Introduction to Philosophy

Course number: PHI 2010, Section 0005
Meeting Times and Location: T/TH 9:00-10:15; 10:30-11:45
Location: CB1 105

Instructor: William Butchard, Ph.D.
Office: PSY 229
Email: Please message me in Webcourses
Office hours: Wednesdays 1:00-3:00

Course Description and Objectives

What is philosophy? It is similar to science in that each is a rational pursuit of truth. But philosophy differs from science in two crucial ways. First, it addresses different questions. While scientists ask, for example, what the various causes of cancer are, philosophers ask what it is, in the first place, for one thing to cause another. While scientists seek to discover the fundamental building blocks of matter, philosophers seek to discover what it is, in the first place, for something to be material (as opposed, say, to being psychological). Philosophers, in brief, ask questions about the notions that are fundamental to our conception of ourselves and of the world. Scientists answer the questions they ask by means of the scientific method. This involves making observations, forming hypotheses, and testing those hypotheses by making predictions. Philosophers, on the other, reflect on the very foundations of science and common sense. It is this “armchair” approach that makes some believe it to be impossible for one philosophical position to be more reasonable than another because it is all “just semantics”. I hope the course will persuade you that philosophy does address matters of substance and that it is possible to make genuine philosophical progress.

We will explore a number of traditional philosophical issues concerning the nature of knowledge, free will, consciousness, morality, and God. This is not a course in which you are expected simply to memorize and regurgitate information. The course is mainly about ideas, and our aim will be to think carefully and critically about the topics mentioned and, more generally, to develop a framework for thinking about the arc, pursuits, and priorities of the rest of our lives. We will question our preconceptions vigorously and work together to establish a communal atmosphere that will make the course both challenging and fun.

Ultimately, it is up to you to decide whether studying philosophy is truly valuable. In my view, it is—and I am very excited to be working with you this semester.

Required Readings


2. Supplemental readings I will make available in Canvas

Grade Determination

You can earn a total of 100 points in the course. Each course requirement is worth a certain number of points. The distribution of points is as follows:

- Writing: 1 paper (20 points)
- Exams: 5 in-class exams (80 points)
- The cumulative final exam will replace your lowest test score (unless it is lower than all of those scores, in which case it will be dropped).

Here are the details about the factors that determine your grade.

Attendance and participation

Class attendance should be viewed as a responsibility. I will take attendance every class period, and I consider attendance mandatory, but it will not affect your grade directly. In other words, you will not earn an attendance score. If you come to class, you will get a much better handle on the readings and the issues we discuss. Also, when
you miss class on a day when there is an exam, you miss the exam, which will hurt your grade. Please read the policy below under “Classroom Etiquette and Make-up Work”.

**Writing**

There will be one paper. It will require a clear representation of an argument advanced by one of the philosophers we cover in the course and a critical discussion of that argument. Your writing will be graded on the basis of your demonstrated understanding of the course material and your ability to respond to an argument with an illuminating critical observation. You can find a detailed description of the assignment in Canvas.

**Grade scale**

The grade scale for the course will be as follows:

- 93% to 100%: A
- 90% to 92%: A-
- 87% to 89%: B +
- 83% to 86%: B
- 77% to 79%: C+
- 73% to 76%: C
- 70 to 72%: C-
- 67% to 69%: D+
- 63% to 66%: D
- 60% to 62%: D-
- 59% to 60%: F

**Classroom Etiquette and Make-up Work**

I strongly encourage you to be a full participant in class discussion and group work. Don’t worry about getting something wrong. If something is unclear to you, it is probably unclear to several other people, and your input may well help us focus on the difficulty. Voicing your opinion, putting an idea on the table for examination, or just asking a question can be very helpful in a class discussion. Always remember to be civil towards people who have different beliefs from yours.

Missing class on a day when there is an exam is not something that can be taken lightly because of fairness and exam security. The final exam is cumulative and can count twice to replace a “0” on an exam. You should consider it very unlikely that you will be able to make up a missed exam. I can allow such make-up work only if your circumstances are truly extraordinary and you provide proper documentation in a reasonable amount of time. Excusable absences include absence due to documented medical emergencies, deaths in the family, and some university sponsored activities. Telling me that you were sick or having a roommate write a note will not count as documentation. A conflict with prior travel plans does not constitute an excuse.

**Academic Honesty**

Plagiarism includes copying and submitting as your own a passage from a text, the work of a fellow student; handing in a paper prepared by another as your own; using sources for writing your paper and not citing them in the paper. Plagiarism does cover materials found on web-sites. Note that it is possible to plagiarize even if you cite your sources, if, e.g., the wording is too close to the cited text.

If, in writing a paper, you have any questions about what counts as plagiarism or how to avoid plagiarism, please discuss the paper with me before turning it in.

**CLEAR EVIDENCE OF PLAGIARISM OR ANY OTHER FORM OF CHEATING WILL RESULT IN AN AUTOMATIC FAILING GRADE FOR THE ENTIRE COURSE, AND YOU WILL BE REPORTED TO THE DEAN OF STUDENTS FOR POSSIBLE FURTHER DISCIPLINARY PENALTY**

For more information on plagiarism (and other forms of academic dishonesty), go to

http://valenciacollege.edu/generalcounsel/policy/default.cfm?policyID=193&volumeID_1=8&navst=0

**Students with Disabilities**

If you have a disabling condition that may interfere with your ability to successfully complete this course, please register with Office for Students with Disabilities:
They will provide you with the proper documentation for you to show your instructors if you request accommodations.

**Important Notice for Financial Aid Recipients**

As of Fall 2014, all faculty members are required to document students' academic activity at the beginning of each course. In order to document that you began this course, please complete the academic activity below by the end of the first week of classes, or as soon as possible after adding the course, but no later than August 27. Failure to do so will result in a delay in the disbursement of your financial aid.

Activity: Go to Webcourses/Canvas and find the “Syllabus Quiz” for this course and complete the quiz.

**Topics and Readings**

Our pace will depend to some extent on how quickly you grasp the material. As a result, it is not easy to predict when a given reading will be assigned. Therefore, the readings will be assigned as we go, and we may not get to every selection listed. Some of the selections are not in your textbook and will be available in Blackboard. Those are marked below with an (e).

1. **God**
   - Saint Anselm: The Ontological Argument
   - Gaunilo: On Behalf of the Fool
   - J.L. Mackie: Critique of the Cosmological Argument (e)
   - William Paley: The Argument from Design (e)
   - Saint Thomas Aquinas: Five Ways to Prove the Existence of God
   - Paul Davies: A Naturalistic Account of the Universe (e)

2. **Free Will**
   - Harry Frankfurt: Alternate Possibilities and
   - Roderick M. Chisholm: Human Freedom and the Self

3. **Knowledge**
   - René Descartes: Meditations on First Philosophy, I and II
   - George Berkeley: Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous
   - G.E. Moore: Proof of an External world
   - David Lewis: Elusive knowledge
   - Jonathan Vogel: Cartesian Skepticism and Inference to the best explanation (e)

4. **Mind**
   - John Searle: Can Computers Think?
   - Frank Jackson: Epiphenomenal Qualia
   - Paul Churchland: Jackson’s Knowledge Argument

5. **Ethics and Justice**
   - John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism
   - Peter Singer: All Animals are Equal
   - Immanuel Kant: Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals
   - Onora O’Neill: Kantian Deliberations on Famine Problems (e)
   - Norman Daniels: Is There a Right to Health Care, and, if So, What Does it Encompass? (e)