

# Introduction to Philosophy: Knowledge and Reality

Philosophy 100

Prof. Brandon C. Look

Fall 2008

Lectures: TR 12:30-1:20 pm

CB 106

Course website:

[www.uky.edu/~look/Phi100main.htm](http://www.uky.edu/~look/Phi100main.htm)

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## Teaching Assistants:

Jesse Delaney

Sections 4, 7, 9

R 9:30-10:20 NURS 501C

T 2:00-2:50 BOW 422

R 8:00-8:50 CB 207

Office: 1402 POT

Office Hours: M 3:00-5:00;

T 3:00-4:00

E-mail: [jesse.delaney@uky.edu](mailto:jesse.delaney@uky.edu)

Adam Labecki

Sections 1, 3, 8

M 9:00-9:50 CP 201

W 9:00-9:50 CP 201

W 10:00-10:50 TPC 101

Office: 1402 POT

Office Hours: M 10:00-11:00;

W 11:00-12:00

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Philippa Satterwhite

Sections 2, 5, 6

T 9:30-10:20 NURS 501C

F 9:00-9:50 CP 201

M 10:00-10:50 TPC 101

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Office Hours: M 11:00-1:00;

F 10:00-11:00

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## Course Description:

This course is an introduction to philosophy and to the themes and issues of two of its branches: metaphysics (“What is there?”) and epistemology (“What can we know?”).

We will address the following questions:

- Does God exist? Or, are we rationally justified in believing that God exists?
- Is the existence of God possible given the apparent evil in the world?
- What can we know about the self?
- What can we know about the world?
- What is the relation between the mind and the body?
- Is the mind identical to the brain?
- Can a computer think?
- If materialism is true, how can we understand the phenomenon of consciousness?
- What makes you the same person over time?
- In what sense (if any) are we free?

The course will have two components: the first, twice-weekly *lectures* by the professor concerning the assigned readings; the second, once-weekly *discussion* sections run by the teaching assistants. It is my hope that students will thereby learn not only through the lectures about the content of the discipline of philosophy but also through the discussion sections what it means “to do philosophy.”

It is something of truism, but let it be nevertheless said: what you get out of this course depends to a great deal upon what you put into it.

## Course Requirements and Expectations:

Final grades will be based on four separate components and weighted in the following way:

- (1) 20% “Reflection” Papers
- (2) 20% Class Participation
- (3) 20% Mid-term Exam
- (4) 40% Final Exam

Because the success of this course depends largely on your *reading* and *reflecting* on the assigned texts and attending and thinking about the lectures, you will be required to submit very short weekly “reflection papers”. These papers are to be *no more than* 200 words in length (and typewritten or computer-printed) and are to be handed in to your teaching assistant at the *beginning of your recitation section*. Each one is to address the following question:

What, to your mind, is the most interesting and important unanswered question raised in or by the previous week’s readings and lectures and why?

By “unanswered question” I mean an interesting and important *difficult* question – one to which there is, so far as you can tell, no easy or obvious answer. It is a question you would like the answer to but do not know what it is. If, after stating the question, you can provide a simple answer to it, the question is not a good one. After stating the question, you need to explain why it is interesting, difficult and important.

The point of these exercises is for you to develop the ability to ask good questions. That sounds easy, but it is not. And the ability to ask good, hard questions is central to the philosophical enterprise.

These assignments will begin the week of September 8-12 and run through the week of December 1-5. There will be no assignments October 13-17 (Mid-term on October 16), and November 24-28 (Thanksgiving). That means there will be a total of *eleven* papers. Each piece will be graded according to the following scale: 2 = demonstrates that you have read, understood, and thought about the issues; 1 = shows some engagement with the texts and lectures, but the question, in the end, lacks insight into the material; 0 = nothing handed in or a clear case of not having done the reading or thought about the material.

This course – indeed, philosophy as a discipline in general – also depends upon your willingness and ability to *discuss* the ideas and issues that arise from these texts and the lectures. Therefore, you will be graded upon your participation in the discussion sections – but in this way: at the end of the term, each of you will be asked to grade the students in your discussion section as well as yourself. In grading, you should ask yourself: How consistently, interestingly, insightfully did your classmate (or you yourself) contribute to class discussion. How much did you benefit from the comments your classmate made? Did your classmate attend the sections regularly? Did he or she treat others with *respect*? – Note: you can treat someone with respect even while you are disagreeing with him or her and destroying his or her arguments about a topic. And you can demonstrate contempt for someone by letting a comment go with, “Yeah, whatever you say.” The

point is this: are you concerned about the *truth*, about figuring about what is *right* or a *good argument*? Are you trying to *help* yourself and others to get to those end-points? If so, that's good. If, on the other hand, someone is merely trying to show off intellectually by scoring argumentative points at the cost of someone else; if someone explicitly or implicitly suggests that the views of any or all classmates are unimportant or below him or her; well, that's not good. Please recognize too that if, in a normal philosophical exchange, *your own* views are questioned, challenged or criticized, you should not be *personally* offended. In other words, if you are concerned about truth and the clarity of your views, you should welcome philosophical criticism.

At the end of the semester, you will be graded on classroom participation. More exactly, at the last meeting of your discussion section, you will be asked to grade each other (and yourself). Criteria include: preparedness, insightfulness, helpfulness; as well as, slothfulness and jerkiness. In short, you are to ask yourself, "How positive was this person's presence in this section? How much did he or she contribute to our learning experience?" In addition, your TA will take attendance and for every absence after a first unexcused absence your participation grade will go down one full grade.

Finally, the exams will consist entirely of essay questions of the form "How does *so-and-so* argue for *x*?" or, taking any of the questions listed above, "What do you think and why?" The blog mentioned below has very helpful self-study questions, as does the textbook itself. And I will offer more than enough suggestions and hints that there will be no surprises about the nature and character of the questions. What will be important is your mastery of the material.

### **Required Texts:**

- *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, edited by John Perry, Michael Bratman, and John Martin Fischer, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Please note: there is a blog for this book run by John Martin Fischer ([http://gfp.typepad.com/intro\\_to\\_philosophy](http://gfp.typepad.com/intro_to_philosophy)). It contains lots of good information and links to resources.

### **Various Policies:**

- Cheating and plagiarism will be dealt with very harshly. (Consult UK's student regulations for a description of the possible penalties.)
- Except in extraordinary circumstances, no incompletes will be given.
- Students are to have done the assigned reading *prior* to class.
- Turn off your cell phones!
- No laptops in class. (Why? In my experience, 10% of students take notes; 90% surf the net and play on Facebook.)

## **Schedule**

8/28 Class Mechanics  
Introduction: What is Philosophy?

### **Philosophy and the Meaning of Life**

9/2 Reading: Russell, *The Value of Philosophy*, pp. 9-12  
Nagel, *The Absurd*, pp. 21-28  
9/4 Reading: Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, pp. 43-45;  
Taylor, *The Meaning of Human Existence*, pp. 45-62

### **The Existence of God and the Problem of Evil**

9/9 Reading: Anselm, *The Ontological Argument*, pp. 78-79  
9/11 Reading: Aquinas, *The Five Ways*, pp. 80-82;  
Pascal, *The Wager*, pp. 82-86  
  
9/16 Reading: Russell, *Why I Am Not a Theist*, pp. 86-90  
9/18 Reading: Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, pp. 91-107  
  
9/23 Reading: Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, pp. 107-25  
9/25 Reading: Perry, *Dialogue on Good, Evil and the Existence of God*, pp. 133-45  
  
9/30 Reading: Perry, *Dialogue on Good, Evil and the Existence of God*, pp. 145-56

### **Knowledge and Skepticism**

10/2 Reading: Descartes, *Meditations I-II*, pp. 171-76  
  
10/7 Reading: Descartes, *Meditations III-IV*, pp. 176-85  
10/9 Reading: Descartes, *Meditations V-VI*, pp. 186-95  
  
10/14 Reading: Grau, *Bad Dreams, Evil Demons, etc.*, pp. 195-202  
10/16 **Mid-Term Exam**  
  
10/21 Reading: Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, pp. 225-34  
10/23 Reading: Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, pp. 234-40  
  
10/28 Reading: Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, pp. 240-51

### **Mind, Body, and Self**

10/30 Reading: Russell, *The Argument from Analogy*, pp. 285-287;  
Ryle, *Descartes's Myth*, pp. 287-94;  
Churchland, *Eliminative Materialism*, pp. 321-25

- 11/4 **Election Day. Go out and vote!**  
11/6 Reading: Searle, *Minds, Brains, and Programs*, pp. 341-53
- 11/11 Reading: Nagel, *What Is It Like to Be a Bat?* pp. 354-62  
11/13 Reading: Jackson, *What Mary Didn't Know*, pp. 363-66;  
Lewis, *Knowing What It's Like*, pp. 366-67
- 11/18 Reading: Perry, *Dialogue*, pp. 368-82  
11/20 Reading: Perry, *Dialogue*, pp. 382-88

### ***Interlude***

- 11/25 Reading: Singer, *Famine, Affluence, and Morality*, pp. 527-35  
11/27 Thanksgiving

### **Freedom and Determinism**

- 12/2 Reading: Chisholm, *Human Freedom and the Self*, pp. 421-28  
12/4 Reading: Van Inwagen, *The Powers of Rational Beings*, pp. 428-40
- 12/9 Reading: Taylor, *Freedom and Determinism*, pp. 451-63  
12/11 Reading: Frankfurt, *Freedom of the Will...*, pp. 470-80  
Review
- 12/16 **Final Exam 10:30am-12:30pm**