

UNIVERSITY of the FRASER VALLEY
COURSE OUTLINE

Course: Philosophy 120: Knowledge and Reality

Section: AB2 (R 11:30 – 14:20)

Term: Fall '09

Instructor: Wayne I. Henry

Phone local: TBA

Office Hours: Thursday, 2:30 – 4:00pm

CRN: 90099

Room: ABA354

Office: TBA

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Course Format:

Three hours per week in a mix of lecture and class discussion.

Course Prerequisites:

None.

Course Description and Objectives:

In this course, we will examine a variety of issues drawn from two of the principal areas of Philosophy: metaphysics and epistemology. In epistemology, we will focus on such issues as the nature of knowledge and the limits of scepticism. In metaphysics, we will consider such issues as the possibility of personal freedom, the nature of mind and the existence of God. Throughout, the focus will be on understanding the source of the perplexity that underlies the individual topics that we will consider. Additionally, I hope to pursue two further goals: First, to cultivate a certain level of rigour in keeping with philosophical analysis, to the extent possible without a background in formal reasoning techniques. Secondly, to come to an understanding of what philosophy is (and, by exclusion, what it is not) by attempting to clarify the distinctive nature of philosophical questions.

Specific objectives include:

1. To acquaint students with major contributions to Western metaphysics and epistemology.
2. To study fundamental positions on key issues in metaphysics and epistemology.
3. To develop students' skills in the methods of philosophical analysis and argumentation, by teaching students to read, understand, and respond critically and coherently to arguments arising from these issues.
4. To develop the abilities of students to see how philosophical positions underlie and influence ideas and developments in other disciplines and in everyday life.

Text:

Theodore Schick, Jr. & Lewis Vaughn (2005) *Doing Philosophy: An Introduction through Thought Experiments* (3rd Ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Course Requirements:

- An in-class writing assignment worth 10% of the final mark.
- Two essays worth 25% each for a total of 50% of the final mark.
- One final exam worth 30% of the final mark.
- Class participation in the discussions will account for 10% of the final mark.

Grading Profile:

- A+ 87-100
- A 84-86
- A- 80-83
- B+ 77-79
- B 74-76
- B- 70-73
- C+ 67-69
- C 64-66
- C- 60-63
- D 50-59
- F 0-49

SYLLABUS:**WEEK 1, Sept.10:**

- Introduction to the course and its expectations.
- A bit about philosophy generally [Text – Sec.1.1].

WEEK 2, Sept.17:

- A bit about reasoning and thought experiments [Text – Sec's 1.2 & 1.3].

WEEK 3, Sept.24:

- The problem of knowledge: Cartesian skepticism (Keanu Reeves goes down the rabbit hole) [Text – Sec.7.1].
- In-class writing assignment.

WEEK 4, Oct.1:

- Knowledge and skepticism, continued [Text – Sec.7.2-7.3].
- Essay topic #1 distributed.

WEEK 5, Oct.8:

- The Mind-Body problem [Text – Sec's 2.1-2.2].

WEEK 6, Oct.15:

- The Mind-Body problem, continued [Text – Sec's 2.3-2.5].
- Essay topic #1 due.

WEEK 7, Oct.22:

- The problem of Free Will [Text – Sec's 3.1-3.2].

WEEK 8, Oct.29:

- The problem of Free Will, continued [Text – Sec's 3.2-3.3].

WEEK 9, Nov.5:

- The problem of Personal Identity [Text – Sec's 4.1-4.2].
- Essay topic #2 distributed.

WEEK 10, Nov.12:

- The problem of Personal Identity, continued [Text – Sec's 4.2-4.3].

WEEK 11, Nov.19:

- The problem of evil and the existence of God [Text – Sec.6.1].
- Essay topic #2 due.

WEEK 12, Nov.26:

- The problem of evil and the existence of God, continued [Text – Sec's 6.2-6.3].

WEEK 13, Dec.3:

- Catching up and review.

➤ This schedule is flexible and will be amended as required.

NOTE: It is the responsibility of the student to keep abreast of the readings (that is the point of the syllabus) and, if absent, to secure class notes from another student. These materials are not easy to read and, thus, you must leave ample time for the task. The committed student will have read the assigned material (more than once) before the class in which it is to be discussed and will reread the assigned readings immediately after the class discussion. As well, a committed student will ensure that their essays or other homework assignments are begun well before the due date. A good essay will require, at a minimum, 4-6 hours to produce an outline and first draft, and about an equal amount of time to adequately revise and produce the final version to be submitted. I am happy to read early drafts and outlines, but I am quite a bit less willing to do this the day before the essay is due. Essay topics are distributed well in advance of the due date for just this reason.

POLICIES:

University of the Fraser Valley has policies on Academic Appeals (including appeal of final grades), Student Conduct, Cheating and Plagiarism, Academic Probation and other educational issues. Copies of these and other policies are distributed to all students during the registration process and are also available in the University Calendar and in the Library.

Following are some specific items I wish to draw to your attention:

Respect in the Classroom:

I strive to create an environment of mutual respect for all participants in the classroom so they can feel comfortable contributing to the class discussions and so on. The standard rules of courtesy apply here, but this is one I insist upon: **all cell phones are shut off while in the classroom. No exceptions!**

Absenteeism:

Regular attendance is a requirement of this course. All missed classes will require documentation. A student that is absent for more than four classes and, thus, not adequately participating in class will not be permitted to write the final exam, even with documentation. For similar reasons, I will not accept submitted work from those who are absent for more than four classes.

Missed Assignments:

There is no provision for make-up assignments. Thus, students lose the portion of the grade associated with any missed work.

Late Assignments:

Late assignments are not accepted except at the instructor's discretion in cases of illness or bereavement. Documentation will be required.

"I" Grade:

Not normally given.

Class Participation:

The grade for class participation is based on both the frequency and the quality of the student's comments, questions and observations, with the emphasis on quality. The quality is determined by, among other things, the relevance, insight and clarity of remarks.

English Usage:

Proper English usage is essential to the enterprise of presenting and defending one's ideas; if the instructor cannot understand what the student is trying to say, it is impossible to evaluate the student's work. Thus, any submitted work that is seriously grammatically flawed will be returned unmarked, and the student will be required to resubmit the work for evaluation with a penalty of five points. This offer will not apply to final term essays or assignments which will be given a mark of zero. If it is anticipated that there will be problems meeting this requirement, it is incumbent on the student to seek help from, for example, the Writing Centre on campus.

Plagiarism and Cheating:

Plagiarism is the deliberate presentation or submission of the research, work, ideas, illustrations or diagrams of others as one's own without citation or credit. Cheating includes the use of unauthorized aids, assistance or materials in the preparation of assignments or in examinations. During examinations, it is considered cheating to communicate with others to obtain information, to copy from the work of others, or to deliberately expose or convey information to others. The resubmission of one's own work for which credit has already been granted in another course, without the instructor's permission, is also cheating. Penalties for academic dishonesty may include a grade of zero on the examination or assignment, a failing grade for the course, suspension from the university, or expulsion from the university.

Office Consultation:

My official office hours will be Thursdays, 2:30-4:00pm. However, you can consider me to be available to help you whenever I am on campus. This means you can feel free to visit me at my office at any time, or approach me at any time and any place. If I am busy or for some reason unable to help you at that moment, we will schedule a time that is convenient for both of us. As a matter of personal preference, I think it's much more civil to have discussions over a cup of coffee and I can often be found in the cafeteria. Should you see me there, please feel free to join me to discuss the course, or anything else for that matter. I am also available by email, but please allow up to two working days for a response.