

Phil 2101: Introduction to Philosophy

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Office hours: T 5:30-6:30, room 3317, by appointment

Section: ET6
Time: T 6:30–9 pm
Classroom: 3407BH

Introduction

Philosophy attempts to answer fundamental questions about the world and our place in it. This course will introduce you to some of these questions. These will include: Can we have genuine knowledge? If so, of what? What are minds, and what is their relationship to the body? Do we have free will, or are our actions determined? What are persons? How do persons exist over time? What are our moral responsibilities? What makes an action right or wrong, and what makes a person good or bad? What makes a society just?

We will look at how some influential philosophers have formulated these questions and evaluate the answers they have given.

Course Requirements

Participation – 10%
Daily quizzes – 20%
Midterm – 20%
Final – 20%
Levels System – 30%

Daily Quizzes

At the beginning of each class, there will be a short three to five question quiz about that day's reading or the previous day's discussion. The questions may be multiple choice, true/false, or short (one sentence) answer. The quizzes will be graded on a pass/fail basis. They are worth a total of 20% of your final grade. There will be 13 total quizzes. Your best 10 will be considered. This means that you can miss or fail 3 quizzes with no consequences. After that, each missed or failed quiz will cost you 2% of your grade.

Exams

The midterm and final will be a mixture of definition, short answer and long answer questions. They will cover material from the readings and the lectures. The final exam is not cumulative. Potential questions will be distributed in advance.

Levels System

See separate sheet

Textbook

All materials will be in a reader that will be made available to you.

Course Objectives

- Students will be able to identify arguments and distinguish premises and conclusion, in general, and specifically in relation to the key philosophical questions.
- Students will be able to formulate clear, convincing, and well-reasoned arguments in support of or in opposition to a philosophical claim.
- Students will be able to evaluate (by providing reasons) the validity and/or cogency of an argument.
- Students will learn about key philosophical questions as well as some proposed answers to these questions. Further, by engaging with contemporary philosophical thinking, they will learn about the problems with these answers that make these issues objects of ongoing debate.

How to do well in this course

For most people, getting an A in this course will require the following:

- (i) Do all of the readings before we discuss them in class, and usually again after. Philosophy can be difficult, and re-reading texts is important for gaining a full understanding of the ideas.
- (ii) Come to every class and display your knowledge of the readings in the class discussion. If you are going to miss class, be late, or leave early, email me.
- (iii) Ask questions, either in class, by email, or in office hours.
- (iv) Write your papers in a clear, concise, and convincing style. (We will discuss this in class and I will provide some more detailed advice and resources for doing this).
- (v) Complete all the assignments.

CUNY Rules, Regulations, and Services

University 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 policy implementation can be found at 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 the violation, the faculty member MUST report the violation.

Center for Student Disability Services

In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations students must first be registered with the Center for Student Disability Services. 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 Center for Student Disability Services, please provide your professor with the course accommodation form and discuss your specific accommodation with him/her.

Non-attendance for Religious Beliefs

The New York State Education Law provides that no student shall be expelled or refused admission to an institution of higher education because he or she is unable to attend classes or participate in examinations or study or work requirements on any particular day or days because of religious beliefs. Students who are unable to attend classes on a particular day or days because of religious beliefs will be excused from any examination or study or work requirements. Faculty must make good-faith efforts to provide students absent from class because of religious beliefs equivalent opportunities to make up the work missed; no additional fees may be charged for this consideration.

Course Schedule

Subject to change.

January 30 – Introduction

Syllabus, course expectations, critical thinking, arguments, philosophical terms

February 6 – What is knowledge?

Plato – *Meno*

Ayer – “What is Knowledge?”

February 13 – How do we know?

Hume – “Sceptical Doubts Concerning the Operations of the Understanding”

Harman – “Inference to the Best Explanation”

February 20 – No Class

Classes follow a Monday schedule

February 27 - What is a mind? (Attempt 1)

Descartes – *Meditations*

Ryle – “Descartes’ Myth”

March 6 – What is consciousness?

Nagel – “What is it Like to be a Bat?”

Churchland – “On Functionalism and Materialism”

March 13 – Who am I?

Locke - “Of Identity and Diversity”

Parfit – “Personal Identity”

March 20 – What is a self? (Attempt 2)

Dennett – “Self as the Center of Narrative Gravity”

Hacking – “Making Up People”

March 27 – Midterm

April 3 – No Class

Spring Recess

April 10 - Do I have free will?

Chisholm – “Human Freedom and the Self”

Ayer – “Freedom and Necessity”

April 17 – Does moral responsibility require freedom? (Attempt 3)

Frankfurt – “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”

Strawson – “Freedom and Resentment”

April 24 - What makes an action right? (Part 1)

Case study – Baby Theresa

Mill – *Utilitarianism*

Rachels – “The Debate Over Utilitarianism”

May 1 – What makes an action right? (Part 2) (Attempt 4)

Kant – *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*

Onora O’Neill – “A Simplified Account of Kant’s Ethics”

May 8 – What makes a society just? (Part 1)

Rawls – *A Theory of Justice*

Nozick – *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*

May 15 – What makes a society just? (Part 2)

Marx – *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*

Young – “Five Faces of Oppression”

May 22 – Final Exam (Attempt 5)