Description of the Course

From the ACC catalogue: “Students will be introduced to various significant philosophical issues and thinkers and to the practice of philosophical analysis.”

Professor Dechene’s sections of Introduction to Philosophy will focus on these questions and issues:

- What is real? How does a person discover what is real? Why is knowing the truth important?
- Is reality one thing or many separate things? What difference does it make in a person’s life?
- Once you realize what is true and real, how can you live realistically?
- How some of the major philosophers have handled these issues throughout history.
- Why is so much of the history of Western philosophy just so much contradictory speculation rather than a unified tradition of wisdom that transforms lives and sets people free?

The first half of the course will emphasize wisdom teachings, nondual philosophies that aim at healing the soul, that emphasize stillness as the ultimate way of knowing, and that may or may not have used logic and rational argument. Examples: the philosophies of Parmenides, Zeno, and Melissus (the Eliatics); Empedocles; Daoism; Hindu Advaita Vedanta; the Mahayana Buddhist philosophy of Nagarjuna; some biblical teachings; Chandogya Upanishad 6; and the American New Thought philosophy. Later we will briefly discuss A Course in Miracles, a contemporary (1975) wisdom philosophy that makes an important addition to the Eliatic philosophy and those other wisdom teachings.

The point of studying Chinese and Indian philosophies in a course that emphasizes Greek/Western philosophy is to show that the same ideas were being developed in the East that were being developed in the West, and to give students the chance to master these ideas by viewing them from different cultural perspectives.

In the second half of the course we will focus on the speculative and analytical philosophies, and then on Existentialism. Parmenides’ philosophy of the two ways will serve as our standard for judging the merits of these philosophies.

We will use Donald Palmer’s Looking at Philosophy (5th edition) as our textbook, and we will, for the most part, read through parts of that book together in class and discuss the philosophers and issues it brings up. Using the textbook this way is intended to give students an anchor they can rely on for confidence as they prepare for tests. Students are expected to read and reread
and study textbook chapters and other required readings, as well as their lecture notes, carefully outside of class. All required readings that are not in the textbook are on the course website and are to be printed out by the student and brought to class as needed.

It is highly recommended that all students read Professor Dechene’s *How to Study and Succeed*, and check that they are following its recommendations.