

PHILOSOPHY 120
Knowledge and Reality – Metaphysics and Epistemology
Section AB2 — September, 2011

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Peter B. Raabe
CLASSROOM: A 235
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COURSE OUTLINE

OBJECTIVES: In this class we'll be discussing and thinking about a number of representative questions dealing with the nature of reality (metaphysics) and knowledge (epistemology). But this is not a history of philosophy course. Instead we'll be doing the work ourselves tackling a range of questions such as, How do we know life isn't just one long dream? Given all the changes I go through, am I still the same person today I was ten years ago? If every event is preceded by a cause how can we say we have free will? Does God exist? We'll also be considering why discussing and thinking about these sort of questions is important to living a good life.

TEXT: required: *Philosophy: Contemporary Perspectives on Perennial Issues* 4th ed. by Klemke, Kline, & Hollinger. Bedford/St. Martin's, 1994.

EVALUATION: There will be two short essay assignments, a midterm, and a final exam

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|------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----|
| Distribution of Marks: | Essay 1 (max. 4 pages double spaced) | 20% |
| | Midterm examination | 20% |
| | Essay 2 (max. 6 pages double spaced) | 30% |
| | Final examination | 30% |

Essays: You may use any citation style you wish as long as you keep it consistent throughout your entire essay. Quoted passages must be properly cited to avoid plagiarism. Please **do not** put any sort of plastic cover on your essay. A title page is acceptable. Always put your student number on anything you hand in.
NOTE: I **do not** accept assignments sent to me by e-mail.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS: Assignments must be handed in at the beginning of class.
Late assignments (without good reason) will be given an automatic 0%.

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OUTLINE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

- 1) Sept 6 Greetings and Introductions — What is philosophy anyway?
- 2) Sept 13 What do I know? (Epistemology) (Intro & Unger - 1)
- 3) Sept 20 What is real? (empiricism and rationalism) (Eddington - 7)
- 4) Sept 27 Fate, determinism, & free will (Blatchford - 11) >>>**(Essay #1 due)**
- 5) Oct 4 Free will and responsibility (Hospers - 14)
- 6) Oct 11 **MIDTERM EXAM**
- 7) Oct 18 Personal identity: What does it mean to be me? (Darrow - 24)
- 8) Oct 25 Mind, brain, and machine (Joad – 17, & Evans – 22)
- 9) Nov 1 Change and time (Stace -9)
- 10) Nov 8 How good is scientific knowledge? (Stace - 58)
- 11) Nov 15 Does God exist? (Russell - 28) >>> **(Essay #2 due)**
- 12) Nov 22 Does Life have meaning? (Baier - 37) Review for final exam.

PHIL 120 Essay Topics

Research Essay #1

(Max. 4 pages double spaced.)

Topic: How do you know something is real?

* This essay can be approached in two ways: (1) epistemically: with a discussion of what it means to know, or (2) metaphysically: with a discussion of what reality is.

NOTE: Don't just write an opinion piece.
Follow the steps on page 5 of this handout titled "How to Write a Good Philosophy Paper."
Make sure you refer to the theories covered in your **text book** and the philosophers we discussed in class.

Research Essay # 2

(Maximum 6 pages double spaced.)

In his essay "Why I am an Agnostic" K. D. Ellis says (on page 296 of *Philosophy: Contemporary Perspectives in Perennial Issues*) the following:

"There are good reasons for the belief in the existence of a god, but none of these are compelling reasons... Therefore we should suspend our judgement on this issue and neither accept nor reject the belief in the existence of God."

Topic: Do you agree?

NOTE: Don't just write an opinion piece.
Follow the steps on page 5 of this handout titled "How to Write a Good Philosophy Paper."
Make sure you refer to the theories covered in your **text book** and the philosophers we discussed in class.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “PHILOSOPHY”?

Philosophy involves examining the reasons we have for the values we hold as good, and the beliefs we hold as true, so that we can free ourselves from blindly following tradition, obeying the dictates of some authority figure, or simply acting on our emotions.

Personal philosophy: my philosophy; my approach to life; my “Weltanschauung;” what leads me to act the way I do; what I believe, not just spiritual.

Being philosophical: critical and creative thinking and discussion; good reasoning about an issue; a thoughtful and thorough exploration; a learned skill.

History of philosophy: the study of the origin and evolution of ideas; what great thinkers have said on various important topics.

Academic philosophy: structured courses studying philosophers and their theories and ideas; systematic examination of various, mostly abstract, issues.

Applied philosophy: discussion and research into problems arising in specific areas such as medicine, business, the environment, etc.

Philosophical counselling: A philosopher helps a non-philosopher resolve real-life issues and problems by examining conflicting values, problematic assumptions, dubious beliefs, unjustified biases, things learned as a child, etc.

Epicurus (341 B.C.-271 B.C.): “Empty is the argument of the philosopher which does not relieve any human suffering; for just as there is no benefit in medicine if it does not drive out bodily diseases, so there is no benefit in philosophy if it does not drive out diseases of the soul.”

HOW TO WRITE A GOOD PHILOSOPHY PAPER

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN TO WRITE ⇒ Think and Discuss

- Think about your topic before you start to write to clarify it in your mind.
- A good paper is a good **argument**, so decide which side of the issue you're going to argue.
- Organize your thoughts by making an outline of what you might want to say.
- Discuss your thoughts and outline with others; ask for feedback and input.
- Organize the source material you plan to cite to support what you say.
- Write in your own voice. Don't try to copy someone else's style (like Plato).
- Use simple and direct language.

THE BEGINNING ⇒ Introduce

- When you begin to write, state the position for which you are going to argue. In a single, short, and precise sentence state the point you are trying to make, and of which you're trying to convince your reader. (This is the **thesis** of your essay). Don't expect the reader to understand the argument you're trying to make in your paper if you're not sure about it yourself.

THE MIDDLE ⇒ Elaborate

- Give grounds, reasons, justifications, and facts which support your position. Support your opinions with **citations** from respected sources. Don't ask your reader to simply accept your unsupported opinion. Don't expect your reader to agree with everything you say just because you say it.
- Use a different paragraph for each new point in your argument.
- Anticipate objections. Offer the strongest **counter-arguments** against your position that you can think of, then argue against them to show how your position is more reasonable. Your job is to convince the reader that your point of view is better than all others. It's not necessary to dispute all the counter-arguments you can possibly think of. The three or four best ones are all you need.
- If your essay seems "too short" make sure what you've written is sufficient to justify your position. If your essay seems "too long" eliminate unnecessary filler passages and digressions to side issues.
- Make sure you cite every writer you quote. If you quote but don't cite it's **plagiarism**.

THE END ⇒ Summarize

- Briefly restate your arguments in the conclusion to demonstrate how you have made your point.
- Make up a good title, one that will grab your reader's attention.

AFTER YOU FINISH WRITING ⇒ Review & Rewrite

- Check for spelling errors, poor grammar, incomplete sentences, sentences that are too long and complicated, and technical terms that need explaining. Don't leave sentences in your essay that don't make sense to you.
- Put your essay aside for a few hours or days; read it again later; then make changes and improvements. Don't assume your first draft is perfect. It never is! Careful editing and rewriting are the keys to achieving a first class mark.