

PHILOSOPHY 100: PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY (HONORS) (SPRING 2014)

Armstrong Hall 306; MWF 10:30 – 11:20 AM

Instructor: Geoff Georgi (gbgeorgi@mix.wvu.edu)

Office Hours: T 2:30 – 4:00 PM, W 3:30–5:00 PM, and by appointment (Stansbury 225)

Course Description

Does God exist? Do humans have free will? Can we ever know anything? What is the best way to live one's life? What is mind? These are some of the classic philosophical questions that we will tackle in this course. In addressing these topics, we will read important writings by both contemporary and historical figures in philosophy, and you will explore your own beliefs in class discussion and written assignments.

Yet scientists, psychologists, and theologians also work on many of the questions that we will encounter in this class. How is philosophy different? What really distinguishes philosophy from other disciplines is not the questions philosophers ask, but the methods that they use in answering them. Philosophy proceeds by analysis, intuition, and rational argument, and to learn how to apply these correctly and insightfully is to acquire skills that will help you in whatever career or endeavor you go on to pursue.

Course Objectives

By the end of the semester you will be able to:

- identify, explain, and apply some of the basic concepts in our understanding of these fundamental philosophical questions,
- use basic tools of logic to critically analyze historically and currently significant views about these concepts,
- evaluate some of the most important arguments for and against these views, and
- demonstrate critical and independent thinking, in both class discussion and written assignments, about the classic questions above.

Evaluation and Grading

In order to help you achieve these goals, we will base your final grade on the following factors:

- (15%) seven short assignments that test your comprehension or critical judgments of assigned texts (your grade will be based on assignments 1, 2 and 4, plus the two best scores from the remaining four assignments)
- (15%) active participation in discussion, including quizzes on the assigned readings,
- (20% each) two 600-900 word papers on a topic chosen from a predetermined list (to be provided during the semester), and
- (15% each) a mid-term and a final exam (multiple choice and short answer questions).

Evaluation and Grading, cont.

Your papers will be evaluated on the basis of three criteria: (i) grammar (including spelling and awkwardness of phrasing), (ii) style (including word choice, transitions, introduction and conclusion, and proper citation practices), and (iii) philosophical content (see below).

The criterion of philosophical content is itself broken up into several sub-criteria:

- Clarity – The thesis is clear and specific; every sentence says exactly what you mean; technical words are appropriately introduced and defined.
- Charity/Integrity – The views of other philosophers are presented fairly and accurately; philosophical views are not dismissed merely because you disagree with them.
- Rigor – Important claims are defended with clear arguments; arguments are stated in such a way that they are valid; there are no missing steps or unstated assumptions; objections clearly target specific views or specific premises of previously stated arguments.
- Originality – The paper does not merely rehearse arguments and points discussed in class or in the readings, but offers some new argument, objection, or interpretation.

I will be happy to meet with you at any point during the semester to discuss these criteria and strategies for writing good philosophy papers.

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

100-90: A; 89-79: B; 78-68: C; 67-60: D; 59 and below: F

Course Policies

Attendance

Attendance in this course is vital. Philosophy is ultimately based on reasoned conversation and debate, and this is best learned by doing it. (This is the fun part of philosophy!) The success of this course depends on you being here, thinking, and contributing to the development of ideas and arguments discussed in class. More than five unexcused absences from class is grounds for receiving an F.

Class Preparation

Readings are to be completed before the class on which they are listed. Our discussions in class will require familiarity of the readings, and the quality of our discussions depends on your doing the readings ahead of time.

Philosophy readings can be challenging, both in the language used and in the concepts introduced. You should expect to read most of the assigned readings at least twice to grasp the main points. I will, in general, attempt to limit the total number of pages per week to under 20 (though I cannot guarantee that this will happen every week).

Course Policies, cont.

Honesty/Plagiarism

Dishonesty and/or plagiarism are serious offenses and they will not be tolerated in this class. Dishonesty and/or plagiarism will result in appropriate academic discipline, and an unforgivable F may be given for the entire course. Please consult pages 47-51 in the WVU Undergraduate Catalog for further information. Please contact me with any questions.

Statement of Non-Discrimination

West Virginia University is committed to social justice, and so am I. As the instructor of this course, I expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon communication and mutual respect. Any suggestions regarding how to further such an environment will be appreciated and given serious consideration. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, color, or national origin. Students who have a disability that might affect their participation and/or achievement in this class should register with Disability Services (293-6700) and then meet with me very early in the semester so that accommodations can be discussed before they are required.

Course Readings

There is one book for this course, available at the bookstore:

Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy, by Descartes

Other readings are or will be made available on the eCampus course website.

Important Dates

Note - '' indicates a Day of Special Concern*

W	Jan 8	First day of classes
M	Jan 13	First Assignment Due
T	Jan 14	Last day to register for courses
W	Jan 15	Second Assignment Due
W	Jan 29	Third Assignment Due
F*	Jan 31	Chinese New Year
F	Feb 7	First Paper Due
F	Feb 14	Mid-Term Exam
M	Feb 17	Fourth Assignment Due
W	Mar 5	Fifth Assignment Due
F	Mar 7	Last day to drop class
F*	Mar 21	Naw-Ruz
W	Mar 26	Sixth Assignment Due
M	Apr 7	Seventh Assignment Due
M*	Apr 21	Second Paper Due / Feast of Rivdan
F	Apr 25	Last day of classes
T	Apr 29	Final Exam

Course Schedule

Week 1	W	Jan 8	Introduction
	F	Jan 10	Introduction to arguments in philosophy
Week 2	M	Jan 13	Arguments and Logic First Assignment Due: Exercises on arguments (eCampus)
	W	Jan 15	The Cosmological Argument for the Existence of God Reading: Aquinas, "Five Ways" (eCampus) Second Assignment Due: Exercises on logic (eCampus)
	F	Jan 17	The Cosmological Argument, cont. First Paper Topics Distributed
Week 3	M	Jan 20	Martin Luther King's Birthday (no class)
	W	Jan 22	The Classical Argument from Design Reading: Paley, "Natural Theology" (eCampus)
	F	Jan 24	The Classical Argument from Design, cont.
Week 4	M	Jan 27	The Fine-Tuning Design Argument Reading: Collins, "God, Design, and Fine-Tuning" (eCampus)
	W	Jan 29	The Fine-Tuning Design Argument, cont. (Chinese New Year) Third Assignment Due: The fine-tuning design argument
	F	Jan 31	The Fine-Tuning Design Argument, cont.
Week 5	M	Feb 3	Pascal's Wager Reading: Pascal, <i>Pensées</i> §233 (eCampus)
	W	Feb 5	Pascal's Wager, cont.
	F	Feb 7	The Problem of Evil Reading: Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" (eCampus) First Paper Due
Week 6	M	Feb 10	The Problem of Evil, cont.
	W	Feb 12	Exam Review
	F	Feb 14	Mid-Term Exam
Week 7	M	Feb 17	Free Will and the Problem of Evil Reading: Plantinga, "The Free Will Defense" pp. 181-187 (eCampus) Fourth Assignment Due: Exercises on definitions in Plantinga
	W	Feb 19	Free Will and the Problem of Evil, cont.
	F	Feb 21	Does Free Will Exist? Reading: Van Inwagen, "The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism" (eCampus)
Week 8	M	Feb 24	Does Free Will Exist, cont.

Course Schedule, cont.

Week 8, cont.	W	Feb 26	Alternative Models of Free Will Reading: Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" (eCampus)
	F	Feb 28	Alternative Models of Free Will, cont.
Week 9	M	Mar 3	The Classical Definition of Knowledge Reading: Plato, <i>Meno</i> pp. 34-35 (eCampus)
	W	Mar 5	Descartes's Meditations: Knowledge and Skepticism Reading: Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> , Meditation I Fifth Assignment Due: The Dreaming Hypothesis
	F	Mar 7	Knowledge and Skepticism, cont.
Week 10	M	Mar 10	Spring Recess (no class)
	W	Mar 12	Spring Recess (no class)
	F	Mar 14	Spring Recess (no class)
Week 11	M	Mar 17	Knowledge and Skepticism, cont. Reading: Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> , Meditation II Second Paper Topics Distributed
	W	Mar 19	Descartes's Meditations: The Existence of God (again). Reading: Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> , Meditation III
	F	Mar 21	The Existence of God (again), cont. (Naw-Ruz)
Week 12	M	Mar 24	Challenges to Morality Reading: Plato, <i>Republic</i> Book I (eCampus)
	W	Mar 26	Challenges to Morality, cont. Reading: Plato, <i>Republic</i> Book II (eCampus) Sixth Assignment Due: The Ring of Gyges
	F	Mar 28	A Puzzle about Morality: The Trolley Problem
Week 13	M	Mar 31	The Trolley Problem, cont. Reading: Thomson, "The Trolley Problem" (eCampus)
	W	Apr 2	The Trolley Problem, cont.
	F	Apr 4	Distributive Justice
Week 14	M	Apr 7	Distributive Justice, cont. Reading: Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i> (selections) (eCampus) Seventh Assignment Due: Letter on Distributive Justice
	W	Apr 9	Distributive Justice, cont.
	F	Apr 11	Minds and Brains Reading: Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs" (eCampus)
Week 15	M	Apr 14	Minds and Brains, cont.

Course Schedule, cont.

Week 15, cont.	W	Apr 16	No Class (I will be out of town)	
	F	Apr 18	No Class (Friday before Easter Recess)	
Week 16	M	Apr 21	Course Conclusion and Final Exam Review (Feast of Rivdan)	
			<i>Second Paper Due</i>	
	W	Apr 23	Final Exam Review	
	F	Apr 25	Final Exam Review	(Last day of classes)

Final Exam

Tuesday, April 29, 3:00 PM, in Armstrong Hall 306

That's all, folks!