

PHIL 206: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

Cuesta College | Fall 2010

1. CONTACT INFO

LECTURE INFORMATION

Time: T R 4:30pm - 7:20pm (w/breaks)

Location: 6303 SLO

CRN: 70248

Start-End Dates: 10/18/10 - 12/17/10

Web page: (access via myCuesta)

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Joshua May

Office: 6900, cubicle 2561

Email: joshdmay@gmail.com

Website: www.joshdmay.com

Office Hours: by appt.

2. BASIC COURSE INFO

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, students will be introduced to the discipline of philosophy (of the western, analytic sort). The introduction will be to both the characteristic *methods* and *works* in the discipline. We will do this by understanding (and, to some extent, evaluating) work in some of the major fields of philosophy: *metaphysics*, *epistemology*, and *ethics*.

The main topics we'll cover in the course are:

1. *God*: Is there any evidence for or against the existence of a God?
2. *Mind*: What is the relationship between mind and body? Is a mind a physical thing?
3. *Free Will*: Can we have free will or be responsible for anything if everything is determined?
4. *Ethics*: What should I do? Why should I be moral? Are we all ultimately just self-interested?
5. *Knowledge*: What is it to know something? Do I really know, say, that I'm not in the Matrix?
6. *Personal Identity*: What secures one's identity over time? Is it, say, having the same mind?

The material covered in the course will include selections from both current and historically important philosophers.

OUTCOME & OBJECTIVES

Knowledge

The student should acquire and demonstrate a knowledge of:

- a. the basis of the broad divisions within the field of philosophy such as epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, political philosophy, and the philosophy of religion.
- b. some of the intellectual and spiritual problems confronting humans which have given rise to philosophical inquiry.
- c. the historical and cultural context which mediated and determined the direction and approach taken by various major philosophers to the problem studied.
- d. the impact of these philosophers' views on their world and the significance of them for the modern world.
- e. the methods and techniques of philosophical inquiry as compared with those in other disciplines, e.g., science.

Skills

The student should be able to:

- a. form and evaluate his/her personal convictions with proper regard for intellectual clarity and integrity.
- b. identify and formulate the major assumptions that inform philosophical positions.
- c. recognize the elements of proper argumentation, viz., specifying the purpose, recognizing correct argumentative strategies, and distinguishing relevant from irrelevant points.
- d. write coherently analytical essays on philosophical material--explaining, expounding, comparing, and contrasting.

REQUIRED TEXTS

(1) *Knowledge, Nature, and Norms: An Introduction to Philosophy*, 1st ed. (Wadsworth, 2009) by Mark Timmons & David Shoemaker. ISBN-13: 978-0-495-09722-8

(2) Additional readings will be provided electronically on the *myCuesta* course page.

MATERIAL COVERED

We will be discussing material primarily from the text. However, we *may not cover everything in the assigned reading*, and quite often *material will be brought up in lecture that is not in the readings*. So it's crucial that you come to class. Likewise, there may be *some material in the readings you'll be accountable for that we don't discuss in detail in lecture*.

UPDATES

Electronic announcements and updates will be made occasionally on the *myCuesta* page. Check frequently if they aren't emailed to you.

HANDOUTS/SLIDES

There will be some handouts from time to time, and they will be available on the course web page. These are to help students catch up who miss class for legitimate reasons. I'm also doing this so students don't have to take such copious notes during class. Keep in mind, though, the handouts will be rather *bare*. You'll need to supplement them with your *own notes* from class.

3. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Participation, Etc.	(in class)	10% of grade	(Due: N/A)	[weekly]
2. Quizzes	(in class)	15% of grade	(Due: TBA , ~6 during term)	[≈weekly]
3. Mid-Term	(in class)	20% of grade	(Date: R 11/11)	[4 th week]
4. Short Paper	(~3 pgs.)	25% of grade	(Due: R 12/2)	[7 th week]
5. Final Exam	(in class)	30% of grade	(Date: R 12/16 4:30-6:30pm)	[9 th week]

Note: These due dates are pretty firm, but they are subject to minor changes.

CALCULATING YOUR GRADE

To calculate your grade, multiply your percentage score for each assignment by the percentage of your grade, then add those up. Then convert that total percentage score for the course into a letter grade using standard conversions (e.g. 92% is an A-). The following chart is an example to help illustrate how to do the calculation.

	Score	Multiplier	Result
Quizzes	85	.15	12.3
Midterm	72	.25	18
Short Paper	77	.25	19.25
Final Exam	87	.35	30.45
	Total:		80% (B-)

PARTICIPATION, ETC.

This will be left fairly open, to be determined at my discretion. Attendance, tardiness, contribution to class discussion, and so on may all be factored in to some extent. I might also throw in some in-class work, such as short group assignments. Note also that instigating and participating in discussion on the Message Board on the course website will also help here.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

In general, assume you *cannot* turn assignments in late. However, of course, if you have special circumstances, exceptions may be made. But you must let me know as soon as *such special circumstances arise*; otherwise I might not work something out with you.

NO EXTRA CREDIT

All students are expected to meet the same standards to pass the course. Doing additional assignments for extra credit or catch-up grades is not an option.

ATTENDANCE

Students are expected to attend all class meetings and to do so on time. I will do roll call and track attendance, but this isn't just part of your grade; it's also for me to learn names. It will be partly factored into participation (e.g. excessive absences and tardiness will be factored in). Of course, failure to show up to class will likely adversely affect your performance on assignments generally.

CHEATING

Don't cheat (this includes *plagiarism*). I warn against this at the beginning of every class, and still nearly every term at least one person gets caught! *I take this extremely seriously.* I will give all cheaters a failing grade for the course and report the incidents to the relevant campus authorities.

Furthermore, it's *your responsibility* to make sure that your work doesn't violate university policies about plagiarism and other academic cheating. If you need any help in understanding these standards or are in any doubt about whether your work for this course violates them, check with me. For your convenience, here is the link to the university's page on academic dishonesty:

<http://academic.cuesta.edu/president/2008BP/BP6000/6200.pdf>

Note that if you cut something from a Web document and paste it into your paper, you are plagiarizing (even if you mix up the wording a bit). The papers you will be asked to write are *not research papers* in that there is no need to look to outside sources (including anything on the Internet). You just need to read the material required for class, attend the lectures, and take your time thinking it all through. But if you do poke around the Web, you must of course diligently cite and quote all consulted sources.

4. STUDENT SUPPORT

OFFICE HOURS

I encourage you all to *talk with me outside of class* (e.g. in office hours). If you are unable to see me during my regular slot or talk to me before or after class, I'm happy to schedule a mutually convenient time. Talking to me about the material, especially in preparation for an upcoming assignment, is not just for those who fear failing the course; it's also for those who want to secure an "A" (or whatever your goal is).

EMAILING ME

I'm available to contact by email. I can even answer relatively short and specific questions that way. If you have a more detailed and lengthy question, talk to me in person.

COURSE WEB PAGE

The web page for this class has some links that may prove useful in the course.

(Note: The rest of my website also has some information and external links to several resources for philosophy. However, browse at your own risk. What is particularly useful for this course will be provided on the web page for this course.)

WRITING SUPPORT

I will be expecting you to write *college-level papers* for this course, so I will be expecting few errors in the areas of spelling, grammar, professional academic style, and so on. Furthermore, writing in philosophy is often very different from writing in other disciplines. Since philosophy requires the clear communication of often difficult and subtle ideas, weak writing renders high level performance impossible.

So I encourage everyone to talk to me about their paper (and exams) before the due date, regardless of whether you have written for a philosophy class before. (More details on requirements for papers will be provided later on in the course.)

READING PAPER DRAFTS

In general, I am happy to discuss with you drafts of your papers before they are turned in. However, I will *not* accept emailed or dropped off drafts. Instead, you are welcome and encouraged to bring your drafts into office hours (or make an appointment) to *discuss* them.

IF YOU FACE MAJOR DIFFICULTIES

If for any reason you face major difficulties—medical or otherwise—get in touch with me *as soon as possible*. I'm happy to work with you to find the best course of action and, if possible, to help you complete the course successfully.

5. READINGS

WHEN TO READ

Students are expected to *do the assigned reading*. You should aim for doing the reading *before or around the time it's covered* in class. The point of this is: *don't give up on the reading*. If you didn't get to it before we covered it in class, make sure you do it after. This is especially important because philosophy involves close examination of often fairly dense arguments. However, you aren't expected to have figured it all out before you walk in the door. That's what we're going to try to do in class. (Notice also that I've provided the length of the readings so you can plan ahead.)

Some Advice: Don't underestimate the power of mental fatigue. When reading, if you find that you can't process it, try reading it again. If you still feel rather lost, it might be that you're getting mentally exhausted. Try putting the book down and coming back to it later, even perhaps the next day. It's quite likely that you'll find it much easier after a break.

READING LIST

The list of readings below is subject to change. All readings are in the course text, unless marked "**PDF**" (in which case I'll make them available to you online). We'll go through these articles in this order, but there is no set schedule. You'll need to come to class to know where we are exactly.

Note: **Nov. 25** is the Thanksgiving holiday. So there will be no lecture that day.

Unit 1: Introduction

Topic 1. What Is Philosophy?

- Sinnott-Armstrong (2009) "What is Philosophy?" (**PDF**) [2.5 pp.]
- Portions of KNN (2009) Ch. 1, "Introduction":
 - What is Philosophy? (pp. 1-3) [3 pp.]
- Plato, *Euthyphro* (**PDF**, excerpt) [8 pp.]

Topic 2. Critical Thinking: Arguments and Evaluation

- Portions of KNN (2009) Ch. 1, "Introduction":
 - What Are Philosophical Arguments? (pp. 4-6) [2 pp.]
 - How Does One Evaluate Arguments? (pp. 6-9) [4 pp.]

Unit 2: Metaphysics

Topic 1. Is There a God?

A. Intro to the God Question

- Portions of KNN (2009) Introduction to Ch. 5:
 - Motivation, Types of Reasons, For & Against (pp. 206-211) [6 pp.]
- Pascal (1670) "The Wager" (pp. 235-238) [3 pp.] — *optional*

B. For God: The Argument from Design

- Paley (1802) "The Teleological Argument" (pp. 223-228) [6 pp.]

C. Against God: The Problem of Evil

- Sinnott-Armstrong (2004) "The Problem of Evil" (**PDF**) [16 pp.]
(first 6 pages for argument; final 10 pages for objections & replies)
- Dostoevsky (1880) "Rebellion" (pp. 213-216) [3 pp.]

Topic 2. The Mind-Body ProblemA. Intro to the Problem

- Bisson (1990) "They're Made Out of Meat" (pp. 77-78) [2 pp.] — *optional*
- All of KNN (2009) Introduction to Ch. 3:
 - Motivation, Mind-Body Problem, & Some Theories (pp. 67-76) [9 pp.]

B. Could a Computer Think?

- Searle (1984) "Minds, Brains, and Machines" (sect. 2 only: pp. 119-126) [8 pp.]

Unit 3: Ethics**Topic 1. Moral Responsibility & Free Will**

- Portions of KNN (2009) Introduction to Ch. 4:
 - Motivation (pp. 138-142) [5 pp.]
- Portions of KNN (2009) Introduction to Ch. 4:
 - Determinism, Doing Otherwise, etc. (pp. 142-147) [6 pp.]
- Fischer (2002) "Frankfurt-Style Compatibilism" sections 1-4 only (**PDF**) [9 pp.]

Topic 4. Moral Psychology

- May (forthcoming) "Psychological Egoism" (**PDF** excerpt) [10 pp.]
- Butler (1726) "Sermon XI—Upon the Love of Our Neighbour" (**PDF**) [7 pp.] — *optional*

Topic 2. Applied Ethics

- Portions of KNN (2009) Introduction to Ch. 7:
 - Motivation & Basic Concepts (pp. 313-315) [2 pages]
- Singer (1999) "The Singer Solution to World Poverty" (**PDF**) [5 pp.]

Topic 3. Normative Ethics

- Mill (1863) "In Defense of Utilitarianism" (pp. 339-345) [6 pp.]
- Noddings (1984) "An Ethic of Caring" (pp. 257-67) [10 pp.]

Unit 4: Epistemology**Topic 1. The Nature of Knowledge**

- Portions of KNN (2009) Introduction to Ch. 6:
 - Motivation, Epistemology, Three Kinds of Knowledge (pp. 270-273) [3 pp.]
 - What is Knowledge? (pp. 275-278) [4 pp.]
- Gettier (1963) – "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" (**PDF**) [3 pp.] — *optional*

Topic 2. Skepticism

- Portions of *KNN* (2009) Introduction to Ch. 6:
 - Skepticism versus Non-Skepticism (pp. 273-275) [3 pp.]
 - Is Knowledge Possible? (pp. 278-280) [3 pp.]
- Descartes (1641) "Within the Sphere of the Doubtful" (pp. 284-289) [5 pp.]
- Moore (1959) "Certainty" (pp. 290-294) [4 pp.] — *optional*
- Unger (1975) "A Defense of Skepticism" (pp. 295-300) [6 pp.]

Unit 5: Metaphysics (cont.)**Topic 1. Personal Identity: What Am I?**A. Introduction to Identity & Persistence

- All of *KNN* (2009) Introduction to Ch. 2:
 - Motivation, Distinctions, Yacht Puzzle, Criteria, & Puzzle Cases (pp. 17-25) [9 pp.]

B. The Puzzle of Personal Identity

- Locke (1690) "The Prince and the Cobbler" (pp. 45-48) [4 pp.]
- Reid (1785) – "Of Mr. Locke's Account of Our Personal Identity" (**PDF**) [4 pp.]
- Parfit (1995) "The Unimportance of Identity" (pp. 62-66) [5 pp.]