

Course Description

Philosophy 120: Knowledge and Reality

Winter 2009:CH1: Tuesday, 10:00 am-12:50 pm
ON1 (On-Line)

UCFV *Calendar*: Many of the traditional problems and arguments in philosophy deal with the nature of human individuality.

Individuality is acclaimed as one of the great achievements of western civilization. The progress of civilization has often been measured by how much individuality is allowed to flourish. What is individuality? What makes me a unique individual?

In order to answer these questions, we also need to ask: When do I have free will to express my individuality? What is the relationship between my physical nature—my body—and my spiritual nature—my mind? Am I really anything more than a complicated thinking machine? What happens to me when I die?

PHIL 120 satisfies a requirement for the *Applied Ethical and Political Philosophy* program at UCFV.

This *Course Description* provides routine information, and describes the objectives and methods for the course. Read it carefully, asking questions as needed.

It should be viewed as a **contract** but can be altered for individual students in extraordinary circumstances.

If I make a special arrangement with you, explain it in a note or e-mail message and ask me to sign or confirm it; show it to me to remind me of our arrangement.

Some sections are specifically about the *On-line* version of this course and are marked accordingly.

On-line : Introduction to Audio Files and Course Description

To listen to an audio file that explains parts of this document, **CLICK** on the next item—*Course Description Audio File*—on the *Course Content* page of the Course Website.

Throughout the course, you must be able to play MP3 audio files attached to lecture notes and other documents. You can play an audio file as many times as you like, pause playback, rewind, fast forward.

Contact Information: Instructor, Office Hours, Telephone & E-mail

Instructor: Paul Herman (residing in Chilliwack, British Columbia, CANADA)

BA, University of California, Santa Barbara; All PhD. work completed except thesis, UBC.
Teaching: UBC; Carleton University; Fraser Valley College & UCFV 1975-present.

Telephone & E-mail

Abbotsford: 604-853-7441, local 4320 or through the Receptionist

Chilliwack: 604-792-0025, local 2836 or through the Receptionist

Home: 604-793-7898

Voice-mail: Abbotsford: 854-4500, box 8117, **Chilliwack:** 795-2800, box 2836

Fax: 604-792-2388

E-Mail: through the *WebCT Course Website* and paul.herman@ucfv.ca

The best times to talk to me on the telephone are mornings but you can try me any time from not too early in the morning to not too late in the evening.

Outside of class, I prefer that you ask all questions that are not personal (*i.e.*, any question you don't mind others knowing you are asking) **through the *WebCT Course Website Bulletin Board-Discussion area*** so that others can also benefit from it.

I usually check my e-mail in the morning and early evening.

Please put the course number (PHIL 110) in the subject line whenever you e-mail me at paul.herman@ufv.ca. Otherwise, I may fail to deal with your message quickly.

If you have not heard back from me within a day, please try again by e-mail or other means.

I usually check the *Course Website* once a day, typically early afternoon.

Mail: Paul Herman

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V2P 6T4
CANADA

Course Website: Go to www.ucfv.ca/online.htm.

Office Hours

Abbotsford: Friday, 9:00-9:30 am and immediately after class, D3091

Chilliwack: Tuesday, 9:00-9:30 am and immediately after class, A102j.

Talk to me during office hours about your problems with an assignment, areas of interest you would like to pursue, my marking of your work, etc. If these times are not convenient for you, we can arrange to meet at other times.

Since I am often out of my office (but usually close to it) or talking to students during the above times, it is best (but not essential) to make an appointment.

On-line: We can arrange to meet in a chat room.

On-line: Emergencies

In the event of a local emergency that results in loss of Internet connection, do your best to contact me by any means once it is reasonable to do so. If circumstances permit, continue to work on the course.

It would be wise to arrange a back up plan for Internet access in case your primary computer fails. For example, libraries and local educational institutions may provide terminals.

The Course

The fundamental purpose of philosophy courses should be to help you think better for yourself. Better thinking can produce a better life.

We look at ideas from the past in order to see where some of our current ideas come from. You may be surprised to find that you share beliefs with, for example, Plato, Locke, or Sartre. But the emphasis is on formulating and revising your own ideas and providing them with a reasonable basis so that you can defend your own conclusions. If you take our investigations seriously and personally, they can be a soul-searching experience.

Prerequisites: None

Major Areas

The course pursues the following fundamental questions about our conception of ourselves:

- When—if ever—am I truly free?
- What am I as a thinking thing: What is the relationship between my physical nature—my body—and my spiritual nature—my mind? Am I really anything more than a complicated thinking machine?
- Who am I really? How do I tell? What is the relationship between my subjective experience of my self and who I really am objectively?

Goals of the Course

At the end of this course, my intention is that you will:

- Be able to identify and describe basic positions on the major, general issues noted above.
- Communicate orally and in writing your organised, disciplined critical thinking about some of these major, general issues in order to produce and defend your own solution to questions about more specific issues such as life after death, psychic phenomena, abortion, artificial intelligence.
- Correctly use philosophical terms and concepts in conversations and informal course work.
- Be motivated to use the skills and knowledge from this course as a productive way to think about these issues as you encounter them in everyday life.

Standard Operating Procedure: seeking reflective equilibrium

Throughout the course, we will typically follow this procedure (often called *reflective equilibrium*):

1. You to make some judgments about some specific examples of an issue, either based on your own experience or on some reading.

We consider your judgments in order to see some of the more general issues they raise.

2. I provide you with some background and reading for the general issues, asking you to consider how they produce general reasons for your specific judgments.
3. We reflect upon the reading and test general reasons by applying them to specific examples.
4. You make some assessment of **your** judgments and general reasons for them.

There is a dialectic between our **judgments about specific cases** and the **general reasons** for those judgments. Sometimes you may change your specific judgments to fit your general reasons. Sometimes you may change your reasons to fit your judgments. Or you may adjust both.

In most cases, there is no single correct answer that emerges from this process. However, some answers are not as good as others, e.g., because they do not deal well with the full range and depth of the issues or are not supported by good reasoning.

So, good answers require much more than merely expressing an opinion.

Resources

Materials to buy from the [Bookstore](#):

Paul Herman, *Philosophy 120 Course Pack*

René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*;

Or e-text version widely available: see <http://www.wright.edu/cola/cartes/mede.html> or [EpistemeLinks.com](http://www.epistemelinks.com) for other sources.

Any copy of Descartes's *Meditations* will do, but you may have to scramble to figure out page references if you do not use the above text.

Additional Resources

If you want to warm up for the course, try the following films:

Waking Life; *I ♥ Huckabees*, *Caché*

The Matrix, *eXistenZ*, *13th Floor*, *Truman Show*

Being John Malkovich, *Adaptation*, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

Twin Falls, *Idaho*

And read around in:

Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones*, PQ 7797 B635 A6, and other writings;

Oliver Sacks, *The man who mistook his wife for a hat and other clinical tales*, WL100 S33, and other writings.

If you want to delve further into the nature of philosophy and methods of reading and writing philosophy—our initial topics—then I recommend Jay F. Rosenberg's *The Practice of Philosophy: A Handbook for Beginners*, copies in the *Bookstore* (although it has become ridiculously expensive), *Library*, and *Writing Centres*.

The [Library](#) has a respectable philosophy collection, including [The Philosopher's Index](#), a bibliographic database with informative author-written abstracts covering scholarly research in philosophy published since 1940 in journals and books, including anthologies. Library staff are also a great resource.

You may also find the following material of interest, although it is not easy:

Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, BD220 N34, and other writings

These and other **optional** works may be referred to during the course. If you have difficulty finding these or other works because they are always out of the Library or are otherwise unavailable, **tell me**. Many older readings are also available on the Internet.

Internet Resources

The **Internet** also has many resources, readings, discussion groups, etc. in philosophy and on a variety of topics that we investigate in this course. Go to the UCFV Library website, [Guides to Research](#), for philosophy (www.ucfv.bc.ca/library/guide/philosophy.htm).

An excellent general philosophy Web site is [Epistémé Links](#) with philosophy material especially useful for undergraduate students such as online encyclopaedias and dictionaries, aides for writing better papers, bibliographies, etc.

Help with writing, spelling, punctuation, and study skills

Help in developing many skills for succeeding in college are available through [Academic Support Courses](#).

Writing help is available through [Writing Centres](#) on each campus. [Paradigm Online Writing Assistant](#) provides help on writing argumentative essays common in philosophy.

This [Microsoft tutorial](#) about writing with a word processor is Microsoft promotional material oriented towards teachers, but it still looks helpful for using a word processor as much more than an automatic typewriter.

Help with a disability that may interfere with your learning

It would be wise to discuss it with me and to see an access advisor at the [Disability Services](#) about available services at UCFV.

Work and Evaluation

See *Readings & Assignments* for due dates. **It is your responsibility to keep up with course work.** We shall try to proceed at a pace that fosters discussion and understanding of the material and issues, so due dates are subject to change with ample notice.

Your written work without your name attached to it may be used as examples in class.

Academic Appeal: Students may appeal academic decisions. See [Academic Appeals Policy](#).

Plagiarism and Intellectual Property

You will not find the final, authoritative answer to a philosophical question in books, encyclopaedias, dictionaries, videos, or cyberspace. It is essential that you produce and justify your own conclusions.

Plagiarism is the high crime of intellectual activity. If the question of plagiarism arises, a student should be able to show that a piece of work is the student's own by producing notes and drafts, explaining and defending the work. The minimum consequence for plagiarism is a **NO CREDIT** for that piece of work. More severe penalties, including a **NO CREDIT** for the course, may be imposed. ([UCFV Calendar](#), p. 26; [UCFV Policy Manual](#).)

There are many times when you are allowed, encouraged, or required to work together. If you have doubts about when these times are, please ask me for clarification.

Intellectual property rights are still quite unclear on the Internet, and it is very easy to violate even those that are clear. Err on the side of caution. For example, forwarding someone else's e-mail message without permission may violate moral and legal standards. There are also increasingly sophisticated Internet tools for detecting plagiarism.

Use of course material from this course is permitted only for your personal, non-commercial purposes.

Final Mark

Your **Final Mark** is based on several activities explained below. You can choose to do more or less work according to your ambitions and the time you have available. You are continuously evaluated on smaller pieces of work so that you can compensate even for the occasional disaster. Your effort and achievement both count in varying ways.

Your **Final Mark** is calculated on the following basis:

Attendance and Class Contribution	5%
Informal Individual & Co-op Work	20%
Formal Co-op Work: Group Presentations	10%
Essays	65%
(First Essay 10%, Second Essay 30%, In-Class Essay 25%)	

Except for *Individual Prep & Co-op Work* assignments, assignments are marked on this scale:

A+ = 4.33	B+ = 3.33	C+ = 2.33	P = 1
A = 4.00	B = 3.00	C = 2.00	NC = 0
A- = 3.67	B- = 2.67	C- = 1.67	

For cumulative *Individual Prep & Co-op Work* and for exam letter grades, the top mark receives an A+, about 50% of the top mark a C-, with other marks scaled accordingly.

All assignments are marked according to how well the work met the **criteria** explained in the assignment, not according to a distribution curve (*i.e.*, **not**, for example, 10% As, 20% Bs, etc.).

Audit Grade requires attending at least 80% of the course. ([UCFV Calendar](#), p. 22; [UCFV Policy Manual](#))

Attendance and Class Contribution (5% of Final Mark)

Please ask questions and contribute to class sessions, especially to your co-op work. Of course, quality, not mere quantity, of class participation is desirable. However, **it is better to err on the side of boldness than of caution**.

Each student starts with a C in this area and adds or subtracts from it. The only way to subtract from it is by being obnoxious to others in class or by regularly not attending. Otherwise, your **Individual Prep & Co-op Work** mark is a good indicator of attendance and class contribution unless you make additional significant contributions to the class as a whole, *e.g.*, through the **Bulletin Board-Discussion** area. Your facility in presenting work to the class also counts towards this part of your mark.

Lack of civility to any members of the class is not tolerated. UFV policy empowers an instructor to dismiss from the course a student who disrupts the class.

On-line:

In order to earn credit, you must provide substantial evidence that you are attending the course. For example, you must participate in course discussion by posting questions and comments to the *Bulletin Board*. And you should check the *Bulletin Board* at least every other day. (WebCT tracks student attendance including where you visited when. See *View Your Track Record* under *Course Website Tools*).

If you will be absent from the course for a while, leave a message on the *Bulletin Board* if possible, and announce when you rejoin the course. (If you will be unable to access your computer during the course, you can download or print pages for off-line reference.)

Individual Prep & Co-op Work (20% of Final Mark)

Do the assigned readings and other preparation assignments, send the required messages, and be ready to ask questions, to agree or disagree with the reading and with others' comments, and to participate in co-operative work.

Typically, each preparatory assignment is marked on a scale from 0 to 4 points. More demanding assignments may be marked on a multiple of this scale. The success of the course depends upon your individual preparation.

Individual Prep Questions are DUE in-class or e-mailed before the beginning of class. They may be turned in up to two days late but with a penalty of one point.

On-line : You are expected to:

post messages that use good reasoning to support your views;
show knowledge of the assigned course material, referencing page numbers as appropriate;
initiate discussion by your comments or questions;
respond not only to me but especially to your classmates.

Leading Discussion

You may be asked to lead discussion on particular topics, usually working in groups of two or three students. Each member of the leadership group will receive the same grade except for members who are remarkably absent or unhelpful.

I will log-on each day and may contribute questions and explanations, but management of the discussion will mostly be your responsibility. Let me know if you need my help.

1. If you share management of a discussion, plan your work so that you can divide it.
2. Log on at least once each day during your term as discussion leader.
3. Initiate discussion as necessary, *e.g.*, by providing a brief summary of the material, asking questions about it, suggesting some of its implications for what is going on in the world (with on-line references if possible, *e.g.*, to a news story).
4. Answer questions the class might have. If your group is unable to answer well, throw the question back to the class. If no one can answer, let me know.
5. Keep focused on the course material.
If someone makes an apparently irrelevant remark, politely ask them how it is related to the topic. If someone gives an unsubstantiated opinion, politely ask them to support it.

A grade for your on-line contributions will be posted at the end of the discussion period for each major topic.

Formal Co-op Work

Some formal co-p work may be required, *e.g.*, debates, conducting a class session, authoring a joint paper. Each member of a formal co-p group receives the same mark except where a

member misses designated preparation or presentation sessions, in which case the mark will be prorated.

Essays (65% of Final Mark)

You are expected to write **three** essays during the course, including one essay written in class.

For the **first essay**, you will explore the problem of freedom and determinism, working both individually and co-operatively.

For the **second essay**, you will receive a list of questions. You will be asked to submit a draft of part of the essay, and to work in class with others working on the question.

The **third essay** will be written in class where you know the topic but not the exact essay question ahead of time. This essay may be written by groups of no more than three persons.

Your work should be **critical**, not merely historical or exegetical. In other words, good critical thinking shows your awareness of some of the relevant thinking by others on the problem, but **above all**, it should express **your** well-reasoned views on the problem and its solution. For more guidance about critical thinking and writing for this course, see [Methods of Inquiry](#) in the *CoursePack* and under **Course Content**.

Non-sexist language is expected in your written work. (For further explanation, see [Writing without Gender Bias](#) in the *CoursePack* and under **Course Content**.)

Essays may be handed in as hardcopy or sent to me as an e-mail attachment in either MS Word or .RTF format, by midnight of the due date, double-spaced with one-inch margins on all sides,.

Essay assignments are not accepted more than one week late. Late essays are marked down one mark, *e.g.*, a B is marked down to a B-. (**Exceptions** are possible in extraordinary circumstances.) If you do not hand your hardcopy essay to me in person, it should be time stamped in some manner, *e.g.*, by the time that you e-mail it to me, by someone at UCFV to whom you hand it in; otherwise, I will assume it was turned in when I pick it up.

If I am unable to download and read your essay because you forgot to attach it or for other apparently technical reasons that are not my fault, **the essay is marked as late**. So, it is wise to submit your essay by late afternoon of the due date so I can notify you about technical problems before it is marked as late.

Keep a copy of all essay work you turn in for comments or for marking.