

West Los Angeles College

Philosophy 1 Introduction to Philosophy

Fall 2015

Instructor

Rick Mayock, Professor of Philosophy

“I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.” – Galileo Galilei

Required Texts

Plato, *Five Dialogues*

Pojman, Louis P., *Philosophy: The Quest for Truth*

Course Objectives

This class will introduce major philosophical ideas as expressed both in their historical and contemporary settings. We will investigate issues of **metaphysics**, or the theory of reality, and **epistemology**, or the theory of knowledge, and cultivate methods of philosophical inquiry. Students will become familiar with diverse philosophical theories and concepts and will develop the skills to present these ideas coherently. In addition, students will learn how to critically evaluate philosophical ideas and to foresee their implications for life and society. Topics of discussion include a historical approach to theories of reality, the relationship between science and religion, the question of the existence of God, the compatibility of faith and reason, and traditional theories of knowledge.

Grading Procedure

Grades will be determined by three take-home exams, each of which is worth approximately one-third of the final grade. The take-home exams will comprise questions that evaluate students' understanding of the material and ability to express philosophical concepts coherently. Exam questions will be given in advance of the due dates, which will be strictly enforced.

Internet research and citations will not be accepted. All essays should be typed and double-spaced. Essays not in this format will not be accepted. Late essays will not be accepted.

Essays should be given to the instructor personally, on or before the appointed due date. If an essay is not handed to the instructor personally, the student will not receive credit. Essays should **not** be left in the instructor's office or mail box, or given to any other

instructors, secretaries, administrators, or anyone but the instructor. **Essays sent to the instructor by email will not be accepted.**

The study of philosophy involves communication, so students are expected to attend class and to participate in class. The idea is to **discuss** philosophy and to allow ourselves to explore philosophical concepts in an atmosphere that is tolerant, stimulating and intellectually nurturing.

Attendance Policy

The instructor will keep records of attendance and timeliness of assignments. Excessive absences will adversely affect the final grade for the course.

Students are expected to attend every meeting of all classes. Violation of this regulation may result in exclusion from the class. **Whenever absences “in hours” exceed the number of hours the class meets per week, the instructor will consider whether there are mitigating circumstances that justify the absences. If the instructor determines that such circumstances do not exist, the instructor may exclude the student from the class. Three cases of tardiness may be considered equivalent to one absence.** It is the student’s responsibility to consult with his or her instructor regarding absences that would alter the student’s status in the class. If a student is not present when the instructor takes role, he or she will not receive credit for attendance. If a student comes late to class, it is his or her responsibility to inform the instructor after class; otherwise he or she will not receive credit for attendance.

Cell Phone Policy

Cell phones are not permitted in the classroom. A ringing cell phone that is audible during the class is a disruption of the class and the owner will be asked to leave the classroom and will not be given credit for attendance. If the cell phone goes off a second time the student will be excluded from the class. This policy also applies to pagers, beepers and any kind of electronic device that disrupts the class. **Students are not permitted to make audio or visual recordings of any portion of the class or lecture without the consent of the instructor.**

Cheating and Plagiarism Policy

The following is based on the provisions of the California Educational Code, the California Penal Code and the LACCD Board of Trustees: Board Rule 9803.12: “Dishonesty, such as cheating, or knowingly furnishing false information to the Colleges.” Any student who cheats on a quiz or plagiarizes an essay will be given no credit for that quiz or essay and will be referred to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action. In addition, that student will have the equivalent value of that assignment subtracted from the total points earned for the class. In other words, if an exam is worth 33 points, and plagiarism has been detected, the student will receive no credit for the exam **and** will have 33 points subtracted from the total points for the class.

Exams with internet references or citations will be considered plagiarism and will not be accepted. There is much scholarship available in philosophy, but most of what is on the internet is spurious at best. Students are warned to be cautious and skeptical regarding philosophical internet sites. All of the material needed to write the essays is contained in the assigned readings and will be discussed at length in class. Students who wish to read additional secondary sources may consult the reading list or discuss other sources with the instructor. **Any material downloaded from the internet and presented as the student's own work will be considered plagiarism.**

Guidelines for Writing Philosophical Essays

Writing philosophical essays can be difficult since it is a sophisticated way of writing, often taking into account more than one point of view. When writing an essay, do not be discouraged if you think you don't have the answers, or don't know enough about the subject. The fact is, no one has the answers, and sometimes writing about the **questions** gives you enough material for a good essay. In philosophy the focus is on questions rather than answers, and the process of formulating, clarifying and articulating meaningful questions is a large part of the philosophical experience. You can learn to write about what you do **not** know in the context of our human limitations and intellectual ability as easily as you can write about what you do know.

When writing philosophical essays, avoid using quotes. It is better to **explain** what a philosopher has said in your own words than to use a lengthy quote. If you wish to use a quote to fortify a particular point, you may do so, but do not use quotes in lieu of an explanation.

The point of writing a philosophical essay is to **explain** a particular issue as clearly and coherently as possible. Do not assume that the reader knows what you are writing about. For example, it may be accurate to say that St. Anselm's argument leads to a contradiction, but a more complete essay will **explain** what the contradiction is and how it works. Never leave something unexplained. Convince the reader that you understand the material you are writing about. Also, do not include unnecessary filler, such as biographical information, dates, places, historical settings, and so forth. Start your essay by addressing the question immediately.

Reading Assignments

Students are expected to stay current with the reading assignments. Reading the material **before** it is discussed greatly increases your understanding and enriches your philosophical experience.

In addition to the assigned readings there will be occasional handouts. Students are responsible for all material distributed in the class.

It should be noted that this schedule is tentative, and may be subject to amendment.

Introduction

Russell, Bertrand, “The Value of Philosophy” (Pojman)

Ancient Philosophy: The Beginnings of Philosophical Thought

Plato, “Allegory of the Cave” (handout)

Plato, *Euthyphro*

Plato, *Apology*

King, Martin Luther, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (handout)

Medieval Philosophy: Philosophy and Religion, Arguments for the Existence of God

Pojman, “Excursus: A little Bit of Logic” (Pojman)

Anselm, St., “The Ontological Argument” (Pojman)

Aquinas, St. Thomas, “The Five Ways,” from *Summa Theologica* (Pojman)

Edwards, Paul, “A Critique of the Cosmological Argument”

Paley, William, “The Watch and the Watchmaker” (Pojman)

Hume, David, “A Critique of the Teleological Argument” (Pojman)

Modern Philosophy: Philosophy and Science, Epistemology

Plato, *Meno*

Campbell, Joseph, “The Impact of Science on Myth” (handout)

Russell, Bertrand, “The Copernican Revolution” (handout)

Sagan, Carl, “The Burden of Skepticism” (handout)

Descartes, Rene, “Cartesian Doubt and the Search for Foundational Knowledge,” from *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Pojman)

Locke, John, “The Empiricist Theory of Knowledge,” from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Pojman)

Kant, Immanuel, “The Kantian Compromise,” from *The Critique of Pure Reason* (Pojman)

Commentaries

The readings in this class are largely original sources rather than commentaries. In other words, we will be reading the philosophers in their own words rather than reading what others have written about them. For commentaries the following works are recommended:

Copleston, Frederick, S.J., *A History of Philosophy*, 9 vol.

Edwards, Paul, ed., *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 8 vol.

Both works are in our library, and should be consulted for specific topics. Also, both works contain excellent bibliographies.

