



Introduction to Philosophy

Philosophy 150 a/b, Fall 2011

Professor William Seeley

Bates College, Hedge 208

M/W 8:-9:20 & 9:30-10:50

Office Hours, M/W 11-12

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Course Description:

This course offers an introduction to the unique way that philosophers have tried to answer a range of questions that each of us has taken time at moments in our lives wonder about: “Why do we exist?”; “What is real?”; “What can I know?”; “What is the basis of moral judgments?”; and “Why is there so much suffering in the world?” Along the way we will explore issues in critical reasoning, the philosopher’s method of inquiry, the nature of arguments, and various strategies we use when we give reasons to support and sustain our basic beliefs about the world. Course readings will be drawn from Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, and contemporary moral philosophy.

Course Goals:

1. Introduce students to foundational issues in metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics through a close reading of historical texts.
2. Develop an understanding of a range of argumentative strategies fundamental to good philosophical method.
3. Develop critical reasoning skills via a close reading of a range of a range of central arguments from the history of philosophy.

Requirements:

Students will be asked to write two 3-page papers (worth 10% of the final grade each); a 6-page midterm paper (worth 30% of the final grade); a cumulative final exam (worth 40% of the final grade); and two short argument exercises (worth 5% of the final grade each). Students will be given a choice between two assigned topics for each paper. Students will also be asked to write a short paragraph summary/comment on each reading on their class discussion board on Lyceum

Attendance:

Class participation is a requirement. Attendance is a minimum requirement for class participation. Therefore, absences will affect a student’s final grade. Class participation will be factored in as +/- 10% of the final grade.

Required Texts:

- Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 4th Edition, 2009. (**W**)
- John Perry, Michael Bratman, and John Martin Fischer, *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, New York: Oxford University Press, 5th Edition, 2009. (**PBF**)
- George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1979. (**B**)
- Glenn Parsons, *Aesthetics and Nature*, New York: Continuum International Publishers, Inc., 2008. (**P**)

Assignments:

All assignments are to be handed in hard copy in class the day that they are due **AND in the dropbox on LYCEUM prior to class that day. I will not grade papers that have not been handed in both places.**

First Paper (10%) - Please write a 3-page (900 word) paper on one of the following topics. Your paper should be double spaced with one inch margins and in a 12 point font. The purpose of this assignment is to demonstrate your understanding of the arguments from Descartes that we have discussed in class. One way to think of a philosophy paper is as a critical analysis of a position expressed by an author. So, think of this as a critical analysis paper where your analysis of the argument is a position that you establish and defend.

Topic 1a:

Descartes has argued that it is possible that he is mistaken about everything that he previously believed. Evaluate the reasons he gives for holding this position. Do you find them plausible? Do you find the grounds he gives for a solution to this problem in the Second Meditation satisfactory?

Topic 1b:

What is the purpose of Descartes' discussion of the wax in the Second Meditation? Do you find his conclusions about the nature of our knowledge of material objects satisfactory?

Topic 1c:

Descartes evaluates the trustworthiness of his rational faculties in the Third Meditation. Ultimately he finds that he can trust his most clear and distinct ideas. On what grounds does he make this determination? Do you find his reasoning satisfactory?

Due Date: 10/10/11 (hardcopy in class and in the dropbox on LYCEUM)

Argument Exercise #1 (10%) - Please identify, provide a rational reconstruction of, and formalize six arguments from Berkeley's "First Dialogue" using the following reasoning strategies from Chapter 6 of Weston: *Modus Tollens*, *Disjunctive Syllogism*, and *Reductio Ad Absurdum*. Make sure to provide at least two examples of each strategy.

Due Date: 10/05/11

Midterm Paper (30%) - Write a 6 page paper (1800 word) on one of two topics to be announced on the distribution date for the midterm. Your paper should be double-spaced in 12 point font with 1" margins. The purpose of this paper is twofold: a) evaluate a standard argument in the literature; and b) demonstrate that you can synthesize the material covered in the 1st half of the semester into a coherent position.

Topics Distributed: 10/24/11

Due Date: 10/31/11

Argument Exercise #1 (10%) - Please identify, provide a paragraph rational reconstruction of, and formalize arguments against relativism and for objectivism in ethics using the following reasoning strategies from Chapter 6 of Weston: *Modus Tollens*, *Disjunctive Syllogism*, and *Reductio Ad Absurdum*.

Due Date: 11/09/11

Third Paper (10%) - Please write a 3 page (900 word) paper on one of the following topics. Your paper should be double-spaced in 12 point font with 1" margins. The purpose of this assignment is to evaluate your understanding of the material introduced after the midterm.

Topics Distributed: 11/28/11

Due Date: 12/07/11

Final Exam – cumulative (40%)

Some Miscellaneous Notes and Guidelines:

Moral behavior is the grounds for, and the framework of, a healthy society. In this regard it is each of our responsibility as individuals within the community of our classroom to act responsibly. This includes following the rules and guidelines set out by the college for academic behavior. Plagiarism is a serious matter. It goes without saying that each of you is expected to do his or her own work and to cite EVERY text that is used to prepare a paper for this class. In general philosophy papers are NOT research papers. Your preparations for papers and presentations should focus on material from the syllabus, assigned supplemental readings, and class discussion.

I ask that you not use the internet for your research except as assigned in class.

The assignments are designed to give you a chance to stretch your legs a bit while you learn about the discipline of philosophy (and to give me a chance to assess your understanding of the material). Your job for each of the writing assignments is to offer a *philosophical defense* of your take on the issue at hand. However, this does not mean that they are free forums for opinions. Make sure that your discussions remain focused on the philosophical problems that surround the assigned question or topic.

There is some flexibility built in to the reading schedule so that we can spend more time on issues that are of particular interest to you. I will occasionally suggest supplementary materials for students who want to pursue particular issues beyond class discussion. I also reserve the right to modify the syllabus as needed to accommodate our interests as a group.

Finally, please come see me at the beginning of the semester to discuss athletic schedules or any accommodations you might need for the class work.

Syllabus & Bibliography:

Topic 1:	A Science of Arguments Perry, Bratman, & Fischer Weston St. Anselm	A Logical Toolkit Deductive Arguments The Ontological Argument
Topic 2:	Minds, Reasons, and Our Knowledge of the External World Plato Descartes Berkeley Hume Salmon	<i>Theaetetus</i> <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> <i>Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous</i> <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> The Problem of Induction
Topic 3:	Identity, Free Will, and the Concept of a Person Locke Dennett Frankfurt	Of Identity and Diversity* Where Am I? Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person
Topic 4:	Moral Explanations and Ethical Theories Harman Pojman Mill Velleman Kant	Freedom of the Will and the Concept of Person A Defense of Ethical Objectivism* <i>Utilitarianism</i> A Brief Introduction to Kantian Ethics Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals
Topic 5:	A Short Story about Science and the Aesthetics of Nature Parsons	<i>Aesthetics and Nature</i>

* All readings are included in the course texts *Readings* except the following which can be found on *LYCEUM*:

Plato, *Theaetetus*, ed. John McDowell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), XXX-XXX.

John Locke, Chapter 27: Of Identity and Diversity, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Niddich (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 328-348.

Louis Pojman, "A Defense of Ethical Objectivism," in ed. Louis Pojman, *Moral Philosophy: A Reader* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishers, Inc.), 38-52.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

What follows is a provisional syllabus. This schedule may change, as may the readings within it, as a result of class interests and time constraints. In fact it is likely to change in accordance with the pace of our day to day conversations and discussions in class. Any changes will be announced in class prior to the date of the change of assignment. Also, importantly, I will let you know each day how to approach the readings for the next class, whether some readings are more important than others, and, occasionally, whether we will drop a reading from a session (it has happened). You can't get this information if you are not in class.

Date	Readings	Assignments
09/07	What is philosophy: a short primer on arguments and other stuff.	
09/12	More on arguments: the ontological argument. Perry & Bratman, Logical Toolkit: 9-17. (PBF) St. Anselm, The Ontological Argument: 42-43. (PBF) Weston, Ch 6. Deductive Arguments: 37-48. (W)	
09/14	Plato, Theaetetus: §§187b-201c. (LYCEUM)	
09/19	Descartes, Mediation I: 136-138. (PBF)	
09/21	Descartes, Mediation II: 138-141. (PBF)	
09/26	Descartes, Mediation III: 142-147. (PBF)	
09/28	(More Mediations)	
10/03	Berkeley, <i>Three Dialogues</i> : 7-42 (B)	Topics assigned for 1 st paper
10/05	Berkeley, <i>Three Dialogues</i> : excerpts (tba). (B)	Argument Exercises Due
10/10	Hume, <i>Enquiries</i> : 190-199. (PBF) Weston, Ch. 5, Arguments about Causes (W)	First paper due
10/12	Hume, <i>Enquiries</i> : 199-205. (PBF)	
10/17	Salmon, The Problem of Induction: 217-238. (PBF)	
10/19-10/23	FALL BREAK!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!	
10/24	Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Ch 27 (LYCEUM)	Midterm Topics Assigned
10/26	Dennett, Where Am I?: 383-390.	
10/31	Frankfurt, Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person: 430-439. (PBF)	Midterm Paper Due
11/02	Discussion Day: What is a Person?	
11/07	Harman, Ethics and Observation: 732-736. (PBF)	
11/09	Pojman, A Defense of Ethical Objectivism: (LYCEUM)	Argument Exercises Due
11/14	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> : 460-469. (PBF)	
11/16	Kant, <i>Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals</i> . (PBF) * Velleman A Brief Introduction to Kantian Ethics	

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11/28	Kant, <i>Groundwork</i> (continued). (PBF)	Topics assigned for 3 rd paper
11/30	NO CLASS	
12/05	Parsons, <i>Aesthetics & Nature</i> . (P)	
12/07	Parsons, <i>Aesthetics & Nature</i> . (P)	3 rd paper due
	FINAL EXAM Phil150a: 12/15/11 8:00-10:00 Phil150b: 12/13/11 10:30-12:30	