

Department of Philosophy

PHL 201-3: Introduction to Philosophy

Semester I, 2015-2016

I. Course Welcome and Introduction

Are you a good person? How do you know if you are? Is the goodness of a person relative to the person, the community in which she or he lives, or is there a sense in which the question of goodness is true for all persons regardless of where and when they are born? Again, how do we know?

These questions, and many others, are the focus of Introduction to Philosophy. In this course, we are more concerned with the questions themselves than with the answers to those questions. We'll look at various responses, to be sure, but our primary task is to get to the point of asking the best questions given the topic of the conversation. While the questions will range from God's existence to that of human nature, and in a number of other directions, as well, our topics will be grouped under three main questions that we get from the great Prussian philosopher, Immanuel Kant: What can we know?, What is there?, and How ought we live? The first question (What can we know?) leads us in the direction of human knowledge. For example, we all know that grass is green so long as it is well watered and gets lots of sun, don't we? What color is it for someone who is red-green color blind? Is that person just wrong about the color since she or he sees it as red? If so, why is this the case—is it just because she or he is in the minority? Is the question reducible to a scientific one? If so, why are the sciences privileged when determining whether or not a person's perceptions fairly match "the world". Why not psychology...religion...the arts? The second question (What is there?) raises all sorts of topics for discussion, like the nature and existence of God, the question of human freedom, the status of beauty and whether or not it is in the eye of the beholder. The third question (How ought we live?) raises the issue of how humans should live their lives, especially in a community, and the extent to which the way each person lives her or his life affects her or his own well being and the well-being of others. We will hear a lot about this third question in the dorm, chapel, time-out, and it deserves our careful, sustained, reflective consideration.

It perhaps bears repeating that the questions themselves are more the focus than the possible responses to those questions. The questions of philosophy are the perennial questions of human existence. Whether in the past, present, or future, we all eventually face the problem of human suffering. We all wonder at our significance in a universe with more than a 100 billion galaxies, each with billions of stars (200-400 billion in our galaxy), and untold planets, some of which are like ours in aspects that are relevant to the development of carbon based life (around 100 million capable of sustaining life in the Milky Way and around 8-20 million capable of sustaining complex life). This course raises, in an intentional way, these and other matters. For many of us, this will be a strange and unfamiliar exercise, for the world has become for many a rather ordinary and well known place—it has lost its wonder—and it has ever been this way. These questions will unsettle our complacency, increase our sense of wonder at God, our surroundings, and ourselves, and challenge our belief that we know the so-called commonplace. My hope is that during our conversation this semester, we will all gain a greater awareness and appreciation for the complexity in our world, the diversity of opinion, even on common, but important, subjects, and for the contribution that we all bring to the table as persons engaged in an inquiry after truth.

So, welcome to philosophy. I challenge you to treat our time together not merely as a general education hurdle, but as an opportunity to creatively engage yourself, others, and the world from a fresh perspective. Let the conversation begin.

II. General Information

Meetings: MWF: 1:30pm-2:25pm
Room, SB 100

Professor: Rob Thompson
Office: Sme Hall 207
Phone: 849-2930
Office Hours: See schedule on office door and by appointment.
E-mail: robertthompson@pointloma.edu
Text: Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings, John Perry, Michael Bratman, and John Martin Fischer, eds. (7th ed.)

III. University Mission

PLNU exists to provide higher education in a vital Christian community where minds are engaged and challenged, character is modeled and formed, and service becomes an expression of faith. Being of Wesleyan heritage, we aspire to be a learning community where grace is foundational, truth is pursued, and holiness is a way of life.

IV. Course Learning Outcomes

1. Students will recognize and appreciate their connection as human beings to the world of ideas and the rich history of that world as found in the western philosophical tradition.
2. Students will engage in the disciplined practice of asking questions about the world, God, humans, and of themselves, including questions for which there may be no easy answers, so as to perpetuate this practice in their lives and provide a means to assess the responses others give to these questions.
3. Students will recognize and appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of human reason and experience to provide an adequate account of the human, the world, ethics, and God, and appreciate how these bear on matters of Christian faith and practice.

V. Course Requirements and Grading

Attendance: Attend every class session. No make-ups will be allowed for any required work unless the cause of the absence is one of the following: documented illness, religious observance, travel due to a sanctioned university event (e.g., team sports, musical presentation—be sure to see me to get such an absence cleared before missing the class). In cases where the absence is sanctioned, only work that is required for that particular day can be made up (excluding Reading and Reflection papers, as these papers cannot be made up). As always, you are responsible for the content of any missed class.

Per the University's attendance policy, any student who misses more than 20% of the course may be de-enrolled without appeal. In addition to no credit being gained for the course, you may receive a failing grade on your transcript if de-enrollment occurs after the last day to drop a semester class. As with any course requirement, you bear the responsibility to insure that the attendance requirement is met. Significant tardiness may count as an absence.

Participation: Participate in class. Please feel free to ask questions or make comments at any time that are relevant to the material we are covering. At times I may ask you a direct question. On such occasions, you are always free to pass on answering the question.

Readings: Read all of the assigned material before coming to class.

15% Reading Reflection Papers: To help facilitate reading comprehension and class discussion, you are expected to complete a total of ten (10) 2 page, typed, double-spaced summary/reflection papers over the course of the semester. Each paper should briefly summarize every primary source reading for a given day (roughly a page) and then offer your own critical reflection on some aspect (your choice) of the readings for that day (roughly a page). No make-ups will be allowed under any circumstance (no exceptions), as there is ample opportunity to complete the requirement over the course of the semester, and you must attend the class session for which the relevant readings are scheduled to be read, per the syllabus, in order for that R&R paper to count toward the total. Papers are due by the beginning of the period and should be submitted in hard copy.

Note: If you do not receive credit for a summary/reflection paper, then at least one of the following has occurred:

1. the paper is too short either in summary or critical reflection,
2. the paper does not cover all of the primary source readings for the day (more than one in several cases),
3. the paper is not turned in by the beginning of the class period on the day that the reading(s) is (are) scheduled to be covered,
4. the paper does not represent a serious effort to read and respond to the reading(s), or
5. you were not in class on the relevant day. (Note: there are no exceptions for this last requirement, including illness, school activities or functions, special life events, etc. Because of this, those who participate in any school activities, including sports and music groups, should plan their semester accordingly.)

60% In Class Content Exams: There will be three in-class content exams, including the final, and you are expected to complete all of these exams. The exams will test over the texts, the lecture notes, and any class discussion, and will tend toward objective style questions, though there may also be some short answer questions. The nature of the course material is comprehensive, so the exams will tend that way as well. These will be closed book exams. Each exam is 20% of the final grade. (**Note: the final exam must be taken as scheduled. Any (very rare) exception should be cleared by the end of the first week of classes.**)

25% Take Home Essay Exam: There will be three take home essay exams offered as options, including the final exam, from which you are expected to choose one to complete. The essay exams correspond to the in-class content exams in that they cover the same material. However, you will have one week to respond to the essay questions (there will be multiple questions for each essay exam) before your essays are due. The idea behind the take home essay exam is to allow you sufficient time to critically and creatively engage the questions raised by the subject matter covered in that exam. They also afford you an opportunity to refine your general writing skills and to gain and/or hone the skill of philosophical writing. Given the added time, essays are expected to be polished and of high quality. The particular essays in each essay exam should stand-alone from one another, be of sufficient length to adequately address the related question and/or to meet the length requirement, which is a minimum requirement of 5-6 pages (and 1500-2000 words) for each exam, and employ standard methods of citation (MLA/APA). (Check essay exam prompts for further requirements and instructions.) You may use the textbook and notes, as well as other research, though not Wikipedia; however, the essay must clearly represent your own work (see Academic Misconduct Policy, especially as it relates to plagiarism). The essay exams will test over the texts, the lecture notes, and any class discussion.

The nature of the course material is comprehensive, so the exams will tend that way as well. Each essay exam is 25% of the final grade and you will choose one of the three essay exam options to complete, each one of which will consist of multiple questions. Note: only one essay exam counts toward your final grade and only one, the first one you submit, will be graded.

Late work and extra credit: No unsanctioned late work will be accepted. Extra credit is very rare and is only offered to the entire class.

VI. Miscellany

1. *Academic Misconduct Policy:* Academic misconduct includes plagiarism and the use of unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any exam or other academic exercise. It also includes assisting others in any attempt to cheat. It will not be tolerated. However, respect for academic honesty is consistent with discussing the ideas of the course with others. In fact, I encourage you to discuss any and all of the course material that you find interesting outside of class. In the end, however, you must do your written work on your own. If you have any questions about academic honesty, either in general or in particular, please ask me.

A special note on plagiarism is warranted. Each of you is responsible to know what plagiarism is and to avoid even the appearance of plagiarism in your work. No act of plagiarism, whether born of one's intention or ignorance, will be tolerated in this class. Anyone caught plagiarizing will incur severe academic punishment. Such punishment will include a grade of zero for the plagiarized work, and may also include expulsion with a failing grade from the course. The student's name and an explanation of the incident will also be forwarded to the Department Chair/School Dean and the area Dean. The area Dean will review the report and submit it to the Provost and the Vice President for Student Development. It will also be placed in the student's permanent academic file. Please see the University policy stated in the catalogue.

2. *Harassment Policy:* Racial, sexual, and ethnic harassment, and any other type of disruptive behavior, are not conducive to a good learning environment. These behaviors will not be tolerated. However, I encourage all students to be open to any honest and tactful discussion of issues that might arise in the context of our learning.

3. *Reasonable Accommodation Policy:* All students are expected to meet the standards for this course as set by the instructor. However, students who may need accommodations should discuss options with the Academic Support Center during the first two weeks of class. The ASC will contact professors with suggested classroom needs and accommodations. Approved documentation must be on file in the ASC prior to the start of the semester.

4. *Inclusive Language Policy:* The use of inclusive language is now prevalent, even expected, throughout most sectors of our society (e.g., academia, government, business, religious organizations). Further, inclusive language is very often a more accurate and fair representation of the intended meaning of a person's communicative content. As such, everyone is expected to make use of inclusive language in all written work. The avoidance of such use in a given project will result in a lowering of the grade for that project. In addition, everyone is expected to make use of inclusive language during classroom discussions.