to other aspects of philosophical thinking through term paper.
	Analyze the positions of traditionally important philosophers, from Plato onwards, and explain why they are deemed worthy of attention today. Students will learn that some texts have endured through time, speaking to new generations with a new voice.	Several courses use contemporary figures as a means to consider the relevance of historical figures. For example, Nietzsche critiquing Socrates in the Apology or the Crito, or reflecting on The Bacchae, Cornel West's treatment of figures like Dewey or Emerson.

Objectives of LA:Phil Option- 7cont'd

- Knowledge and skills related to philosophy

Knowledge and skills related to Philosophy	Examine significant philosophical questions--such as "what is reality?" "how should I live?" or "what can I know?"--and developments in their treatment throughout the history of philosophy.	Through thorough discussion and writing about Socrates' dictum "The unexamined life is not worth living" students are invited to reflect on these serious philosophical topics and to develop their own position in reaction to their reading of original sources and their treatment throughout history. Learning is assessed through term papers, journal submissions, discussion boards, and class discussion.
	Assess the strengths and weaknesses of positions and methods--such as idealism or realism, egoism or altruism--that arose in response to principal philosophical questions.	Students are challenged to find strengths and weaknesses in significant approaches to philosophical questions in the canon. Students build upon their criticisms and construct their own philosophical positions. Assessed through term papers, journal submissions, discussion boards, and final examination.

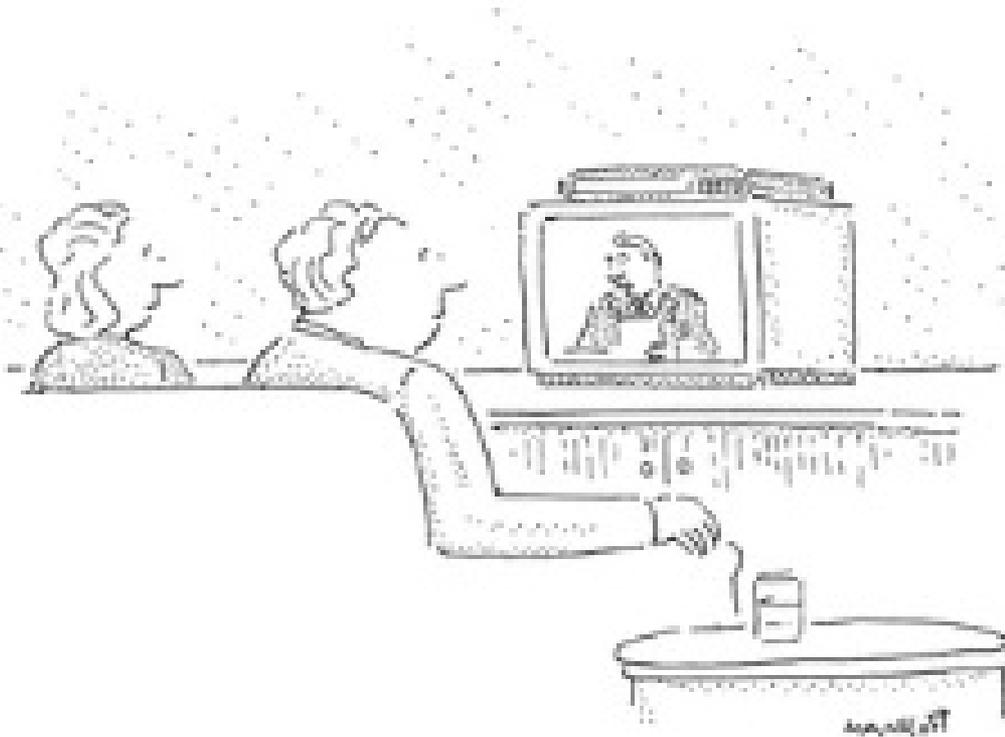
Perennial relevance of Philosophy



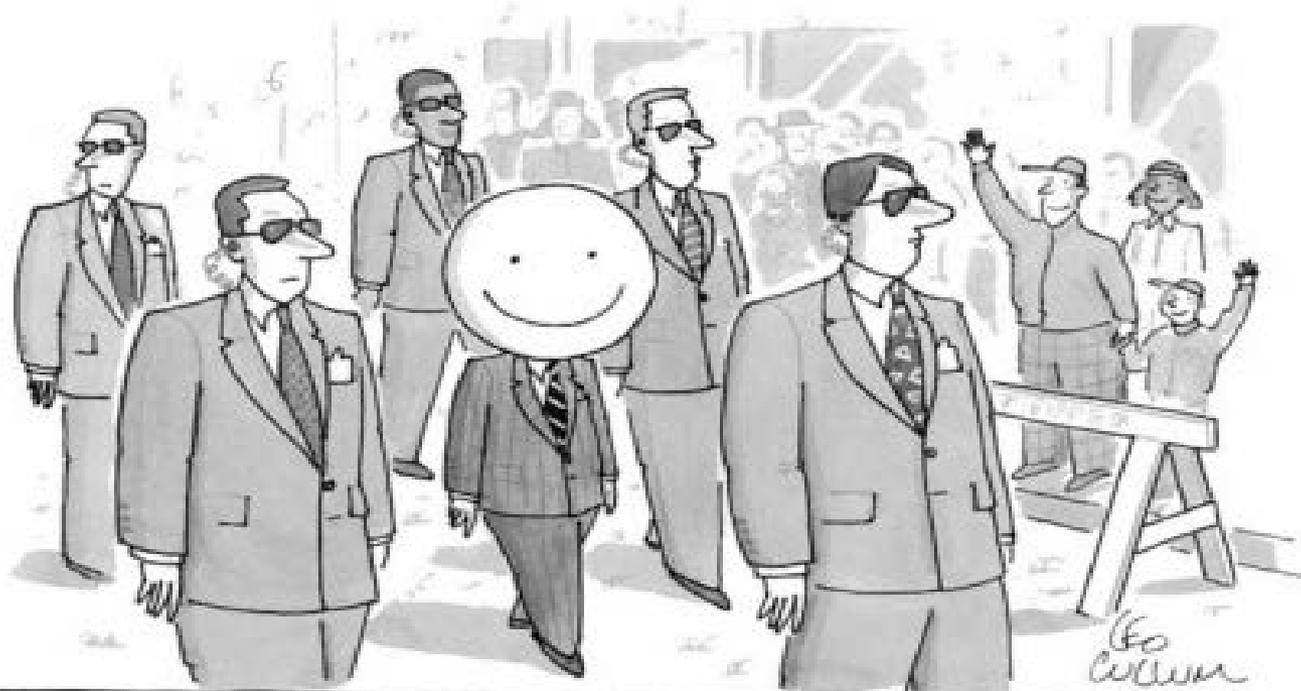
“Our real first line of defense, wouldn’t you agree, is our capacity to reason.”

- Philosophy invites students to become familiar with their tradition, but also to adopt a critical stance toward their own presuppositions.
- This provides a premium over mere technical or vocational education.
- For instance, the Japanese parliament’s report on the nuclear meltdown at Fukushima saw a central problem in “reflexive obedience, ... [a] reluctance to question authority, [a] a devotion to “sticking with the program.”
- These are skills provided by the liberal arts.

Philosophy helps to guard against the current political climate of image trumping truth



"And a final note: today, at 3:28 P.M. Beltway time, perception officially became reality."

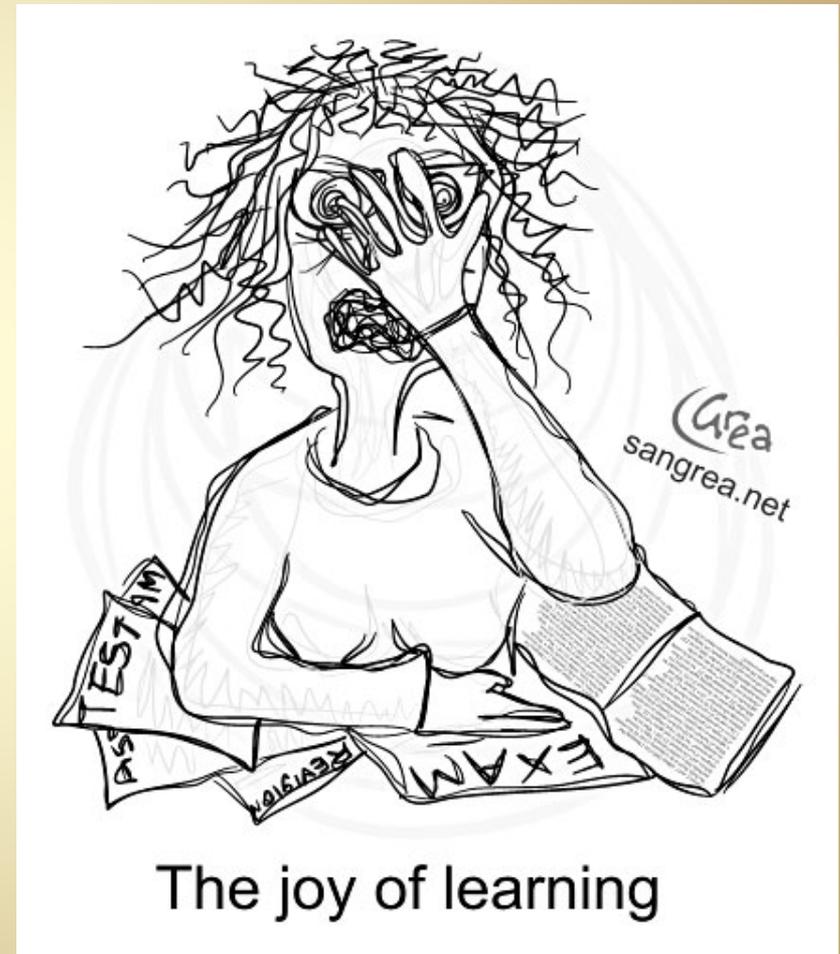


THE RETURN OF GUARDED OPTIMISM

The high standard of many of the philosophy papers in the past year provides good grounds for hope for the program and for student success

“The Paper” as primary form of expression and assessment

- 5-7 pages in length (1500-2000 words)
- Drafts strongly encouraged
- Focuses on analysis and critical thinking
- Develop thesis
- Exhibit familiarity with text and application to real life



Challenges of written Assignment

- Occasionally a student misunderstands the given prompt. This can be avoided if student submits a draft in advance of the due date
- Students on rare occasions either a) leave assignment to last minute, or b) don't understand the central philosophy, and may rely “excessively” on an unattributed source
- Written philosophy papers do not lend themselves to a strict rubric which some students may have become dependent on for other subjects

Overall Quality of Papers

- Sometimes students lacked clear writing skills, but showed that they understood the central concepts
- Students often wrote as if an explanation of the central thinker's position were not necessary
- Alternatively, some students provided only a summary of a philosopher's position without providing the necessary critical analysis
- Students sometimes lacked the language to express the complex ideas being communicated.
- Many students showed a good command of the philosophical concepts and terminology.

MadMen?

Contemporary society has an unfortunate tendency to look to marketers and the media for “truth” rather than looking for it through critical analysis



B. Smaller

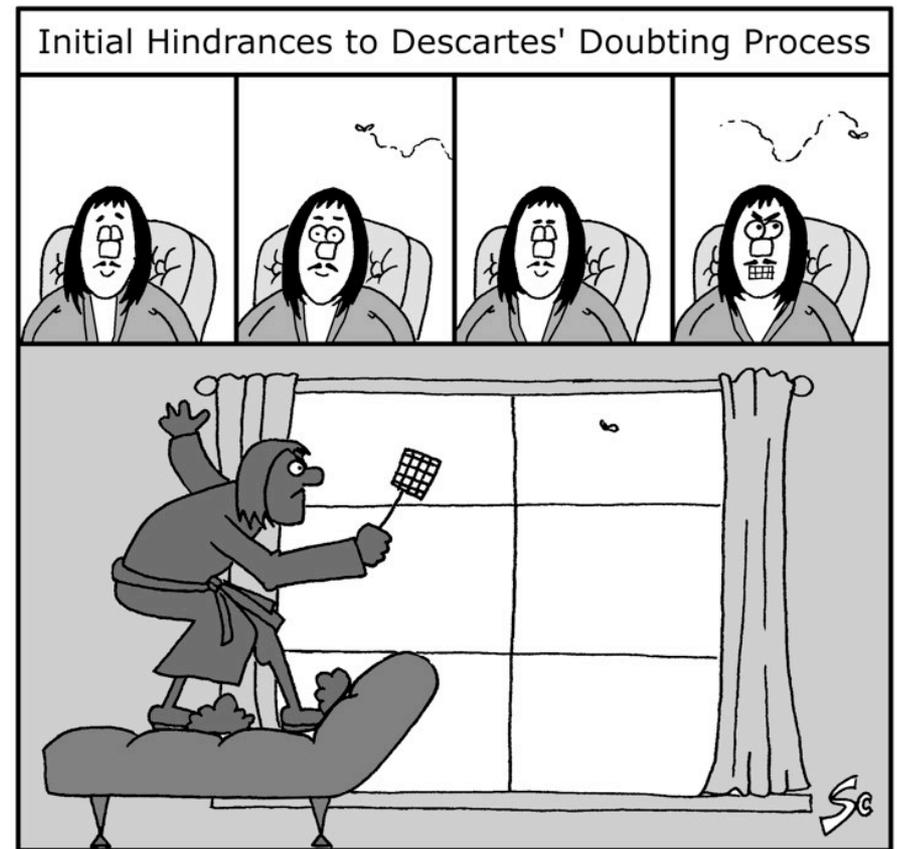
"How can we know who we are when the best marketing consultants of our time don't know."

Sample of papers

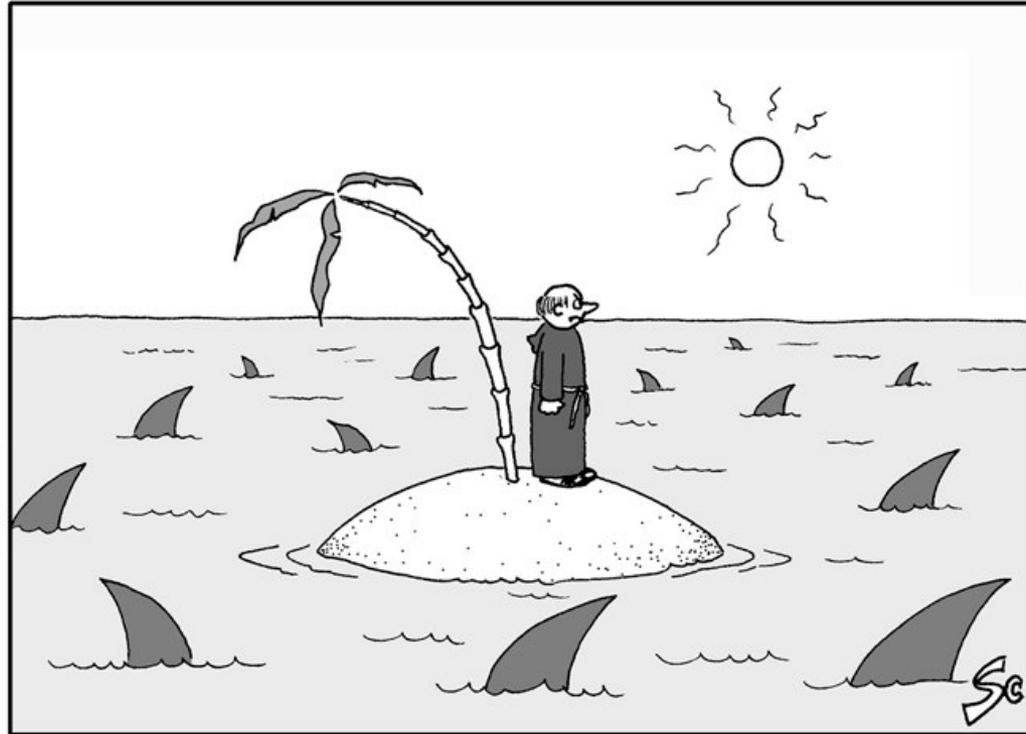
- Student A – Descartes' ontological argument. Grade - A
 - Sophisticated paper. Connects with Immanuel Kant's modal logic and to contemporary philosophers including Alvin Plantinga and Jonathan Vogel's Cartesian skepticism and his Inference to the Best Explanation
- Student B – Cartesian dualism. Grade - B
 - Reflects on Descartes' dictum, "You can take my body, but you can't take my mind." Selected some prescient quotes from Descartes and compared his position to modern studies of the brain. Exhibited great interdisciplinary connections. Assessed Descartes' idea of whether mind is merely a substitute for the soul. This paper could have delved more deeply into the problems of mind/body interaction.

- Student C – Descartes' Meditations. Grade – B+

- Examined Descartes' arguments for God's existence. This paper was both too ambitious and too brief. In the student's own assessment there was a good defense of statements such as "We can never truly know God."



Imagining a perfect island is not so easy



Gaunilo began to suspect his travel agent's tendency to exaggerate.

- Student D – Importance of God. Grade - B+
 - Provided a good explanation of why God is necessary for Descartes' project. Could have explained in more depth *how* Descartes' argues for God's existence and shown a grasp of text, e.g. one needs an effect which is not superior to the cause.



- Student E – Locke’s Epistemology. Grade - A
 - Provided a detailed account of the basic elements of Locke’s theory of knowledge. Incorporated secondary source information from Samuel Enoch Stumpf, Bruce Hauptli, and Locke. Paper offers an analysis about why some types of abstract knowledge cannot be explained by factual knowledge through the senses, e.g. love, artistic appreciation, etc.
- Student F – Kant’s synthesis of Rationalism and Empiricism. Grade – A-
 - Uses some great quotes. A clear, solid explanation. In analysis section paper could have made more clear the ramifications of Kant’s stance, e.g. paper notes a distinct “mind-self” separate from the brain, but this could be defended further.

Grades can be nuisance, but also a great motivator!



"Is this going to be on the midterm?"

Inspiration



While it is important to inspire our students, it is necessary that this be based in real skills and critical thinking.

Philosophy continues to be a source of eternal truths



"Buy low, sell high. Aren't there any other eternal truths?"