Introduction.

This course is primarily an introduction to philosophy, but in addition to reading standard central and representative texts from the history of philosophy, it will also focus on using art as a tool for thinking philosophically and using philosophy as way of understanding art. There will be three segments of this class: The City, The Mind, and The Situation. These three segments of the class will offer three different ways of understanding the fundamental nature and meaning of human life, and also the place of artistic expression within the personal, cultural and political dimensions of that life. Though these perspectives are all prominent, viable contenders in our ongoing attempts to understand ourselves, and therefore are not the property of any particular person or era, these perspectives nonetheless correspond to the central orientations of three of the most definitive periods in the history of philosophy: Ancient (“The City”), Early Modern, (“The Mind”) and Contemporary (“The Situation”). Studying these perspectives will introduce you to the basic changes of perspective on human reality that have shaped the discipline of philosophy (and culture in general). We will also use artworks—works of painting, architecture and music and also literature and poetry—to help us to see into the perspective under consideration, and we will also consider how art is understood, is valued, and functions differently within each perspective.

In the first segment of the class—The City—we will take the human political and social context as the primary arena for determining our human experience. We will use Plato’s Republic to investigate this perspective, and we will consider what art looks like from the perspective of the city. In the second segment—The Mind—we will consider the human world as defined primarily by the power and capacities of the human mind. In other words, the mind will be taken as that which defines humanity. We will consider how the human looks from this perspective, and what art looks like when the mind is taken as what defines the human experience. Here, our primary texts will be drawn from the writings of Immanuel Kant. As we did in the first segment, we will use works of art to help us to see from within the perspective of the mind. In the final segment of the class—The Situation—we will draw on the concept of the ecosystem to understand the human experience. In an ecosystem, living beings do not exist as isolated individuals; instead, they are contextualized and defined by the network of involvements that make up their situation. We will draw on this concept to understand the human situation as one that necessarily involves a network of involvements. Here our basic text will be Russon’s Human Experience. Once again, we will use artworks to help us see what this experience is like. We will also consider what art looks like when considered from the perspective of a network of involvements—that is, from within the human situation.
Tentative Schedule of Readings. May be modified as necessary.
Do the reading in advance of the class meeting, and come prepared to discuss them.

Date: Reading:
Aug. 24 Introduction, with slides: Ways of Seeing
31 Sophocles, Antigone
Sept. 7 Plato, Apology
14 Film--"The Godfather"
 nb: 1st take-home test due Monday September 12
21 Republic I
28 Republic II
Oct. 5 Republic V
12 Republic VI, VII, excerpts
 nb: 2nd take-home test due Monday October 10
19 Kant, Trans. Aesthetic
26 Analytic of Beautiful
Nov. 2 Russon Human Experience Chapters 1, 2, 3
9 Chapter 4
16 Chapter 5
23 no class Wednesday: Thanksgiving Break
 nb: 6-page paper due Monday November 21
30 Russon, Human Experience Chapters (5) and 6, and
Potok, My Name is Asher Lev
Dec. 7 My Name is Asher Lev

Format for Classroom Practice.

We will meet as a class only once per week. This has the advantage of allowing us the
time to develop a substantial, collective engagement with the material we are studying.
Our class meetings will involve a great deal of discussion. We will discuss the texts we
are studying, we will discuss philosophical issues raised by those texts, and we will
discuss works of art that we will look at (or listen to) in class. Collective discussion
allows us all the benefit of using the ideas and insights of others to develop our own
perspectives. Through discussion, we will develop ideas on our own, which we will then
use to enhance our understanding of the relevance and the viability of the ideas that the
great philosophers are presenting to us.

One of the major ongoing components of our classroom work will be the discussion of
works of art. I expect that you will find that the discussion we will have over the course
of the semester will change your relationship to art. The study of art is itself a disciplined
and complex work in its own right. This course is not a substitute for such a study, but it
will contribute to it. Our approach to artworks will largely be exploratory--we will be
seeing what we as a group can learn about the works just through our own collective
efforts at discussing them, and further, what we can learn about the philosophical works
being studied through these collective reflections on art.
The most important component of our classroom work, though, will be the discussion of
the philosophical works we are studying. In order to discuss these works well, you need
to know what these works say, and to have thought about their significance in advance.
This means that it is imperative that we all come to class well-prepared. Even though we
are only meeting one night per week, then, you need yourself to be working throughout
the week, studying the assigned material. To help you in this, I will be giving you
questions to work on while you are doing the week's reading. Some of these questions
will be reading questions—straightforward questions that you need to be answering in
order to understand the basic content of the text—and some will be reaction questions—
questions that require you to formulate your own evaluation of the ideas being presented.
At the beginning of the semester, I will be giving you these questions each week.
Because these questions are designed to help you to learn how to prepare on your own,
however, I will be cutting back on this as we move through the semester, with the
expectation that you will be developing better abilities to prepare independently.

On Studying Philosophy:

If this is your first philosophy class, there are some things you need to know about what
is required of you in such classes. Philosophy is not primarily about getting information;
it is about learning how to think for yourself. (1) This means, then, that you need to
spend time by yourself devoting yourself to thinking about the topics we’re studying. No
doubt this is true to some extent in any class, but it is specially true in philosophy class.
(2) Philosophy is also a disciplined study though, and in philosophy we read the works of
other great thinkers who can be helpful to us in our efforts to become better thinkers. So,
even though philosophy is not primarily concerned with the simple passing on of factual
information, it is still important that you be accurate in thorough in learning what the
philosophers actually say—don’t ignore the technicalities and the details. In terms of
your ongoing practice of doing your course work, here is what you need to expect.

You need to have a consistent and high level of engagement with the texts. These are the
primary educational tools in the class, more important than the lectures. You need to
read the assigned texts carefully. Careful reading means something more than just
breezing through the pages. You need to think about what they are about, and you need
to find in yourself the reasons why the study of these issues can be important. When you
yourself are in touch with the importance of the questions under study, you are in a
position to appreciate the significance of what is said in the text. Reading well requires a
process of question and answer, where you actively approach the reading of the text with
questions of your own, to which the text can then offer its answers.

In class, you need to participate in cooperative, collective discussion of the materials. To
participate well you need to be prepared, which means you need to have done the
reading. You also need to put conscious effort into being respectful and constructive
when responding to the contributions made by others in the class. A significant part of
your philosophy education will be learning how to better participate in collective,
thoughtful discussion.
You will also need to learn better and stronger writing skills. You will need to learn to be accurate, precise, clear and organized in your presentation of ideas. Reading the works of philosophers who themselves write well will be helpful, and a regular ongoing practice of writing on your own will help you to make progress here.

Overall, you need to recognize that your philosophical education will require you to change and to grow. A single class may or may not make a great difference in your life, but a sustained study of philosophy is only successful if it leads to a transformation in the way you think about yourself and the world. And who knows—one single class may make such a difference!

Studying philosophy is difficult, and you will need to learn new skills. I can provide you with supplementary reading materials to help you learn how to write philosophy papers. I am also happy to talk with you one-on-one about your studies. I encourage you to come in to talk with me in order to get a better sense of how you are doing and what you should be working on.

Assignments:

The assignments in this course are designed to facilitate your development of some of the abilities mentioned above. The primary assignment for the course will be a series of short essays (each 1 single-spaced page in length) due roughly every second week. There will also be a final examination and there will be a participation grade. Here is how the marks break down:

**Participation**

Your participation grade will be a qualitative assessment of your participation in class. Your participation is assessed in three areas: your attendance and preparation, your active and constructive participation in class meetings, and your completion of assignments (including the reading questions and reaction papers). Adequately fulfilling the requirements would mean, basically, attending all classes, doing all readings, and completing all assignments. Beyond “adequate,” however, your participation can be “good,” or even “excellent.” These higher levels of accomplishment will be achieved through demonstrating real engagement with the course materials, through actively and constructively contributing to the content and the environment of classroom discussion, and so on. You should expect that adequate participation will earn you a “C” for your participation grade, good participation will earn you a “B,” and excellent participation, an “A.” Of course, if your performance is less than adequate, you should expect a grade lower than “C.”

**Weekly reading questions and reaction papers.** Mandatory to pass the class.

Most weeks, I will give you questions pertaining to the materials we are studying. Reading questions will be questions for you to write answers to as you are reading through the assigned material. Their purpose is to help you focus on important
aspects of your reading. They are to be handed in each **Monday** by 5 p.m. to my office (except on those Mondays on which a take-home test or paper is due, or in a week where questions are not assigned). **Late assignments will not be accepted.** Reaction papers will be written in response to questions that ask you to give your own assessment of or opinion about the material we are studying. Their purpose is to help you develop your own critical powers, and to help you to prepare for class participation. They are to be handed in each **Wednesday** at the beginning of class. **Again, late papers will not be accepted.**

Your answers will not be assigned a specific grade, but I will be checking to make sure that you are completing the work, and I may periodically write comments on your work. Nonetheless, your answers must demonstrate a basic level of competence and engagement to count as successful completion of the assignment. **Completion of these assignments is mandatory for receiving a passing grade: failure to complete more than two of the assignments will result in failing the class.**

**2 take-home tests, due September 12 and October 10**
2 @ 20% = 40%
Test 1 will have questions (short answer and/or essay) on *Antigone* and *Apology.*
Test 2 will have questions (short answer and/or essay) on *Republic* Books I, II and V.

**1 6-pp Critical Essay**
25%
This will be a paper that allows you to choose from a number of topics (major themes from the course) and from the different major figures we've studied (Plato, Kant, Russon).

**Final Examination**
25%
This will be a comprehensive test, (i.e., it will deal with all the material we have studied in the class) and will have both short answer and essay questions.

**Course Texts.**

West and West (eds), *Four Texts on Socrates*
Kant, *Selections*, Beck (ed)
Russon, *Human Experience*
Potok, *My Name is Asher Lev*