

# INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY

## PHIL 2101

SPRING 2014; SECTION TR9B  
TUESDAY & THURSDAY 9:30A.M.–10:45A.M.

3 CREDITS  
3411 BOYLAN HALL

**INSTRUCTOR:** David Neely

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY:** 3308 Boylan Hall

**OFFICE HOURS:** By Appointment

**OFFICE LOCATION:** Room 3316 Boylan Hall

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Philosophy is the systematic study of the “big” questions about reality and human experience. In this course, we will begin with an overview of what philosophy is and the method of philosophical investigation. With these in hand, we will consider some of the most fundamental questions in the history of philosophical thinking: "How do we know?" "What is reality like?" and "What makes our actions good or bad?" By examining these questions, we will become acquainted with some of the ways that these questions have been answered throughout history as well as the sort of rational argumentation that lies at the heart of philosophical inquiry.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

1. Students will improve critical thinking, writing, and communicating by developing skills of explaining, critically examining, and responding to philosophical claims in the philosophical areas of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics by engaging with these matters in thought, writing, and speech.
2. Students will improve skills of interpreting and evaluating philosophical writings.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Students will acquire a familiarity with some classic and contemporary philosophical literature and some fundamental philosophical issues.
6. 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 TEXTS:**

The vast majority of the readings for this class come from the following textbook:

**Steven M. Cahn, *Exploring Philosophy: An Introductory Anthology* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.)  
Oxford University Press, 2011**

*Note:* There is more than one edition of this text, but due to changes that have occurred between editions it is important that you purchase the latest (4<sup>th</sup>) edition.

There will also be a handful of other readings not found in the textbook. I will make these readings available by email.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:**

Your final grade will be a mix of a midterm exam, a final exam, two 2-3 page papers, participation, and weekly quizzes that will count as part of your participation grade. Final grades will be calculated along the following lines:

- First Short Paper: **20%**
- Second Short Paper: **25%**
- Midterm Exam: **20%**
- Final Exam: **20%**
- Participation/Quizzes: **15%**

The prompts for the papers will be handed out two weeks before the paper is due. Papers must be 2-3 pages, typed, double-spaced, 12 pt. font and will be collected in class the day they are due. Every day a paper is late, it will lose 2/3 of a grade (i.e. a B+ is the highest grade a paper can get if it is one day late, B- if it is 2 days late, etc.).

The quizzes will pertain to that week's reading or to previous discussion. They will be given once a week at the start of class and will take 5 minutes. The quizzes will be graded pass/fail. Two quiz failures will be wiped from your record.

Arriving late on a quiz day will cause you to miss the quiz. So, if you arrive late a lot, it will negatively affect your participation grade.

Attendance, participation in class discussion, and demonstrating that you seriously read the readings will also inform your participation grade.

Please be aware that I do not offer extra credit assignments.

You must complete at least **3** of the 1<sup>st</sup> paper, 2<sup>nd</sup> paper, Midterm, and Final to pass my class.

### **CLASSROOM POLICIES:**

- Please arrive on time. Arriving late is distracting to other students. Also, if you arrive late, you will miss the quiz. And missing lots of quizzes will hurt your participation grade.
- I have no issue with students taking notes on laptops, tablets, or cell phones.
- Please silence your cell phones and refrain from texting in class.
- Eating and drinking in class is permitted if done quietly and if you are courteous to those around you.
- Please **sign** all your emails with your **full name**. And, **PLEASE** keep emails professional. [Pretend you are writing me a fancy letter.]
- If you know you are going to have to miss an exam, please let me know before the exam.
- If you miss the midterm for any reason, you must make it up before the exams are returned.
- Feel free to email me if you have questions or concerns about readings, papers, etc. I will do my absolute best to respond promptly.
- I will not give comments on paper drafts by email. But I am more than willing to go over a draft in person.

**SCHEDULE AND WEEKLY READINGS:****NOTE:**

- All selections from Cahn's Exploring Philosophy are accompanied by the approximate page number the article starts on (in parentheses).
- Any reading that is **NOT** in Cahn (and which will be provided digitally) is designated with a \*\*\*.
- This schedule is subject to change. If it changes, I will let you know and provide an updated syllabus.

**WEEK 1:**JANUARY 28<sup>TH</sup>:

INTRODUCTION

JANUARY 30<sup>TH</sup>:

PHILOSOPHICAL TOPICS AND ARGUMENTATION

- \*\*\* Blackburn—Introduction to *Think*
- \*\*\* Foster-Wallace—"Consider the Lobster"

**WEEK 2:**FEBRUARY 4<sup>TH</sup>:

EPISTEMOLOGY: WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE

- Ayer—"What is Knowledge" (≈67)

FEBRUARY 6<sup>TH</sup>:

EPISTEMOLOGY: RATIONALISM

- Descartes—*Meditations on First Philosophy*—Meditation 1 (≈87)

**WEEK 3:**FEBRUARY 11<sup>TH</sup>:

RATIONALISM (CONT.)

- Descartes—*Meditations on First Philosophy*—Meditation 2(≈151)

FEBRUARY 13<sup>TH</sup>:

EPISTEMOLOGY: EMPIRICISM

- Hume—*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (≈108)

**WEEK 4:**FEBRUARY 18<sup>TH</sup>:

EMPIRICISM (CONT.)

- Hume—*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (≈108)

**NO CLASS FEBRUARY 20<sup>TH</sup> (CONVERSION DAY)****WEEK 5:**FEBRUARY 25<sup>TH</sup>

MORE EPISTEMOLOGICAL MATTERS:

- Russell—"Appearance and Reality" (≈73)

FEBRUARY 27<sup>TH</sup>:

DOES GOD EXIST? (ARGUMENTS FOR)

- Anselm and Gaunilo—"The Ontological Argument"(≈265)
- Aquinas—"Summa Theologiae" (≈273)

**WEEK 6:**MARCH 4<sup>TH</sup>:

DOES GOD EXIST? (PASCAL'S WAGER)

- Pascal—"The Wager" (≈298)

MARCH 6<sup>RD</sup>:

DOES GOD EXIST? (ARGUMENTS AGAINST)

- Nagel—"Does God Exist?" (≈209)

**WEEK 7:**MARCH 11<sup>TH</sup>:

DOES GOD EXIST? (THE PROBLEM OF EVIL)

- Swinburne—"The Problem of Evil" (≈217)

MARCH 13<sup>TH</sup>:**FIRST PAPER HANDED OUT**

HOW TO WRITE A PHILOSOPHY PAPER

- \*\*\*Pryor—"Guidelines to Writing a Philosophy Paper"

**WEEK 8:****MARCH 18<sup>TH</sup>:**MARCH 20<sup>TH</sup>:**MIDTERM!!!**

RACE AND GENDER (WHAT THEY AREN'T)

- \*\*\*Diamond—"Race Without Color"
- \*\*\*Fausto-Sterling—"Why Two Sexes are Not Enough"

**WEEK 9:**MARCH 25<sup>ND</sup>:

WHAT IS RACE?

- \*\*\*Root—"How We Divide the World"

**MARCH 27<sup>TH</sup>:****FIRST PAPER DUE!!!**

WHAT IS GENDER?

- \*\*\*de Beauvoir—*The Second Sex*

**WEEK 10:**APRIL 1<sup>ST</sup>:

PERSONAL IDENTITY (PART 1)

- Smart—"A Case of Identity" ( $\approx 321$ )
- Perry—"The Problem of Personal Identity" ( $\approx 323$ )

APRIL 3<sup>RD</sup>:

PERSONAL IDENTITY (PART 2)

- Locke—*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* ( $\approx 353$ )

**WEEK 11:**APRIL 7<sup>TH</sup>:

PERSONAL IDENTITY (PART 3)

- Reid—*Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* ( $\approx 361$ )

APRIL 10<sup>TH</sup>:**SECOND PAPER HANDED OUT**

ETHICAL QUESTIONS

- \*\*\*Thomson—"Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem"

**NO CLASS APRIL 15<sup>TH</sup>, 17<sup>TH</sup> OR 21<sup>ST</sup> (SPRING BREAK)****WEEK 12:**APRIL 24<sup>TH</sup>:

ETHICS: HOW NOT TO ANSWER MORAL QUESTIONS

- Regan—"How Not to Answer Moral Questions" ( $\approx 379$ )

**WEEK 13:**APRIL 29<sup>TH</sup>:

MORAL THEORY OF KANT

- Kant—*Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* ( $\approx 413$ )
- O'Neill—"Kant's Ethics" ( $\approx 383$ )

**MAY 1<sup>ST</sup>:****SECOND PAPER DUE!!!**

MILL'S UTILITARIANISM?

- Mill—*Utilitarianism* ( $\approx 418$ )
- Pojman—"Assessing Utilitarianism" (**only read**  $\approx 386-387$ )

**WEEK 14:**MAY 6<sup>TH</sup>:

MORE ON KANT AND MILL

- Cahn—"A Supreme Moral Principle?" ( $\approx 393$ )

MAY 8<sup>TH</sup>:

CULTURAL RELATIVISM

- Rachels—"The Challenge of Cultural Relativism" ( $\approx 369$ )

**WEEK 15:**MAY 13<sup>TH</sup>:

CATCH-UP/REVIEW

MAY 15<sup>TH</sup>:

CATCH-UP/REVIEW

***FINAL: See Brooklyn College Website for Date and Time of Final***  
**CUNY POLICY ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:**

The faculty and administration of Brooklyn 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 CUNY Academic Integrity Policy and the Brooklyn College procedure for implementing that policy can be found at this site: <http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/bc/policies>. If a faculty member suspects a violation of academic integrity and, upon investigation, confirms that violation, or if the student admits that violation, the faculty member **MUST** report the violation.

**DISABILITY SERVICES:**

In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations students must first be registered with the Center for Student Disability Services (CSDS).

Students who have a documented disability or suspect they may have a disability are invited to set up an appointment with the Director of the Center for Student Disability Services, Ms. Valerie Stewart-Lovell at 718-951-5538. If you have already registered with the CSDS please provide your professor with the course accommodation form and discuss your specific accommodation with him/her as soon as possible and at an appropriate time.

**THE NY STATE EDUCATION LAW 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.