

Problems of Philosophy

PHI 171

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Section: 81W
Office hours: M 4-5 (by appointment)
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Semester: Fall 2015
Classroom: CA-348
Meeting time: T 6:00-8:40
Credits: 3.0

SYLLABUS

Introduction

This course engages some of the broader questions that we ask ourselves. What is the nature of reality? What can I know? Is there a divine being? Is there a distinction between my mind and body? What is the basis of a good life? What is the right thing to do? These have all been central questions addressed by philosophers for millennia. This course attempts to lay the foundations for thinking about these types of questions in a philosophical manner. The course aims to provide both a foundation for future philosophical study at the university level and critical thinking skills that will remain useful in quite disparate future academic and professional endeavors.

Learning Objectives

- 1) Students will improve critical thinking by developing skills of explaining, critically examining, and responding to philosophical theories, issues, and claims in the philosophical areas of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics.
- 2) Students will improve writing skills by explaining, exploring, and critically examining philosophical theories, issues, concepts, and arguments relating to the philosophical areas of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics clearly in writing.
- 3) Students will improve communication skills by explaining orally philosophical theories, issues, claims, concepts, and arguments relating to the philosophical areas of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics.
- 4) Students will improve skills of interpreting and evaluating philosophical writings.
- 5) Students will develop an openness to having their beliefs challenged, will learn to hear and comprehend the views of others, and to entertain objections to their own views.
- 6) Students will be able to explain several classic ethical theories, to compare and contrast ethical theories, and to apply these to justify conclusions relating to concrete moral issues.
- 7) Students will acquire a familiarity with and an understanding of some classic and contemporary philosophical literature and some fundamental philosophical issues, and will be able to explain important contributions to the history of philosophy and their relation to present viewpoints.
- 8) Students will be able to explain several classic epistemological theories, and to compare and contrast theories of what knowledge is and how it is acquired.
- 9) Students will be able to show that issues may be regarded from multiple viewpoints,

and will be able to present reasons in support of each viewpoint.

10) Students will improve reasoning skills and ethical decision making skills by acquiring an understanding of ethical theories and philosophical concepts that will enable them to develop their own opinions on conceptions and practices of moral interaction and democracy.

11) Students will develop a conceptual foundation for future learning by exploring philosophical theories and arguments and will acquire related critical thinking and communication skills.

Required Text:

Steven M. Cahn (ed.), *Exploring Philosophy: An Introductory Anthology, 4th Ed*, Oxford University Press (2012), (Price: \$61.10), ISBN: 978-0199797271

Optional Texts:

Additionally, the following two books are recommended (but not required) as supplementary reading; both are short, accessible, cheap, and easily available. I will be posting excerpts of these books online on the Course Blackboard site:

Blackburn, Simon, *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy*, Oxford (1999), ISBN: 0192100246

Nagel, Thomas, *What Does It All Mean? A Very Short Introduction to Philosophy*, Oxford (1987), ISBN: 9780195052169

Course Blackboard Site:

There will be a site for this course on Blackboard. The syllabus, some of the readings, and perhaps your grades, will be posted and accessible on that site. Additionally, you are required to post your online journal (see below on Course Requirements and Grading) on the Blackboard site.

Please note: Sometimes I combine two or more of the sections I am teaching into one joint Blackboard site. I will post information about this. Stay Tuned!

Course Requirements and Grading

1. Class participation: 10% **Based on attendance (taken each class) and discussions.**
2. First paper: 10% **Due Date TBA**
3. Midterm exam: 20% **October 20.**
4. Second paper: 10% **Due Date: TBA**
5. Final exam: 25% **December 22nd 6-8 PM**
6. Final Paper: 20%: **Due Date TBA**
7. Journals on Blackboard: 5% (You must do 5 of these by 12 noon on the day of class)

Note on the Requirements

Class Participation (10%). I will take attendance at the beginning of every class. Still, students will need to participate in discussions in order to get a passing grade for attendance (cell phones should be on silent mode). Repeated absences will be taken note of. **You are allowed 3 unexcused absences without it affecting your grade.** Lateness should be avoided, but better that you attend late than not at all. If you must enter late, please make an effort not to disturb the class as you get to your seat.

Paper Assignments (10+10+20=40%) The first two paper assignments will be short essays where students will be asked to compare and evaluate material from a chapter not covered in class. The two papers will relate to each other. You will receive these papers back with comments. The final paper will ask you to incorporate some of the material you covered in the first paper and apply it to some new material. Papers are to be submitted electronically (via email) only.

Exams (20+25 = 45%) The two exams will consist of several short answer questions and essay questions. The final exam will be comprehensive. The final grade will be curved.

Journals on Blackboard (5%). Prior to each class you are to write a paragraph with comments on the reading for that week. The comments can be in the form of an objection, an observation, a question that the writer leaves unanswered (and why you think this is an important problem for the writer's argument). Your comment can also address a previous comment made by the students. The comments will be posted on a discussion board on the course blackboard site. You must do no fewer of 5 of these, worth 1 point each. If your comment is judged to be satisfactory, you will receive 1 point. If I judge the comment to be unsatisfactory, you will receive 0.5 points (or zero points if the comment is plagiarized or completely irrelevant). Comments must be up on Blackboard no later than 12p.m. (Noon) on the day of class.

Absence from classes does not affect the due dates for the assignments or your exam dates. If you miss an exam your grade will be zero for that exam, unless you contact me beforehand in an attempt to work out an alternative. Late assignments handed in **within 2 weeks** of the due date (i.e. before I return the papers to the rest of class) will receive a **single letter-grade deduction unless an extension has been granted** prior to the due date. **Assignments handed in later than that will only be accepted after talking to me first.**

Please be aware of the NY State Education Law, which provides that:

1. Any student in an institution of higher education who is unable, because of their religious beliefs, to attend classes on a particular day or days shall, because of such absence on the particular day or days, be excused from any examination or any study or work requirements.
2. It shall be the responsibility of the faculty to make available to each student who is absent from school, because of religious beliefs, an equivalent opportunity to make up any examination, study or work requirements which they may have missed because of such absence on any particular day or days
3. Any student who is aggrieved by the alleged failure of any faculty or administrative officials to comply in good faith shall be entitled to maintain an action or proceeding in the supreme court of the county in which such institution of higher education is located for the enforcement of their rights

CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity

The faculty and administration of Lehman College support an environment free from cheating and plagiarism. Each student is responsible for being aware of what constitutes cheating and plagiarism and for avoiding both. The complete text of the Lehman Policy is in the student handbook.

<http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/student-affairs/documents/student-handbook-02.pdf>

CUNY Policy on Disability Services

Lehman College is committed to providing access to all programs and curricula to all students. Students with disabilities who may need classroom accommodations are encouraged to register with the Office of Student Disability Services. For more information, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services, Shuster Hall, Room 238, phone number, 718-960-8441. 8.

The Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) and the Science Learning Center (SLC)

The Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) and the Science Learning Center (SLC) are two of the tutoring centers on campus. The ACE provides appointment-based and drop-in tutoring in the humanities, social sciences, and writing, as well as general writing and academic skills workshops. The SLC provides drop-in tutoring for natural science courses. To obtain more information about the ACE and the SLC, please visit their website at <http://www.lehman.edu/issp>, or please call the ACE at 718-960-8175, and the SLC at 718-960-7707.

Reading Schedule (All Readings are in the Cahn text, followed by page number, unless indicated otherwise)

Week 1 September 1: Introduction to the Class; What is Philosophy?; Reasoning
READINGS:

- (1) Beardsley, What is Philosophy? (3)
- (2) Salmon, The Scope of Logic (43)
- (3) Barker, Improving Your Thinking (50)

Week 2 September 8: God. (1) God and Morality; (2) The Ontological Argument for the Existence of God

First Paper Prompt (Due date: September 29)

READINGS:

- (1) Plato: Euthyphro (248)
- (2) Anselm and Ganilo: The Ontological Argument (265)

Week 3 September 15 ROSH HASHANAH – NO CLASS

Week 4: September 22 YOM KIPPUR – NO CLASS (Make up class on Friday September 25)

Friday September 25: God (continued): (1) The Cosmological Argument; (2) The Argument from Design; (3) The Problem of Evil

READINGS:

- (1) Aquinas: Summa Theologiae (273)
- (2) Paley: Natural Theology (175)

Week 5 September 29: Knowledge: Descartes and Rationalism

READINGS:

- (1) Descartes Meditations on First Philosophy (87)
- (2) Descartes Meditation on First Philosophy (151)
- (3) *Optional Reading*: Nagel Chapter 2 (Available on Blackboard)
- (4) *Optional Reading*: Blackburn Chapter 1 (Available on Blackboard)

Week 6 October 6: Knowledge: Empiricism

READINGS:

- (1) Locke: An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (91)
- (2) Berkeley: A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge (98)
- (3) Hume: An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (108)
- (4) *Optional Reading* Nagel Chapter 3 (Available on Blackboard)
- (5) *Optional Reading* Blackburn Chapter 7 (Available on Blackboard)

Week 7 October 13: Empiricism, Skepticism, and Induction

READINGS:

- (1) Hume (continued) (108)
- (2) Kant: Critique of Pure Reason (117)
- (3) Russell: The Problem of Induction (82)

Week 8 October 20: Midterm Examination;

Second Paper Prompt (Due Date November 3)

Week 9 October 27: Mind.

READINGS:

- (1) Descartes: Meditations (continued) (151)
 - (2) Ryle: The Ghost in the Machine (127)
 - (3) Taylor: The Mind as a Function of the Body (131)
 - (4) Nagel: What is it Like to be a Bat? (138)
 - (5) Searle: Do Computers Think? (148)
 - (6) *Optional Reading*: Nagel Chapter 4 (on Blackboard)
 - (7) *Optional Reading*: Blackburn Chapter 2 (on Blackboard)
- Week 10** November 3: Free Will.
READINGS:
- (1) Nagel: Free Will (161)
 - (2) Stace: Free Will and Determinism (166)
 - (3) Cahn: Freedom or Determinism? (169)
 - (4) Frankfurt: The Principle of Alternative Possibilities (179)
 - (5) *Optional Reading*: Nagel Chapter 6 (on Blackboard)
 - (6) *Optional Reading*: Blackburn Chapter 3 (on Blackboard)
- Week 11** November 3: Ethics: Virtue Ethics
READINGS:
- (1) Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics (408)
 - (2) Mayo: Virtue Ethics (398)
- Week 12 November 10: Ethics: Kant and Deontology
READINGS:
- (1) Kant: Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals (413)
 - (2) O'Neill: Kant's Ethics (383)
- Week 13 November 17: Ethics: Utilitarianism
READINGS:
- (1) Mill: Utilitarianism (418)
 - (2) Pojman: Assessing Utilitarianism (386)
 - (3) Cahn: A Supreme Moral Principle? (393)
- Week 14 November 24: Ethics: Challenges
Final Paper Prompt (Due Date: December 22)
READINGS:
- (1) Rachels: The Challenges of Cultural Relativism (369)
 - (2) Regan: How Not to Answer Moral Questions (379)
 - (3) Plato, "Ring of Gyges" (on Blackboard)
 - (4) Vitrano: Happiness and Morality (405)
- Week 15 December 1: Politics, Justice, and the Social Contract
READINGS:
- (1) Hobbes: Leviathan (567)
 - (2) Locke: Second Treatise of Government (574)
 - (3) Rawls: A Theory of Justice (529)
 - (4) Nozick: Distributive Justice (533)
- Week 16 December 8: TBA

FINAL EXAM December 22 from 6-8 PM