

Landmarks in the History of Philosophy

Course: PHIL 3105

Fall, 2012

Hours: Monday, Wednesday, 9:30 am-10:45 am

Classroom: Boylan Hall, 3305

Texts: *The Rationalists: Descartes: Discourse on Method & Meditations; Spinoza: Ethics; Leibniz: Monadology* (Rene Descartes, Benedict de Spinoza, Gottfried Wilhelm Von Leibniz)
The Empiricists (John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume)
Basic Writings of Existentialism (Gordon Marino)
The Republic (Plato), <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>
Various articles and court cases available online

Instructor: Anna Gotlib

Phone: (office): TBA

Email: agotlib@brooklyn.cuny.edu

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 12:30 pm - 2:00 pm, *and by appointment* (Boylan Hall, #4300)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we will read, discuss, and evaluate some of the most important and exciting historical and contemporary philosophical texts, including those by Plato, Descartes, and Sartre. We will investigate how both the earlier and more modern philosophers can be understood to be in a dialogue with each other, and with the larger society in which they found themselves. We will then ask some questions that are central to the study of philosophy: What kinds of things exist in the world? How do we know? What ought we care about, and why? Through the careful examination of these questions, you will gain, or improve upon, your ability to form, analyze, and defend arguments, and to develop and write philosophical papers. *This course will be especially valuable for early-stage philosophy majors*, but will also be useful for those who simply wish to sharpen their philosophical skills through the study of great works in philosophy.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course you will:

- Understand the central concepts, theories, and dilemmas within philosophical claims and debates;
- Be able to argue in support or in opposition to claims within philosophical debates;
- Be able to read and explain to others sophisticated philosophical arguments;

- Be able to take apart complicated arguments, finding their weak and strong points, and charitably address these strengths and weaknesses;
- Improve your speaking and writing abilities by becoming more confident in expressing yourself, more convincing in presenting your claims, and more effective in formulating your thesis statements and supporting arguments;
- Become a more informed and nuanced thinker about philosophical issues and dilemmas;
- Become a more engaged and informed democratic citizen

LECTURE AND DISCUSSION FORMAT AND CONDUCT

As you probably already realize, in this course we will deal with many controversial and sensitive issues, and chances are, at some point during the semester, you might find yourself disagreeing with me, with the text, or with someone in the class. This is normal and to be expected (in fact, even encouraged). But how do we argue and debate without stepping on each other's toes (too much)? For this purpose, I have a few guidelines for our discussions, and as a class, we may decide to add to it as we go along. For now, here is a draft of our code of conduct:

- Respect others' right to hold opinions and beliefs that differ from yours;
- Challenge or criticize ideas, not people;
- Listen to what others are saying even if you do not agree;
- Please, please be courteous to one another (and to me) -- do not interrupt or engage; in private conversation while others are speaking;
- Support your statements with good evidence -- give us a rationale for your points;
- Avoid making broad generalizations about entire groups, or, if you feel compelled to do so, present us with evidence of why you think this is merited;
- Give everyone a chance to talk -- we all have something valuable to add to the discussion.

VERY IMPORTANT: I encourage you to raise your hand and speak up -- what a terrible time we would all have if it was just my voice we all heard for over an hour! I will call on individuals, encourage you to talk to each other, and ALWAYS will take questions, comments, challenges, gripes (well, some gripes), etc. during class. You guys are better at teaching each other than you think!

ATTENDANCE

As you may have guessed, attendance is mandatory. If you know you will be absent on particular days due to sports, music, or other commitments (long weekends are not commitments, folks!), please let me know in advance. Many missed days will make it very difficult for you to pass this course. PARTICIPATION IS ESSENTIAL!

GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS:

There will be 2 short (3-5 pages) papers, a midterm, and a final examination. Each paper will count for 20% of your grade, the midterm will also count 20%, and the final examination will count 25%. Participation will count for 15% of your grade.

Receipt of a passing grade requires completion of both papers, the midterm, and the final examination.

The first paper will be on an assigned topic:

- The first paper is due: **Wednesday, October 17th**
- The midterm is scheduled on: **Wednesday, October 24th**
- Your second paper is due: **Wednesday, November 28th**
- Final exam: **Monday, December 17th, 8:00 am-10:00 am**

Late papers: Late papers will be accepted, but points will be taken off for lateness (unless previously arranged), with every week about 1/2 of a grade being subtracted. Thus, if your paper merited a B and it is a week late, you would get a B-. However, you must turn in all papers, even if VERY late, in order to pass this class.

PLEASE NOTE: *The readings are to be completed by the day that they are noted on the syllabus.*

COURSE SCHEDULE

Monday, August 27: Introduction: Why philosophy is so weird, and why you should care.

Wednesday, August 29: Why worry about philosophy?

Reading: "The Value of Philosophy" (Bertrand Russell) (available on Blackboard in the "Information" section)

Monday, September 3: NO CLASS

Part I: What is the world like, and what do we do about it? Plato's well-ordered universe

Wednesday, September 5: What is justice? Why should it matter that we are just?

Reading: Book I: *The Republic* (Plato), <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>

Monday, September 10: Who are we?

Reading: Book II: *The Republic* (Plato), <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>

Skim: Book III *The Republic* (Plato),

<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>

Wednesday, September 12: What is just authority?

Reading: Book V: *The Republic* (Plato), <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>

Skim: Book VI: *The Republic* (Plato),
<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>

Louis Rene Beres, "The disappearance of the philosopher kings,"
(available on Blackboard in the "Information" section)

Monday, September 17: NO CLASS

Wednesday September 19: Everything you know about reality is wrong!

Reading: Book VII: *The Republic* (Plato),
<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>

**Part II: The world, and our roles in it, can be correctly understood through reason:
The Rationalists**

Monday, September 24: Descartes: The search for certainty

Reading: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Synopsis and Meditation I

Wednesday, September 26: NO CLASS

Monday, October 1: Descartes: certainty can be found in rationality

Reading: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation II

Wednesday, October 3: Descartes: certainty can be found in rationality

Reading: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, skim Meditation III, read Meditation IV

Monday, October 8: NO CLASS

Wednesday, October 10: Spinoza: there can be only one!

Reading: *The Ethics*, Part I ("Concerning God")

Monday, October 15: Leibniz: This is the best of all possible worlds

Reading: Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, I-VII; XXXVII

Wednesday, October 17: What if we don't agree about WHICH reasons are right?

Reading: Michael P. Lynch, "Reasons for Reason"
(available on Blackboard in the "Information" section)

Monday, October 22: Midterm review

Wednesday, October 24: MIDTERM

Part III: The world can only be understood through the senses: The Empiricists' rejection of rationalism

Monday, October 29: John Locke: We only know through experience
Reading: *The Empiricists*, pp. 75-91

Wednesday, October 31: George Berkeley: To be is to be perceived.
Reading: *The Empiricists*, pp. 135-151

Monday, November 5: David Hume: The world is ultimately unknowable -- and that's okay (Part I)
Reading: *The Empiricists*, pp. 307-315

Wednesday, November 7: David Hume: The world is ultimately unknowable -- and that's okay (Part II)
Reading: *The Empiricists*, pp. 316-322

Monday, November 12: David Hume: The world is ultimately unknowable -- and that's okay (Part III)
Reading: *The Empiricists*, pp. 322-333

Part IV: There is no certainty. The world is absurd -- and so are you: The Existentialists

Wednesday, November 14: Friedrich Nietzsche: All our reasons for our actions are wrong
Reading: Marino, pp. 111-144

Monday, November 19: Fyodor Dostoevsky: Do we even want to be free?
Reading: Marino, pp. 231-254

Wednesday, November 21: Jean-Paul Sartre: Can we genuinely re-claim our freedom in a value-free universe?
Reading: Marino, pp. 341-367

Monday, November 26: Simone de Beauvoir: The universe is not quite value-free
Reading: Marino, pp. 413-436

Wednesday, November 28: Albert Camus: Can we reclaim meaning in the universe? (Part I)
Reading: Marino, pp. 441-470

Monday, December 3: Albert Camus: Can we reclaim meaning in the universe? (Part II)
Reading: Marino, pp. 470-492

Wednesday, December 5: Ralph Ellison: How to live authentically in an absurd universe
Reading: Marino, pp. 495-505

Monday, December 10: Some concluding remarks

Wednesday, 12: Review

THE INSTRUCTOR RESERVES THE RIGHT TO MAKE ALTERATIONS TO THIS SYLLABUS THROUGHOUT THE TERM!!!!

BROOKLYN COLLEGE POLICIES

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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.

CLASS ATTENDANCE AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

For information about the state law regarding non-attendance due to religious beliefs, please see page 53 in the Undergraduate Student Bulletin.

PLAGIARISM AND CHEATING:

This is a very unpleasant subject, but we might as well get it over with. No cheating or plagiarism will be tolerated. Period. To refresh your memories, the following is a general summary of the cheating-plagiarism policy:

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 the violation, the faculty member **MUST** report the violation.

CUNY POLICY ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY (This policy can be found on: <http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/pub/documents/academicintegritypolicy.pdf>)

Definitions and Examples of Academic Dishonesty

1. **Cheating** is the unauthorized use or attempted use of material, information, notes, study aids, devices or communication during an academic exercise. The following are some examples of cheating, but by no means is it an exhaustive list:
 - Copying from another student during an examination or allowing another to copy your work.
 - Unauthorized collaboration on a take home assignment or examination.
 - Using notes during a closed book examination.
 - Taking an examination for another student, or asking or allowing another student to take an examination for you.
 - Changing a graded exam and returning it for more credit.
 - Submitting substantial portions of the same paper to more than one course without consulting with each instructor.
 - Preparing answers or writing notes in a blue book (exam booklet) before an examination. Allowing others to research and write assigned papers or do assigned projects, including use of commercial term paper services.
 - Giving assistance to acts of academic misconduct/dishonesty.
 - Fabricating data (all or in part).
 - Submitting someone else's work as your own.
 - Unauthorized use during an examination of any electronic devices such as cell phones, palm pilots, computers or other technologies to retrieve or send information.
2. **Plagiarism** is the act of presenting another person's ideas, research or writings as your own. The following are some examples of plagiarism, but by no means is it an exhaustive list:
 - Copying another person's actual works without the use of quotation marks and footnotes attributing the words to their source.
 - Presenting another person's ideas or theories in your own words without acknowledging the source.
 - Using information that is not common knowledge without acknowledging the source.
 - Failing to acknowledge collaborators on homework and laboratory assignments.
3. **Internet plagiarism** includes submitting downloaded term papers or parts of term papers, paraphrasing or copying information from the internet without citing the source, and "cutting & pasting" from various sources without proper attribution.
4. **Obtaining Unfair Advantage** is any activity that intentionally or unintentionally gives a student an unfair advantage in his/her academic work over another student. The following are some examples of obtaining an unfair advantage, but by no means is it an exhaustive list:
 - Stealing, reproducing, circulating or otherwise gaining advance access to examination materials.
 - Depriving other students of access to library materials by stealing, destroying, defacing, or concealing them.
 - Retaining, using or circulating examination materials which clearly indicate that they should be returned at the end of the exam.

- Intentionally obstructing or interfering with another student's work.

Most importantly, remember this: I do not have all the answers. You do not have all the answers. Philosophy is a process by which we can at least begin to engage in asking the right questions. This class is all about seeing just where those questions will lead us.