

Philosophy UN1001– Introduction to Philosophy, Fall 2018

MW 1:10-2:25 PM

225 Milbank Hall

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Office Hours: MW 12-1 PM

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Course Description

Perhaps you decided to enroll in college to increase your knowledge about a particular subject. Maybe, after a few courses, you would say that you know a thing or two about, for example, calculus or business administration or art history. But how can you really be sure?

Ask yourself: how do you know that you aren't dreaming right now? Or that you aren't in an elaborate virtual reality simulation? Could it be that all of the experts you rely on for "knowledge" are really just trying to cheat you out of money? Once you begin to doubt these things, how can you be sure that you really "know" anything?

In Introduction to Philosophy, you will learn how to tackle skeptical questions like these. In our first unit of the class, we will ask about the foundations of knowledge. What does it mean to **know** something, as opposed to merely believing it?

We will also consider questions in a variety of different areas of philosophy. For example, we will wonder about the relationship of your mind to your brain. Are they the same thing? Could your mind exist apart from your brain? Could there be zombies with no mind at all?

In addition to questions about knowledge and the mind-body relationship, we will ask other philosophical questions: Can we prove that God exists, or can we only have faith that God exists? To what extent does the morality of our actions depend on forces beyond our control? Why be moral in the first place?

Our primary goal will be to construct and evaluate *arguments* based on good evidence in favor of different answers to these questions. The answers we will consider come from both classical readings in Philosophy (like Descartes' *Meditations*) as well as from contemporary sources.

This course aims to develop students' skills in critical thinking, reading, and writing. Class time will largely be discussion-based, though I will lecture on some key concepts from the reading.

Students will be asked to write two papers about two different philosophical topics. They will also be asked to participate in a peer review process of these papers to help them challenge their ideas and strengthen their arguments. The rest of the course grade will be based on students serving as discussion leaders and their performance on a midterm and final exam.

## Textbook

All of the course material will be accessible online. However, I have ordered a few “recommended” hard copies of texts like the *Meditations* for those who would prefer one. Please visit Book Culture for hard copies of these texts.

## Course Goals

The goals of this course are:

- To introduce you to philosophy, both as a historical body of knowledge and as a practice that you can engage in.
- To encourage you to see the intrinsic value of learning about and doing philosophy, regardless of its benefits to your critical thinking, reading, and writing skills.
- To introduce you to the methods and goals of interpreting primary texts from the history of philosophy, with the aim of developing your ability to charitably interpret unfamiliar texts and to assess the merits of the ideas therein.
- To help you develop the skill of engaging with complex, abstract and unfamiliar ideas with clarity and rigor.
- To encourage you to reflect carefully on the foundations of your own knowledge by reflecting on its humble origins and on impressive arguments for beliefs you may not hold.

## Achieving these Goals

We will achieve these goals with the following methods:

- Students are expected to read assigned texts carefully before class and take notes of questions and comments you have about the text.
- I will give brief lectures to help explain the more complex material. However, most of class time will consist in my asking pointed questions about the text to help you guide your own thoughts.
- Sometimes I will ask small groups to work together to discuss an unfamiliar text to help develop the skills of constructing one’s own interpretation of a text and of critically engaging with that text.
- When an objection to a philosopher’s views is raised, I will do my best to respond “as” that philosopher. I will illustrate that though we may reject certain beliefs, they often have more merit than we might expect.
- When we find points of disagreement with a philosopher I will ask you to reflect on *why* your views are more plausible.

- Exam questions will test not only your comprehension of the material discussed in class but also your ability to grasp the systematic points of view of many of these philosophers.

### Assignments and Grading

#### **Discussion Leadership** (15 pts.)

After the add-drop period has concluded, I will assign each student three days on which they are one of the “discussion leaders.” Discussion leaders are expected to come to class prepared to pose and answer questions about the reading for that day’s class. Five points will be awarded if a discussion leader offers thoughtful replies to my questions about the material and/or contributes to class discussion in some meaningful way. No points will be awarded if a discussion leader is absent without an approved excuse. Fewer than five points will be awarded if they are underprepared for class. Discussion leaders are welcome to discuss their readings with me before their class period.

#### **Writing** (50 pts.)

##### **Paper 1 – Critical Paper (5+ pages)** (25 pts.)

You will be asked to write a paper criticizing your own position on a philosophical topic discussed in class. Before submitting your final paper (15 pts), you will be asked to submit a draft (5 pts) to be peer reviewed. You will be asked to review two papers (5 pts for participation) and then to incorporate that feedback into your final draft.

##### **Paper 2 – Defense Paper (5+ pages)** (25 pts.)

You will be asked to write a paper defending your position on a philosophical topic discussed in class. Before submitting your final paper (15 pts), you will be asked to submit a draft (5 pts) to be peer reviewed. You will be asked to review two papers (5 pts for participation) and then to incorporate that feedback into your final draft.

#### **Midterm Exam** (15 pts.)

The midterm exam will be a combination of short answer and multiple-choice questions. It will cover only material discussed in the weeks prior to the exam.

#### **Final Exam** (20 pts.)

The final exam will be a combination of short answer and multiple-choice questions. It will cover all of the material discussed over the course of the semester.

#### **Attendance**

You will not receive credit for attending class. You are expected to attend every class unless you can provide a reasonable, documented excuse. Every unexcused absence after the first will result in 2 points off your final grade.

## Course Grade Guide

A+: 97-100 A: 94-96 A-: 90-93

B+: 87-89 B: 84-86 B-: 80-83

C+: 77-79 C: 74-76 C-: 70-73

D: 60-69 F: 0-59

Scores will be rounded to the nearest half point.

## Course Policies

- Our classroom will be technology-free, unless you have a documented need to use an electronic device. I will count any student that uses an unapproved electronic device during lecture and group discussion absent for that day. For almost all classes, you will need just something to take notes with and your text.
- Discussions will be respectful. No one wants to feel uncomfortable or unsafe in a classroom. Any comment or action that discriminates or harasses on the grounds of sex, gender, race, sexual identity, nationality, ability, or any physical characteristics will not be tolerated. If you feel disrespected in any way during the class, please contact me immediately.
- If you are a student with a documented disability and require academic accommodations in this course, you must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) for assistance. Students requesting accommodations will need to first meet with an ODS staff member. Once registered, students are required to request accommodation letters each semester to notify faculty. Accommodations are not retroactive, so it is best to contact ODS early each semester to access your accommodations. If you are registered with ODS, please see me to schedule a meeting outside of class in which you can bring me your faculty notification letter and we can discuss your accommodations for this course. Students are not eligible to use their accommodations in this course until they have met with me. ODS is located in Milbank Hall, Room 009/008.
- The Honor Code states: “We, the students of Barnard College, resolve to uphold the honor of the College by engaging with integrity in all of our academic pursuits. We affirm that academic integrity is the honorable creation and presentation of our own work. We acknowledge that it is our responsibility to seek clarification of proper forms of collaboration and use of academic resources in all assignments or exams. We consider academic integrity to include the proper use and care for all print, electronic, or other academic resources. We will respect the rights of others to engage in pursuit of learning in order to uphold our commitment to honor. We pledge to do all that is in our power to create a spirit of honesty and honor for its own sake.”
- Plagiarism and collaboration of any kind on exams is strictly prohibited. You may not collaborate on any written assignment or exam except as part of the peer review process. If your papers refer to or include work that is not your own, whether directly quoted, paraphrased, or even described in general terms, it must be clearly cited. I do not care which

citation style you use, as long as I can check the source. If I discover any instance of plagiarism, you will receive a zero for that assignment.

- Wellness Statement: It is important for undergraduates to recognize and identify the different pressures, burdens, and stressors you may be facing, whether personal, emotional, physical, financial, mental, or academic. We as a community urge you to make yourself--your own health, sanity, and wellness--your priority throughout this term and your career here. Sleep, exercise, and eating well can all be a part of a healthy regimen to cope with stress. Resources exist to support you in several sectors of your life, and we encourage you to make use of them. Should you have any questions about navigating these resources, please visit the sites listed here: <https://barnard.edu/blais/faculty-resources#wellness>

### Course Schedule and Readings

*Please note that these readings are subject to change and any changes will be announced. Please check the syllabus weekly.*

#### Epistemology

9/5 – Introduction to the Course; Plato – *Meno*

9/10 – Plato – *Meno*

9/12 – Descartes – *Meditations* 1 & 2

9/17 – Descartes – *Meditations* 4

9/19 - Hume - *Enquiry* Sections 1-3

9/24 - Hume - *Enquiry* Sections 4-5

#### Mind-Body Problem

9/26 – Plato – *Phaedo*

10/1 – Plato - *Phaedo*

10/3 - Descartes – *Meditations* 6; Descartes’s Correspondence with Elizabeth

10/8 - Berkeley – *Principles* –Sections 1 – 33

10/10 - Berkeley – *Principles* –Sections 34 – 72 (Pick five objections to read)

10/15 - Aristotle – *De Anima* – Book 1-2; **Paper 1 Draft Due**

10/17 – Aristotle – *De Anima* – Book 2-3

#### Philosophy of Religion

10/22 – **Midterm Exam Day; Paper 1 Peer Review Due**

10/24 – Descartes – *Meditations* 3, 5

10/29 – Hume – *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Parts 2-7)

10/31 – Hume – *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Parts 9-11) **Paper 1 Final Due**

11/5 – **NO CLASS**

11/7 – Murray – “Coercion and the Hiddenness of God”

11/12 – James – “The Will to Believe”

11/14 - Wittgenstein – “Lectures on Religious Belief”

## Foundations of Morality

11/19 – Kierkegaard- *Fear and Trembling* (selections)

11/21 – **NO CLASS**

11/26 - Nagel – Moral Luck; **Paper 2 Draft Due**

11/28 - Wolf - Moral Saints

12/3 - Foot – “Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives”; **Paper 2 Peer Review Due**

12/5 – Marcus – “Moral Dilemmas and Consistency”

12/10 – Last Day of Class; Final Exam Review; **Paper 2 Final Due**