

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

Fall Semester 2016

City College New York, PHIL 102

Mon/Wed 12:30-1:45

NAC 5/109

Instructor: Dr. Silvia De Toffoli

Email: sdetoffoli@ccny.cuny.edu

Office: NAC 5/203 D

Office Hours: Wed 3pm-4pm, or by appointment.

Philosophy, if it cannot answer so many questions as we could wish, has at least the power of asking questions which increase the interest of the world, and show the strangeness and wonder lying just below the surface even in the commonest things of daily life.

Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*

Now we must not *attach* learning to the mind, we must *incorporate* it; we must not sprinkle, but dye. And if learning does not change the mind and improve its imperfect state, certainly we do much better to let it alone.

Montaigne, *Essays*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The aim of this course is twofold, divided between content and method. First it will offer an introduction to some central philosophical ideas and survey some influential ways of conceiving what philosophy is. Second, it will equip students with the tools required to read and write about difficult philosophical texts in epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy as a way of life. Students who successfully complete the course will be familiar with the logical and analytic methods commonly deployed in philosophical argumentation. This will help them identify and critically assess not only arguments in philosophical contexts, but arguments in other fields as well. The course will also equip them to produce written and oral argumentation on behalf of a thesis.

Typically, the course is divided into two main parts:

1) **Knowledge and the Mind**

In this first part of the course, students will be introduced to some classic issues in epistemology and philosophy of mind, starting with Descartes' *Meditations*. The main topics will be external-world skepticism (how can we know that the external world exists?), the analysis of knowledge (is justified true belief knowledge?), the mind-body problem (what is the mind? What is the relationship between the mind and the body?) and the problem of consciousness (what is consciousness?).

2) **Self and Self-Fashioning**

In this second part we will explore what the self is and how philosophy can be conceived as a way of living and self-fashioning. After a brief overview we will consider some of the central debates about personal identity and individuation. We will then focus on the ideas of Montaigne and Nietzsche. Specifically, on their way of conceiving the self, and more generally, the nature of philosophical inquiry. We will see how they conceive philosophy not only as a purely intellectual endeavor, but as encompassing the whole person in a process of self-fashioning (how can we use philosophy to change ourselves?). These two philosophers are particularly relevant because their works are concerned with finding a way in which, through philosophy, we can create an identity. In fact, according to their view the self is not something given, but an achievement that is performed partly through philosophy.

LEARNING GOALS

As part of the College's General Education Curriculum, this course is designed to enhance your students' understanding of analytic and philosophical reasoning. Students successfully completing this course will meet the following objectives:

- 1) *Oral & Communication Skills*: Students will have had multiple experiences in communicating ideas in writing and speaking
- 2) *Critical Analysis*: Students will have had experiences that emphasize analytic and philosophical reasoning to critically examine fundamental questions of epistemology, religion, and ethics.
- 3) *Information Literacy*: Students will have had multiple experiences in finding information in the library, on the Internet, and in other places, and in evaluating the reliability of this information.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will be able to:

- 1) *Read* philosophy—to identify the thesis of a piece of philosophical writing and the arguments or evidence adduced in support of that thesis.
- 2) *Write* philosophy—to present a claim in clear terms and to defend it in a logically coherent manner.
- 3) *Reconstruct* and *debate* some foundational issues in the Western philosophical tradition.

PREREQUISITES

None in specific, just willingness to be exposed to different philosophical ideas, and to take them seriously.

TEXTS

Required:

Simon Blackburn. *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Cress, third Edition, Hackett Classics, 1993.

Other readings will be made available on the course Blackboard site.

Optional:

Sarah Bakewell, *How to live, a life of Montaigne*, Other Press, New York, 2010.

Michel de Montaigne, *The Essays*, trans. Frame, Stanford University Press, 1957.

Jennifer Nagel, *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2014.

Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York, 1974.

LECTURES

Always bring the assigned reading material with you to the lectures. You are required to read the assigned texts *ahead* of each class (see the Schedule below). There will be plenty of in-class discussion and exchange of ideas in this course. Come prepared to contribute and make the best out of your time in class. You are expected to attend and be on time every class throughout the semester.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism is against university policy and will not be tolerated. Students who plagiarize will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and will fail the course. We will discuss in class how to quote and paraphrase properly to avoid plagiarism.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students should participate actively in class, will submit three assignments, complete a midterm and a final exam and write a paper.

- Active participation during the lectures is crucial in philosophy. Students will be expected to read the material and engage in conversation about it during the class period. Moreover, they will be asked to give short presentations.
- There will be three homework assignments. You are supposed to work on the first assignment in groups of four, in the second assignment in a group of two and individually in the third assignment. Each group will submit one set of answers. The grade given to those answers is the grade every member of the group receives for that assignment. Your answers must be written in a format of short papers 1.5- 2 double-spaced pages (approx. 700 words).
- The midterm and the final exams will consist of short questions on the material. Institutionally approved absences must be verified with the instructor at least one week in advance to arrange for alternative exams. The exam will be closed book and students will take their exams independently.

- I will provide a detailed explanation of the point of writing papers in philosophy and show how to write argumentative papers. Moreover, I will give specific prompts to follow. Each student will first submit a detailed outline and then a final version of the paper, which should be 4 double-spaced pages long (approx. 1500 words). Afterwards, there will be the possibility of shortly presenting the paper to the other students.

The final grade will be derived by the weighted combination of the following 5 requirements:

- 1) Attendance and Participation: 15%
- 2) Homework Assignments: 20% (first: 5%, second: 5%, third: 10%)
- 3) Midterm Exam: 15%
- 4) Final Exam: 15%
- 5) Paper: 35%

SCHEDULE

Week 1: What is Philosophy?

08/29 No readings.

08/31 Plato, *Myth of the Cave*, Blackburn, *Introduction*

PART I: KNOWLEDGE AND THE MIND

Week 2: Skepticism

09/05 **No class – Labor Day**

09/07 Descartes, *Meditations I*, Blackburn 15-32

Week 3: The Evil Daemon + Writing

09/12 Descartes, *Meditations I*

09/14 Jim Pryor, *Guidelines on how to write philosophy*

Week 4: Cogito, Ergo Sum + Logic

09/19 Descartes, *Meditations II* --- **FIRST HOMEWORK DUE**

09/21 Blackburn 193-211 (Ch. Reasoning, until Section *Plausible Reasoning*)

Week 5: Scientific Reasoning + Problem of Induction

09/26 Samir Okasha, *Philosophy of Science: A Very Short Introduction*, Ch. 2 “Scientific Reasoning”

09/28 Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Ch. 9 “The Nature and Necessity of Scientific Revolutions”

Week 6: Scientific Revolutions + Values in Science

10/03 **No Class**

10/05 Nancy Cartwright, *The Truth Doesn't Explain Much*

10/06 (Classes Follow a Mon Schedule) Heather Douglas, *Inductive Risk and Values in Science*

Week 7: No Classes

10/10 **No Class – Columbus Day**

10/12 **No Class -- SECOND HOMEWORK DUE**

Week 8: Skepticism + Knowledge

10/17 Jennifer Nagel, *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*, Ch. 2 “Scepticism”

10/19 Nagel, *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*, Ch. 4 “The analysis of knowledge”

Edmund Gettier, *Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?*

Week 9: Epistemic Injustice + Midterm Week

10/24 Miranda Flicker, *Epistemic Injustice - Power and Ethics of Knowing*, Introduction

10/26 **Midterm Exam in class**

Week 10: Mind-Body Problem

10/31 Blackburn 49-58

11/02 Jen McWeeny, *Princess Elisabeth and the Mind-Body Problem*

Week 11: Consciousness + Philosophy as a Way of Life

11/07 Susan Blackmore, *What is it like to be...?*

PART II: SELF-FASHIONING AND THE ART OF LIVING

11/09 Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Ch. 2, Nehamas, *The Art of Living*, Introduction

Week 12: Montaigne – How to Live

11/14 Sarah Backwell, *Introduction*, Montaigne, *To the reader*, Montaigne, *Of idleness* (I:8)

11/14 Montaigne, *That to philosophize is to learn to die* (I:20), Backwell, Ch. 1, Optional: *Of cannibals* (I:31)

Week 13: Self-fashioning

11/21 Montaigne, *Essays, Of giving the lie (II:18)*, --- **THIRD HOMEWORK DUE**

11/23 Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, Ch. 1

Week 14: Nietzsche – The Death of God + Amor Fati

11/28 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science, Preface, §1, §108-9, 124-5*

11/30 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science, §276-7, 289-90, 299*

Week 15: Nietzsche – Eternal Recurrence

12/05 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science, §341, 343-7* --- **FINAL PAPER DUE**

12/07 Final considerations and general review

Week 16: Last Week

12/12 **Final Exam in class**