

# PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY OF LIFE

Professor: Antoine Traisnel

Teaching Assistant: Bantu

COMPLIT 376/ENGLISH 317 – Tu. 6.30PM – 8.30PM

Macomb Correctional Facility

## SYNOPSIS

This course is being offered through the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program®, a national educational program that brings together incarcerated (“inside”) students and university (“outside”) students for dialogic, bi-directional learning opportunities. This Inside-Out course will consider some of the most difficult and abiding questions driving philosophers: What makes a life worth living? How do I know that something is real? Is violence ever justified? What does it mean to be free? We will read, discuss, and reflect on works from thinkers such as Plato, Karl Marx, W.E.B. DuBois, Friedrich Nietzsche, Frantz Fanon, Audre Lorde, and Angela Davis, among others. No prior knowledge of philosophy is required, just the desire to think together and engage big ideas.

## COURSE EXPECTATIONS

The ambition of this seminar is to foster an atmosphere favorable to respectful dialogue and the careful analysis of philosophical texts. At the end of this course, you will have a better knowledge of the Western philosophical canon and will have developed skills for articulating complex ideas with rigor and clarity, both orally and in writing. More importantly you will have had an opportunity to expand your thinking by exchanging ideas with classmates across prison walls.

## EVALUATION

Over the course of the semester, you will be asked to produce four critical responses to the works studied in class. These will take the form of “reflection papers,” and should be informed by our seminar discussions. The course will be discussion-based, with weekly reading assignments ranging from 20 to 100 pages, depending on the difficulty of the reading.

Course work and evaluation break down as follows:

- Four two-page reflection papers (40%)
- Final group project (40%)
- Regular attendance and active engagement with course materials and concepts (20%)

## SCHEDULE

### Week 1. Introduction

#### Sept. 4.

- For Outside Students: Introduction
- What is Inside-Out?
- Program rules and mission.

### Week 2. Orientation

#### Sept. 11.

- For Outside Students: Orientation at Macomb at 6pm.
  
- For Inside Students: Introduction
- What is Inside-Out?
- Program rules and mission.

### Week 3. First Meeting – Identity

#### Sept. 18.

- Wagon Wheel.
- Identity and Privilege: Peggy McIntosh's invisible knapsack.
- The First Philosophical Imperative: *Know Thyself*

### Week 4. Debriefing Session

#### Sept. 25.

- Separate Classes
- Reading Assignment: Inside-Out's "Socratic Method."
- *First Reflection Paper Due*

### Week 5. What is Philosophy (Good For)?

#### Oct. 2.

- Plato, "The Allegory of the Cave"

### Week 6. Truth

#### Oct. 9.

- Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense"
- *Second Reflection Paper Due*

### Week 7. No Class

#### Oct. 16.

- NO CLASS (Fall Study Break)

### **Week 8. Justice**

**Oct. 23.**

- Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

### **Week 9. Freedom**

**Oct. 30.**

- Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*
- *Third Reflection Paper Due*

### **Week 10. Race**

**Nov. 6.**

- Frantz Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness"
- WEB du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" (from *The Souls of Black Folk*)

### **Week 11. Gender**

**Nov. 13.**

- Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference."
- Jamaica Kincaid, "Girl"

### **Week 12. Community**

**Nov. 20.**

- Reading TBD

### **Week 13. Group Projects**

**Nov. 27.**

- Group Projects I
- *Fourth Reflection Paper Due*

### **Week 14. Group Projects**

**Dec. 4.**

- Group Projects II

### **Week 15. Conclusion**

**Dec. 11.**

- Closing Ceremony