

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

Fall Semester 2016

City College New York, PHIL 102

Mon/Wed 12:30-1:45

NAC 5/109

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Office Hours: Wed 3pm-4pm, NAC 5/203 D or by appointment. In any case, send me an email to let me know when you are coming.

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. I will offer an introduction to some central philosophical ideas and I will give an overview of different ways of conceiving what philosophy is. Moreover, I will provide the necessary tools to improve the skills of reading and writing philosophical texts. Students who will successfully complete the course will acquire the logical and analytic methods commonly deployed in philosophical arguments. These methods will help them to identify and critically assess not only philosophical arguments, but arguments in other fields as well. Therefore, the skills they will acquire will be useful even in non-philosophical contexts, such as scientific ones, helping them to improve their reasoning abilities. Moreover, they will learn to produce written and oral articulated argumentations of their views. The topics that will be addressed are fundamental questions belonging to different areas of philosophy, such as epistemology, philosophy of mind and philosophy as the art of living. The exposure to these heterogeneous topics will constitute an adequate preparation for advanced courses in philosophy. More specifically, the course is divided into two 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. In particular, we will first read Descartes' *Meditations* as way into philosophical conundrums. The main topics treated will be the one of external-world skepticism (how can we know that the external world exists?), epistemic agency (are we free to believe?), the mind-body problem (what is the mind? Is the mental reducible to the physical?) and the problem of consciousness (what is consciousness?).

2) Self and Self-Fashioning

In this second part we will explore what philosophy can tell us about the self. First, we will give an overview on the topic and then address the issue of personal identity (What is the self?). We will then focus on the figures of Montaigne and Nietzsche. Specifically, on their way of conceiving the self, and more generally, the nature of philosophical inquiries. In particular, we will see how they conceive philosophy not only as a purely intellectual endeavor, but as encompassing the whole being in a process of self-fashioning (how can we use philosophy to change ourselves?). The figures of these two philosophers are particularly relevant because their works are concerned in 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. We will explore some of the ways they designed to arrive at such an achievement.

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:

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

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

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

Optional:

Nagel, *What does it all mean?*, Oxford University Press, 1987.

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

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

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

Nehamas, *Nietzsche, life as literature*, Harvard University Press, 1985.

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

LECTURES

Always bring 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: The Evil Daemon + Cogito, Ergo Sum

09/05 **No class**

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

Week 3: Reasoning and Writing

09/12 Blackburn 193-213

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

Week 4: Skepticism

09/19 Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, Ch. 1: *Appearance and Reality* 1,

Ch. 2: *The Existence of Matter* --- **FIRST HOMEWORK DUE**

09/21 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* 10-38

Week 5: Knowledge

09/26 Ayer, *What is Knowledge?*, Gettier, *Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?*

09/28 Foley, *Beliefs, Degrees of Belief, and the Lockean Thesis*

Week 6: Epistemic Agency

10/03 **No Class**

10/05 James, *Will to Believe*

10/06 (Classes Follow a Mon Schedule) Kornblith, *Reflection*: Ch. 3: *Freedom*

Week 7: No Classes

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

10/12 **No Class**

Week 8: Mind-Body Problem

10/17 Descartes, *Meditations* VI, Blackburn 49-58

10/19 Blackburn 58-80

Week 9: Consciousness

10/24 Nagel, *What is like to be a bat?*

10/26 **Midterm Exam in class**

PART II: SELF AND SELF-FASHIONING

Week 10: The Self

10/31 Blackburn, 120-134 --- **THIRD HOMEWORK DUE**

11/02 Blackburn, 135-148

Week 11: Montaigne – Philosophy as the Art of Living

11/07 Backwell, *Introduction*, Nehamas, *The Art of Living*, *Introduction*

11/09 Montaigne, *Essays*, *Of idleness* (I:8) Backwell, Ch. 2

Week 12: Montaigne – How to Live

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

11/14 Montaigne, *On solitude* (I:39) Backwell, Ch. 8--- **PAPER OUTLINE DUE**

Week 13: Self-fashioning

11/21 Montaigne, *Essays*, *Of giving the lie* (II:18), Backwell, Ch. 3

11/23 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 --- **PAPER DUE**

Week 15: Nietzsche – Eternal Recurrence

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

12/07 **Final Exam in class**

Week 16: Last Week

12/12 Last class final considerations and students' presentations.