

University of Calgary
Department of Philosophy

Philosophy 201.02

Problems of Philosophy

Winter 2009

MW 17:00 - 18:15

ST 132

Instructor

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Teaching Assistant

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Office Hours: By appointment

Texts

Baggini, Julian and Peter S. Fosl. 2003. *The Philosopher's Toolkit*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Blackburn, Simon. 1999. *Think*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Conee, Earl and Theodore Sider. 2005. *Riddles of Existence: a guided tour of metaphysics*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Description

The primary purpose of this course is to develop your ability to think critically about really difficult issues. What makes philosophical problems difficult is primarily that before one can begin to think about the answer one has to invest considerable effort in determining what the question actually is. This is good training for thinking about problems in any area of inquiry, since insight often comes from recognizing that the problem is not what you, or indeed anyone else, thought it was.

A secondary purpose of the course is to familiarize you with some classic philosophical problems and some classic positions philosophers have taken on these problems. This provides a foundation for future study in philosophy, but also these problems and positions are interesting in their own right. Questions such as 'What kind of creatures are we?', 'How can I know what the world is like?', etc., are often raised and examined in popular media like books, movies, and television shows, and we will be approaching these questions by means of pop culture as well as via the writings of both historical and contemporary philosophers. Problems to be discussed will include personal identity, the nature of knowledge, the existence of God, free will, and time.

Thinking critically about these problems means considering arguments for and against a given position. You may well have strong opinions about the issues we discuss. These opinions, no matter how firmly held, are at best a starting point for discussion. Thinking critically requires that you suspend your belief in ideas that may seem natural and obvious in order to examine assumptions, consider alternatives that may seem far-fetched, and evaluate critically what may be some of your most deeply held beliefs.

Evaluation

Grades in this class will be based on 6 short answer papers (300 words), a term paper (1000 words), a take home final exam, and tutorial participation.

Due Dates

Short answer paper 1	Wednesday January 21 st
Short answer paper 2	Wednesday February 4 th
Short answer paper 3	Wednesday February 25 th
Short answer paper 4	Wednesday March 11 th
Term paper draft	Monday March 16 th
Short answer paper 5	Wednesday March 25 th
Term paper	Wednesday April 1 st
Short answer paper 6	Wednesday April 8 th
Take home exam	Wednesday April 20 th

Grading

1. *Ceteris paribus*, the short answer papers will collectively be worth 40%, tutorial participation will be worth 10%, the draft of the term paper will be worth 5%, the term paper will be worth 20%, and the take home final exam will be worth 25%.
2. Students must receive a passing grade (D or better) on the final exam in order to pass the course.
3. The term paper draft will be graded on a credit/no-credit basis.
4. Later virtue will be allowed to redeem earlier sin.
5. Tests and writing assignments will be graded on both accuracy and quality of presentation.

Grading rubric

On each assignment and exam question you will receive a letter grade reflecting the level of comprehension of the readings and your ability to assess philosophical arguments shown by the work you submit. There will be no ,+/- grades, but "slash" grades (e.g., A/B) are possible. The meanings of letter grades are defined in the *Calendar*; for written work, they amount roughly to the following criteria:

- A Excellent—superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of subject matter. (Your writing is clear and concise; your assignments make obvious that your understanding of the issues and arguments is correct and complete; you show superior ability in representing and assessing others' philosophical arguments; you show ability for original philosophical thinking).
- B Good—clearly above average performance with knowledge of subject matter generally complete. (You show a good grasp of the assigned reading; but either your writing is not perfectly clear or your assignments are largely only expository and don't show the critical ability required for an A).
- C Satisfactory—basic understanding of the subject matter. (Your work shows that you've worked through the reading and attended class, but your assignments misrepresent the arguments we're discussing, or your criticisms are off the mark.)
- D Minimal pass—marginal performance. (Your work is unclear or confused; or you grossly misrepresent the arguments we're discussing.)
- F Fail—Unsatisfactory performance. (Your work fails to show that you've made a serious attempt at coming to grips with the material; or your writing borders on the incomprehensible.)

Notice that it is not enough that you understand the issues we discuss, your written work must show this. The quality of your writing will be a major factor in which grade you'll get. If your sentences miss subjects or verbs, your cross-references are unclear, or you use terminology ambiguously, you will receive a lower mark than if you had composed and proof-read more carefully.

In computing your exam grade and your collective short answer paper grade, your marks on individual questions will be converted to grade points as defined in the calendar (A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1, F = 0). "Slash" grades have grade point values 0.5 below the higher grade (e.g. A/B = 3.5). The grade will be equal to the average of the grade point value of the questions (e.g. a 3 question exam with grades A B B would receive a grade point score of 3.33).

Your final grade point score will be calculated according to the weights given above. *Ceteris paribus*, the final mark is the letter grade corresponding to this average plus a margin of 0.2. For the final grade, +s and -s are possible too; as defined in the *Calendar*, +/- adds/subtracts 0.3 grade points. In other words, a course average of 3.8 or higher receives an A, at least 3.5 and less than 3.8 an A-, and so on. There is no D- grade. A+ is reserved for truly exceptional performance.

Late policy

Papers and exams will not normally be accepted after the deadlines unless special permission has been given by the instructor. Failure to submit on time will normally result in a mark of zero. Students who cannot submit a paper or test due to medical reasons or other reasonable grounds should contact the instructor as soon as possible.

Course website

A course website on U of C's BlackBoard server has been set up. You will be automatically registered if you're registered in the class. To access the BlackBoard site, you can either go directly to blackboard.ucalgary.ca and log in with your UCIT account name and password, or you can access it through the myUofC portal (my.ucalgary.ca; log in with your eID). If you don't have an eID or UCIT account, see elearn.ucalgary.ca/help.html.

INTELLECTUAL HONESTY

Intellectual honesty is the cornerstone of the development and acquisition of knowledge and requires that the contribution of others be acknowledged. As a result, cheating or plagiarism on any assignment or examination is regarded as an extremely serious academic offence, the penalty for which may be an F on the assignment and possibly also an F in the course, academic probation, or requirement to withdraw. The University Calendar states that plagiarism exists when:

- *the work submitted or presented was done, in whole or in part, by an individual other than the one submitting or presenting the work (this includes having another impersonate the student or otherwise substituting the work of another for one's own in an examination or test;*
- *parts of the work are taken from another source without reference to the original author;*
- *the whole work (e.g., an essay) is copied from another source; and/or*
- *a student submits or presents work in one course which has also been submitted in another course (although it may be completely original with that student) without the knowledge of or prior agreement of the instructor involved.*

While it is recognized that scholarly work often involves reference to the ideas, data and conclusions of other scholars, intellectual honesty requires that such references be explicitly and clearly noted. Plagiarism is an extremely serious offence. Plagiarism occurs not only when direct quotations are taken from a source without specific acknowledgement, but also when original ideas or data from the source are not acknowledged. A bibliography is insufficient to establish which portions of the student's work are taken from external sources; footnotes or other recognized forms of citation must be used for this purpose.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

It is the student's responsibility to request academic accommodation. If you are a student with a documented disability who may require academic accommodation and have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre, please contact their office at 220-8237. Students who have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre are not eligible for formal academic accommodation. You are also required to discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of this course.

STUDENTS' UNION REPRESENTATIVE

The Humanities Representative is Daniel Pagan, MSC 251, humanitiesrep@su.ucalgary.ca or 220-3913.