

PHIL 205-02 – Introduction to Philosophy

Fall 2009, T/Th 9:30 – 10:45 a.m.

Davidson 204

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Purposes and Aims of the Course:

“Ask a philosopher a question, and 30 minutes later you don’t understand your question.”

Philosophy is a shared endeavor the point of which is to find answers to fundamental questions of human affairs. For example, “What is the good society?” is a philosophical question; but so is, “Are the mind and the body distinct entities?” We recognize that such questions are very hard to answer and that even if we found final answers we would have a hard time knowing we had done so. It is also hard to know when we’ve found the right answer to them. So philosophy is at least as much about the getting there as it is about where we’re going. Philosophy is unified not by its focus on one subject matter, but by a *way of thinking about* such subject matters. And philosophical questions are such because they are susceptible of solution, if at all, only through this way of thinking.

The philosophical way of thinking can really be learned only by doing. But it does have some hallmarks. One is the practice of *clarifying ill-formed questions* so we better understand what it is that we already know, and what it is that we do not yet know. Questions like “Have you stopped beating your wife yet?” are well-known ill-formed questions. But so are other supposedly philosophical questions like “If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?” and “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” To revise or scrap our ill-formed questions is to begin to turn our critical reflections on the structure of our thought itself.

Related to the clarification of questions is *critical reasoning* more generally. This is the practice of challenging assumptions, checking arguments for validity and soundness, and avoiding intellectual vices (or *fallacies*) like circularity (assuming your conclusion before you start the reasoning process) and equivocation (assigning two different meanings to the same word in a way that is significant for the argument). A final part of this process is *speculative* reasoning: to reflect on problems, trying to come up with creative solutions. In truth, of course, these three elements are crucially linked. The fact that philosophical problems can often—in principle, at least—be solved “from an armchair” does not mean that there are no canons of reasoning or evidence. Further, the fact that philosophical questions often seem to have more than one plausible answer does not mean that just anything goes. There are *crucial* differences between “I can’t determine which of two or more answers is correct,” “there is no single right answer,” and “there are no right or wrong answers.” Typically, there are *very many wrong answers*, even when there are multiple right ones; and at least sometimes, the inability to discern which of multiple answers is correct is due to some unnoticed assumptions or equivocations smuggled into the course of reasoning. The task of philosophy is, in part, to ferret these out.

This course aims to introduce students to major questions that have animated what is typically called “Western” philosophy—philosophy done in ancient Greece and Rome, as well as modern Europe and North America. There are multiple great traditions of philosophy, including African, Chinese, Indian, Islamic, Jewish, Native American, and others. These traditions have overlapped at various points in history, and are increasingly overlapping today. Nonetheless, it is very difficult to integrate them in a way that makes a coherent one-semester course and a fruitful conversation from one class period to the next. So this course focuses on one such tradition, the Western tradition. I encourage you to complement this course by pursuing other traditions, as well as other aspects of the Western tradition. I can give you some suggestions of courses to take or books to read that would help you to do so.

General Education Profile

This course fulfills a **General Education requirement in Humanities** and is thus designed to enable students to:

1. Communicate an understanding of vocabulary, concepts, materials, techniques, and methods of intellectual inquiry within the humanities.
It achieves this outcome through readings of philosophical work from a variety of sources and on a variety of subjects, and through in-class discussion of philosophical materials. It assesses students’ progress on this outcome with in-class and take-home writing assignments, and with the opportunity to revise a paper for credit.

2. Describe and evaluate texts using primary and secondary materials.
It achieves this outcome in the choice of readings, the emphasis on primary-source material, and the content of the assignments. It assesses students’ progress on this outcome through periodic writing assignments as well as the term paper.

3. Analyze and synthesize texts, recognizing the diversity of cultures and historical contexts.
It achieves this outcome through readings, lectures, and discussions of texts spanning thousands of years, encouraging students to critically engage with these materials by writing about and discussing them. It assesses students’ progress on this outcome through periodic writing assignments, the final paper, and the final exam.

Evaluation:

The following scale represents the *guaranteed minimum* grade corresponding to each raw score. If the class average is below a C+ or so, I will bump up letter grades to attain a C+ average.

A+	97.5-100	A	92.1-97.4	A-	89.5-9
B+	87.5-89.4	B	82.1-87.4	B-	79.5-82
C+	77.5-79.4	C	72.1-77.4	C-	69.5-72
D+	67.5-69.4	D	59.5-67.4	F	0-59.4

Requirements:

Short writing assignments:	60%
Final paper draft:	10%
Final paper revision:	15%
Final exam:	10%
Attendance & Attention:	<u>5%</u>
Total:	100%

Reading. Reading course materials is of the essence of this course. You should do each reading at least once **before** the corresponding meeting; you may then benefit from re-reading. I reserve the right to use pop quizzes if it seems as though a critical mass of people is not doing the reading. Performance on such quizzes will be part of your “Attendance & Attention” grade.

Short writing assignments. The basic premise of evaluation in this class is that evaluation ought to reward persistence, improvement, and the development of skills. Thus the majority of your course grade will be based on short writing assignments most of which build up to a full philosophy paper, the final version of which will not be due until December.

Final Paper: This will be a paper of approximately 8-10 pages. A draft (worth 10%) will be due just before Thanksgiving; the final version (worth 15%), which must be revised in light of my comments, will be due at the beginning of the final exam on December 7. (You must ensure that I have a copy of the original version of the paper as well as the revision. I cannot grade improvement if I do not have the original.)

Final exam: This is a **non-cumulative** final that covers only the Suits and Perry readings. Its purpose is to ensure that you stay involved even after you decide on a paper topic. I will provide information the week of Thanksgiving.

Attendance & Attention. Philosophy is a discursive enterprise. Reading and writing are essential but it is very likely that without actively participating in the discussion you will be unable to learn the material. Every student should attend every class and participate in class discussions and activities, and not do things that distract themselves or others from active participation. This **precludes use of cell phones** for any purpose during class, and **if you bring a computer into class you must sit in the front row.** I will reserve 5% of your grade for attendance and attention. Every two unexcused absences will cost one attendance point. Every single use of a cell phone in class, and every instance of using a computer when not seated at the front, will also cost one attendance point. In the event that your attendance grade reaches zero, each unexcused absence or cell-phone use will lower your course grade by an additional 1/3 of a letter grade. Of course there may be exceptional circumstances, which I can respect **provided you inform me in advance.** Excused absences are those that occur for university-sponsored events, university-recognized religious observance, and serious incapacities. Excused uses of cell phones are those that occur because your partner is about to go into labor, or suchlike. If you do not inform me in advance the transgression will count as unexcused. Please note that, while cell phones and irrelevant web-surfing are the most egregious distractions, there may be others that emerge during the course of the semester. Please do your best to follow the spirit of this policy; in the event that people do not do so, I reserve the right to add to the list of official distractions.

How to succeed in this class:

First and foremost, read carefully, and do so *before* the class meeting for which that reading is assigned. As you read, and after you read, practice the art of “writing to understand reading.” You may do this by taking notes or making notes in the margins when you find particularly important or confusing parts; summarizing or outlining essays or dialogues; etc. (These are practices we will learn during the semester.) Ask questions in class, or in office hours, designed to elicit explanation of the confusing parts and discussion of the important parts. Take notes that make clear to you not just the *topic* or *main claims* of the text, but the *arguments* – how the author *supports* those claims. When planning out your paper, go back over your notes and reread relevant parts of the text(s), then plan your paper as the defense of a specific, controversial thesis. Write *and revise* your paper carefully. If you are not receiving the grades you would like, visit me during office hours to discuss how you can improve your work.

Writing: Evaluation in this course is weighted towards written work. I encourage you to use the services of the University Writing Center. The UWC, on the 3rd floor of Ekstrom Library, provides free support for writers by providing a comfortable place to write, to collaborate with other writers, and to use writing resources. To schedule an appointment, students may stop by in person or call 852-2173. Note, however, that the writing center will not be able to help you with a course of reasoning or with claims about specific arguments. For help with these you may benefit from consulting student members of Phi Sigma Tau, the Philosophy honors society. I can help you get in touch if you are interested.

Academic Integrity: Cheating and plagiarism are immoral because a) they are *dishonest* (to me and others), in that the cheater/plagiarist presents as her/his own something that is not; b) they are *unfair* (to classmates), who work hard to meet requirements that the cheater/plagiarist circumvents; c) they violate *academic obligations* (to the university) that students voluntarily accept upon enrollment; and d) they may violate *self-regarding duties* of *self-development* or *self-perfection* (if such duties exist).

They can also get one in serious trouble. According to the University of Louisville’s *Code of Student Conduct*, Section 5, “Academic dishonesty is prohibited at the University of Louisville. It is a serious offense because it diminishes the quality of scholarship, makes accurate evaluation of student progress impossible, and defrauds those in society who must ultimately depend upon the knowledge and integrity of the institution and its students and faculty.” It is your responsibility to know this code and comply with its requirements. If I discover violations of this policy I will pursue the required disciplinary channels, which normally involve communicating with the dean for undergraduate affairs. If you have any questions about how to comply with this policy, ask me *in advance*.

Handing in Assignments: Except for in-class work, assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day listed in the schedule below. They will be counted late 15 minutes after the beginning of class. Late assignments will be penalized one grade per

school day. I am not flexible on this policy. In general, the **only** acceptable reasons for failure to complete or submit an assignment on time are University-approved excuses (i.e. sponsored activities or recognized religious holidays), physical impossibility, and deaths in the family. In all cases, if at all possible you must communicate with me **in advance** about your situation, and I reserve the right to request documentation. We can then make alternative arrangements. Note that such arrangements may involve your completing the work *in advance*, not after.

You may hand in assignments on paper or by e-mail attachment. If you hand in computer files, please use **MS Word for Windows (.doc or .docx) or Rich Text Format (.rtf)**. **I cannot guarantee that I will be able to read/open other types of files, and if I cannot open your paper, it will be counted late.** However you choose to submit your assignments, please minimize the amount of extra paper you use, and avoid any adornments. If you cannot hand in your paper in class, leave it in the plastic file folder on my office door. You remain responsible for it until it is in my hands.

Disabilities: The University of Louisville is committed to providing access to programs and services for qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a disability and require accommodation to participate and complete requirements for this class, notify me immediately and contact the Disability Resource Center (Robbins Hall, 852-6938) for verification of eligibility and determination of specific accommodations.

Required Texts:

1. **Bedau:** Hugo Bedau, *Thinking and Writing about Philosophy*, Second Edition (Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2002)
2. **Perry 1:** John Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality* (Hackett, 1978)
3. **Perry 2:** John Perry, *Dialogue on Good, Evil, and the Existence of God* (Hackett, 1999)
4. **Plato:** Plato, *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*, Second Edition, trans. Grube, rev. Cooper (Hackett, 2002)
5. **Suits:** Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (Broadview, 2005)

NB: it is required that you use the particular editions listed here of both **Bedau** and **Plato**. Editions (and translations) vary widely in content and quality, and using different editions of these texts may lead to a semester's worth of confusion.

Schedule of Topics:

Subject to change; at no point will you be held responsible for anything that is not on this syllabus or a published update to it made available to you at least one week in advance.

Aug	25	Introduction
	27	Bedau, chap. 1 and Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i>
Sept	1	continued and Bedau, pp. 7-15

- 3 continued; start in on Plato, *Apology*
- 8 **assignment #1: summary of *Euthyphro* due**
Apology continued
- 10 finish *Apology* and Bedau, 15-17 and discussion on 24
- 15 **assignment #2: abstract of *Apology* due**
 Plato, *Meno*, beginning to 79e (p. 69)
- 17 Plato, *Meno*, 79e-89c (pp. 69-81)
- 22 **assignment #3 due**
 Plato, *Meno*, 89c-end (pp. 81-92)
- 24 continued
- 29 **assignment #4 due (see handout)**
 Bedau, pp. 33-37
- Oct 1 Bedau, 38-40 and Plato, *Crito*
- 6 **assignment #5: outline of *Crito* due**
 continued
- 8 Bedau, pp. 55-64
- 13 **Fall Break – no meeting**
- 15 Bedau, pp. 64-77
Last Day to Withdraw
- 20 **assignment 6 due**
 continued
- 22 Bedau, pp. 78-89
- 27 Bedau, chap. 5
assignment 7 due
- 29 **Note: priority registration for fall is now underway. Don't delay!**
 Suits, Chaps. 1 & 2
- Nov 3 Suits, chaps. 3-5 and 8
- 5 Suits, chaps. 12-13
- 10 Suits, chaps. 14-15 and Appendix 1
- 12 continued
- 17 **thesis, outline, and draft opening paragraph of paper due**
 Bedau, pp. 89-105
- 19 continued

- 24 Perry 1 – read the whole thing
- 26 **Thanksgiving – no class**

- Dec 1 **final paper drafts due**
Perry 2 – read the whole thing
- 3 Discussion of Perry 1 and 2; conclusions

Final exam is Mon., Dec. 14, 8:00AM – 10:30AM. Final paper revisions due by the beginning of the exam.