

Introduction to Philosophy

**PHIL 101:02 (4 cr.)
Skidmore College
Spring 2012**

Instructor:	Catherine McKeen	Office:	Ladd 214
Class times:	M 11:15-12:10 and Tues. & Thurs. 11:10-12:30	Office hrs:	M 10-11am and Tues & Thur 8:30-9:30am and by appointment
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Course description:

Philosophy asks “fundamental” questions. That is, philosophy asks questions that aim at central concerns in human life and about the nature of reality. In addition, philosophy utilizes a collection of specialized tools to think about and respond to these questions. So, philosophers are particularly concerned to pay careful attention to our uses of language and concepts; they are concerned with the uses of evidence in supporting claims; and they are interested in investigating the ways we reason to conclusions.

In this course, we will explore three main areas of philosophical investigation: soul, God, and free will. Questions in these areas include (1) It seems to many people that human beings have souls – what is it to have a soul? How are souls related to bodies? (2) It seems to many people that God exists – is anyone justified in believing that God exists? (3) It seems that we freely choose our actions – do we really? Is freely acting compatible with living in a world with physical laws?

In exploring these areas of inquiry, we will be closely working with some influential texts in the history of philosophy. We will also be using some of the tools that have been developed by philosophers – analysis, reason, and argument. You will learn what philosophers have thought (and do think) about these central questions. You will also get some practice in doing philosophy.

What can you expect to get out of this class?

This course will give you a solid grounding in the Western philosophical tradition. If you go on to do further work in philosophy, such grounding is crucial. Having an understanding of where philosophy has travelled will help you to better understand where philosophy is now, and where it is going.

Even if this is the only philosophy class you ever take, it can importantly enrich your education. Philosophy provides the foundation for the Western intellectual tradition, and so has influenced every other academic discipline. For this reason, philosophy is a mainstay of the liberal arts. Discussions in intellectual and public life are often informed by the philosophical tradition, even when this is not obvious. Philosophy also helps one to read more carefully, to ask better questions, to think clearly, and to write more cogently.

Materials.

The following texts are required for this course. You should plan on using the editions that are listed below:

Five Dialogues, Plato, trans. Grube, ed. Cooper, Hackett Publishing, ISBN-13: 978-0872206335

On Free Choice of the Will, Augustine, trans. and intro. Thomas Williams, Hackett Publishing, ISBN-13: 978-0872201880

Meditations, Rene Descartes, ed. and trans. Ariew and Cress, Hackett Publishing, ISBN-13: 978-0872207981

Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, David Hume, ed. Popkin, Hackett Publishing, ISBN-13: 978-0872204027

Course pack available through the Skidmore Shop.

Contact and availability.

I don't believe that philosophy stops at the classroom walls. As Socrates noted, to spend one's days talking philosophy is one of the great joys of life. So, I welcome the chance to talk outside of class about philosophy, ideas, the course, your education, your progress, your plans, or just about life in general. My office hours are listed above. I hope you'll come by sometime during the semester to chat.

If you have a short question about any aspect of the class and need a quick response, then email is the best way to reach me (cmckeen@skidmore.edu). Usually, I'll get back to you within 12 hours.

Life is not perfect, and we can expect there will be difficulties. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with me about any issues or problems you run up against. I can't promise to have an easy answer, but I can promise to help you work through it. Earlier is better than later.

Course work and expectations.

Preparation – You should expect to regularly attend class and to come prepared. Being prepared means that you have read the material for class, and that you’ve read in a thorough and thoughtful way. You should give yourself enough time to think carefully about what you have read, and you should come to class with questions and thoughts about the readings. You can expect that the readings will often make strong demands on you. If you are reading well, they should. So, give yourself plenty of time to read, re-read, and reflect on the readings.

Exams – There will be three take-home exams for this course. The exams are designed to allow you to show progress in understanding the material, analyzing texts, and in working with arguments. For these exams, you’ll be given several essay prompts and you’ll be asked to write 3-4 short essays in response. You’ll be required to turn in a printed copy of your full exam in class. You will also be required to turn in a digital copy to SafeAssign on our course’s Blackboard site by the due date. I will provide more details about the essay exams in class.

Class participation – Philosophy works through discussion, so discussion is a key part of this course. You should expect to participate in class discussions. Participation can happen in a number of ways: raising questions about the material; bringing up philosophical issues for us to think about; active listening to what others are saying; responding to what others say. In all cases, your presence (mentally and physically) is required.

Other work – There will be weekly short assignments for this course. Usually, these will be short answer responses to the readings. Typically I will send the prompt to you by Friday, and your response will be due in class on Monday.

Evaluation.

I will evaluate your work for this course based on how well you (a) demonstrate strong positive involvement with and understanding of the course material; (b) demonstrate progress towards rigorous, coherent and in-depth philosophical thinking in your written work; (c) demonstrate active and honest engagement in class meetings.

Class work will be weighted as follows in your course grade:

1 st essay exam:	25%
2 nd essay exam:	25%
3 rd essay exam:	25%
Other work:	15%
Participation:	10%

Nota bene: The following will result in failure of the course: (a) failure to turn in one or more essay exam; (b) absence from 6 or more class meetings; (c) demonstrated Honor Code violation.

Due dates.

1 st essay exam	handed out: 2/14	due back: 2/20
2 nd essay exam	handed out: 3/29	due back: 4/3
3 rd essay exam	handed out: 5/1	due back: 5/8

Course policies.

Attendance. Much of our class time will be devoted to working through the course material in discussion. You can't do the work for the class, then, if you are not present. You should plan to attend every class meeting. Aside from the intrinsic benefits, excellent attendance will be reflected in your participation grade, and can count for up to 1/3 a grade (so the difference between a C+ and B-, or B- and B, e.g.). Absences over 4 will be subject to penalty to your participation grade. If you miss six or more classes, you will be asked to withdraw from the course (subject to failure).

If you do miss a class meeting, you are responsible for the work for that class, including any notes or material discussed in class. You cannot make up short assignments that were done in class. If you will miss class, and know it in advance, you should let me know in advance. If you miss class due to a late-breaking emergency, you should let me know as soon as is feasible.

Lateness, leaving during class. You are expected to be on time to class, to stay for the entire class. Frequent latenesses or entrances and exits are distracting and negatively affect class discussions. So please keep these to a minimum.

Electronic devices. Using electronic devices in class hinders your full participation in class discussion and distracts others. All electronic devices (I-pods, laptops, cell phones, etc.) should be turned off and safely stowed during class meetings. If you have a learning issue that requires an electronic device, get in touch with me so that we can work out some guidelines for classroom use.

Format of written work. Written work should be word-processed in a readable 11 or 12 pt. font. Essays should be double-spaced and with margins of 1 inch around. You should number your pages and staple. No title page is needed, but you should include your name, the course, and the date on the first page.

Make-up assignments. In-class work cannot be made up. Short assignments missed because of illness, family emergencies, or other legitimate reasons are eligible to be made up, but this is not automatic and you must contact me close to the assignment deadline (within 24-48 hours). Short assignments missed for other reasons cannot be made up. There are no make-up exams.

Submission of work. Short assignments will be due in class or through Blackboard. Hard-copies of the first two essay exams will be collected at the start of the classes in which they are due.

You will also need to submit a digital copy of your essay exam through our Blackboard site by 5pm on the due-date. The 3rd essay exam will be due to my mailbox in the Philosophy Department, Ladd Hall. **No late essay exams will be accepted.**

Academic integrity.

All of your work for this course is subject to the College's Honor Code. In this course, as in all college courses, your written work should represent your own ideas, interpretations, and research. If your written work consists mostly of the thoughts of others, this is a problem. You can make some *limited* use of others' work, but this must always be done with appropriate citation. (In philosophy, either MLA or APA format is appropriate.) It is *never* acceptable to borrow someone else's words, ideas, interpretations or research without noting that you are doing so -- this includes any and all material that is posted on the internet, appears in a blog or a social networking site, is from an online encyclopedia or other reference work, is heard on the radio or t.v., is given in conversation, or appears in print. After all, borrowing without permission goes by the somewhat less nice name of "stealing".

Here are some specific guidelines for our class:

Allowed – discussing the material and ideas of the class outside of class; studying together; group work in class; citing any sources you consult in your written work; using notes and texts to prepare for take-home essay exams.

Not allowed – cutting and pasting from internet sources; relying on the work of others without citation; consulting others while writing essay exams; using internet or secondary sources while writing essay exams.

I take violations of academic integrity seriously. I will thoroughly investigate any suspected cases. And I will pursue the severest penalties for proven cases of academic dishonesty.

Sometimes people are confused about what exactly constitutes plagiarism or what academic dishonesty involves. Such confusion can have disastrous consequences if it results in a violation. So, if you have any questions at all, please ask me.

Accommodation.

If you have a disability that requires accommodation, please let me know early in the semester so that we can determine a viable plan for your work. You should also contact the Office of Student Academic Services (518-580-8150).

Class plan.

What follows is the plan for the course over the semester. If there are changes to this plan, I will let you know in advance. The readings are listed under the dates that will be discussing those

texts in class. So, you should read and prepare those texts *before* the date listed. Page numbers refer to the bookstore editions of the texts.

FD = Five Dialogues
Meds. = Meditations
CR = course reader

FCW = On Free Choice of the Will
DNR = Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion

Week 1: Introduction
M 1/23 first day

I. Soul and body

Tu 1/24 The philosopher practices for death
readings: Plato: *Phaedo* FD, pp. 93-123 (57a-84d)

W 1/25 – add deadline

Th 1/26 The immortality of the soul
readings: Plato: *Phaedo* FD, pp. 123-154 (84e-118a)

Week 2: Cartesian dualism
M 1/30 Questioning the external world
readings: Rene Descartes, Introduction and *Meditation I* Meds., pp. 1-13

Tu 1/31 *Cogito ergo sum*
readings: Rene Descartes, *Meditation II* Meds., pp. 13-19

Th 2/2 Rene Descartes, *Meditations III, IV and V* Meds., pp. 19-39

Week 3: Responses to Cartesian dualism
M 2/6 Not as a sailor in a ship
readings: Rene Descartes, *Meditation VI* Meds., pp. 40-50

M2/6 – drop deadline

Tu 2/7 Mind-body interaction
readings: excerpt from correspondence between
Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia and Descartes Elizabeth, CR

Th 2/9 The ghost in the machine
readings: Gilbert Ryle, "Descartes' Myth" Ryle, CR

Week 4: Responses to dualism

M 2/13 Consciousness

readings: Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be A Bat?" Nagel, CR

Tu 2/14 wrap-up on soul-body

**** Tues. 2/14 – first essay exam handed out in class; due back Mon. 2/20****

Th 2/16 no class meeting

**** Mon. 2/20 – first essay exam due in class ****

II. God and religious belief

Week 5: Should we believe in God?

M 2/20 Wagering on God; prudential reasons

readings: excerpt from Blaise Pascal, *Pensees* Pascal, CR

Tu 2/21 Rational religious faith?

readings: Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*,
preface and Part I DNR, pp. 1-12

Th 2/23 Grounds for belief

Hume's *Dialogues*, Parts II & III DNR, pp. 13-27

Week 6: Causal and cosmological arguments

M 2/27 First causes

Aquinas, *The Five Ways* Blackboard

Tu 2/28

readings: Descartes, *Meditation III* Meds. pp. 19-29

Th 3/1 Responses to cosmological arguments for God

readings: Hume, *Dialogues*, Part IX DNR, pp. 54-57

Week 7: Arguments from design

M 3/5 From the watch to the watch-maker

readings: excerpts from William Paley, *Natural Theology*;

Tu 3/6 Hume, *Dialogues*, Parts IV, V, VI

DNR, pp. 28-43

Th 3/8 Nature by design?

Hume, *Dialogues*, Parts VII & VIII DNR, pp.44-53

Week 8: spring break 3/10-3/18 – no class meetings

Week 9: Ontological arguments

M 3/19 A being than which none is greater
readings: excerpt from Anselm, *Proslogion* Anselm I, CR

Tu 3/20 Descartes' version of the ontological argument
readings: Rene Descartes, *Meditation V* Meds. pp. 35-40

Th 3/22 The fool responds
Guanilo's "Response on Behalf of the Fool"
excerpt from Anselm, *Proslogion* Guanilo, CR
Anselm II, CR

Week 10: The problem of evil

M 3/26 Is God's existence compatible with evil?
readings: J. J. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" Mackie, CR

Tu 3/27 Hume's skeptical solution
readings: David Hume, *Dialogues*, Parts X-XII DNR, pp. 58-89

Th 3/29 wrap-up on God

**** Thurs. 3/29 – second essay exam handed out in class; due back Tues. 4/3****

III. Free will and free choice

Week 11: Free will theodicy

M 4/2
readings: excerpts from Gottfried Leibniz, *Theodicy* Leibniz, CR
Rene Descartes, *Meditation IV* Meds., pp. 29-35

4/2-4/6 – advising week

Tu 4/3 Free will and God's omniscience
readings: Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*, Book III FCW, pp. 1-96, secs. 1-12

**** Tues. 4/3 – second essay exam due in class ****

Th 4/5 What makes us responsible for our actions?
readings: Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*, Book III FCW, pp. 96-123, secs. 13-24

Week 12:	Determinism and causality	
M 4/9	All action is determined; there is no free will	
readings:	excerpt from Holbach, <i>Systems of Nature</i>	Holbach, CR
	M 4/9 – fall registration begins	
Tu 4/10	Causes and actions	
readings:	David Hume, excerpt from <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> , sec. VII	Hume, <i>Enquiry</i> , CR
	Tu 4/10 – withdrawal deadline	
Th 4/12	Hume’s compatibilism	
readings:	David Hume, excerpt from <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> , sec. VIII	Hume, <i>Enquiry</i> , CR
Week 13:	Incompatibilism	
M 4/16	You can’t change the past	
readings:	van Inwagen, “The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism”	van Inwagen, CR
Tu 4/17	There is no free will	
readings:	Derk Pereboom, “Determinism, Al dente”	Pereboom, Blackboard
Th 4/19	What kind of freedom is needed for moral responsibility?	
readings:	Harry Frankfurt, “Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”	Frankfurt, CR
Week 14:	Moral responsibility	
M 4/23	Responsibility and luck	
readings:	Bernard Williams, “Moral Luck”	Williams, CR
Tu 4/24	Moral luck	
readings:	Thomas Nagel, “Moral Luck”	Nagel, CR
Th 4/26	wrap-up on free will	
Tu 5/1	last day	

****Tu 5/1– third essay exam handed out in class; due Tu 5/8 ****

