

PHILOSOPHY 153
FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS IN PHILOSOPHY
Fall 2009

Section 153D (MWF, 9:00-9:50 am, 335 Hiemenga)
Section 153J (MWF, 11:30-12:20 pm, 333 Hiemenga)

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I. Required Materials

Blackburn, *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy*
Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*
Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*
Mathewes-Green, *The Illumined Heart: The Ancient Christian Path of Transformation*
Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*
Course Packet (available for purchase in the Philosophy Department office—see Donna)

II. Course Description

Philosophical inquiry serves many purposes under many different names. As a method of theoretical analysis, it helps us to clarify the nature of things and to distinguish truth from falsity. As an approach to interpreting the meaning of life, it awakens us to the open-endedness of human existence and to the importance of our particular communities for making sense of ourselves. As a spiritual discipline, it aids us in our efforts to pursue the goal of a life well-lived. And as a social coping mechanism, it helps us to make judicious policy decisions and to find solutions to social and political problems. This course is an introduction to four different (but complementary) approaches to asking the questions “What is philosophy?” and “How is it relevant to everyday life?”. The four approaches to philosophical inquiry we’ll cover are as follows:

Analysis: Thinking is a uniquely human capability that avails a person of a reflective standpoint from which to analyze and assess the nature of the world and its contents. Philosophical inquiry, thus, is both the refinery and the test-laboratory for thinking: it converts the raw materials of intuition, conceptual analysis, logic, and rhetoric into viable accounts of the way the world is, and then it tests the accuracy, completeness, and explanatory power of those accounts against alternatives.

Hermeneutics: Thinking is an interpretive activity that inevitably reflects the assumptions and previous experiences of the thinker; the answers one finds, in other words, are determined in part by the questions one asks. Philosophical inquiry, thus, is an ongoing process of examining the traditions and experiences that have shaped one’s thinking so that one might become more aware of one’s hidden assumptions and thereby more open to revising or changing them if necessary.

Spiritual Discipline: Thinking is a lived discipline (rather than a passive, abstract endeavor) that transforms a person through the practice of daily exercises aimed at bringing her whole being into accordance with a unified vision of human flourishing. Philosophical inquiry, thus, is a work upon the

self that has far-reaching effects on how one thinks about and acts towards oneself, others, and the world.

Pragmatism: Thinking is a coping mechanism that enables a person to achieve her life goals (survival, happiness, power, etc.) by helping her to understand and adapt to her ever-changing environment. Philosophical inquiry, thus, is a tool for diagnosing and innovating outmoded practices of thought and action that are no longer effective in achieving their prescribed goals.

III. Objectives and Procedures

This course is designed to help you meet the following five objectives:

Objective One: *Achieve an introductory familiarity with each of the above approaches to philosophy.*

A carefully chosen list of manageable reading assignments will serve two purposes: (a) “baseline” readings will provide an introduction to the guiding principles of each approach; and (b) “case study” readings will provide specific examples of each approach as practiced in various historical and disciplinary contexts.

Objective Two: *Achieve a critical yet charitable understanding of the advantages and drawbacks of each approach (particularly in view of one’s own professional and personal interests).*

You will be encouraged through lecture, class discussion exercises, and writing opportunities to engage the models exemplified in the readings. Daily lectures will take one of two primary formats. For the first few class meetings and on days when a new unit is introduced, lectures will be lengthier and more formal, aimed at providing necessary background information as well as a framework for interpreting supporting readings. During sessions directed at “case studies,” by contrast, my input will be more informal so as to allow maximum time for discussion. To stimulate critical reading and thinking and to encourage preparedness for discussion, I will often ask you to prepare and turn in written discussion exercises pertaining to the day’s reading; there will be a total of 12-15 daily assignments throughout the semester.

Objective Three: *Develop the critical skills required for investigating and practicing each model.*

Writing assignments will help you to develop the skills of careful reading, critical analysis, and the strategic organization of ideas. In addition to written discussion exercises and two essay-based exams, there will be one 4-5 page paper on an assigned topic that is due toward the end of the semester. Though regular participation during in-class activities will provide ample opportunities for sharpening critical skills, I encourage you to solicit my guidance as often as you like via e-mail or at office appointments. I’m in this business because I love working with people like you, so please don’t be shy if you want more feedback or if you need extra help!

Objective Four: *Create an informal, inclusive classroom community in which we’re all responsible to each other.*

In a course of this kind, vigorous discussion is indispensable to the process of understanding, appreciating, and applying course material. In my experience, people tend to come to class better prepared and contribute more vigorously when they have a sense of affinity for and responsibility toward their instructor and fellow students. It is absolutely essential, therefore, to foster an atmosphere

of community and camaraderie by providing ample opportunities for enjoyable and productive interaction. I hope to convey a contagious excitement (and a good sense of humor) about what I take to be fascinating and highly relevant material, to model respect for and interest in the contributions of all participants, and to facilitate discussion that is well-directed enough to illuminate the issues at stake, but open-ended enough to inspire a sense of wonder and enjoyment in as many of you as possible!

Objective Five: *Discern the possibilities and the challenges that each model presents for thinking and living in Christian community.*

As you've surely gathered by now, Calvin is a place where we take our identity as a community of Christian scholars and servants very seriously. Naturally, the question of how best to pursue faithful Christian thinking and living will be a recurring motif of our inquiries.

IV. Requirements and Grade Assessment

To receive a passing grade in the course, each of you must fulfill the following requirements:

Attendance—5%

I will take attendance at every class meeting. Students with more than THREE unexcused absences will receive an "F" for their attendance grade. Students with FIVE OR MORE unexcused absences may incur an additional penalty of up to ONE FULL LETTER off their final semester grade. Since regular attendance is a REQUIREMENT to pass this course, students with excessive unexcused absences risk failing the course.

Participation (Daily Assignments and Discussion)—25%

Since some of us are naturally inclined to verbal participation and others of us are not, frequency of verbal input isn't always the most reliable indicator of who's involved; in other words, you can do perfectly well in this course without speaking up a lot in class, and I will never call on people at random or put you on the spot. I will do my best to regulate discussion so that everyone who wants to get a word in will feel comfortable speaking up, without worrying that the same four or five people will always dominate the conversation. To insure fairness and to make our classroom friendly to a variety of different learning styles, then, the majority of your participation grade will be determined in view of the effort you put into your daily work (reading responses, written discussion questions, etc.).

Short Paper—20%

Each of you will write a 4-5 page paper on an assigned topic. The paper will be assigned toward the end of the semester and will have a rolling deadline (which I'll explain as the time approaches).

Exams—50%

There will be mid-term (25%) and final (25%) examinations. These exams will be short-answer and essay based. I will have more to say about the format and content of each exam as the semester progresses.

V. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a very serious form of academic dishonesty that is covered in detail in the Calvin College Student Handbook and Student Conduct Code available at <http://www.calvin.edu/student-life/safety-student-conduct>. As a student of Calvin College, you are responsible for having read and understood this information, and I will conduct class with the expectation that you are aware of and responsible to the college's definitions, policies, and sanctions concerning plagiarism. I am not trying to scare anyone here, but it is my duty to make you aware that Calvin College takes academic honesty very seriously.

In order to promote thorough understanding of what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, I am providing you here with some helpful information on plagiarism from the Calvin College English Department. **My expectation is that you will read this information carefully and ask any questions you may have about it before turning in your first written daily assignment for this class.**

From the Calvin College English Department Statement on Plagiarism
(this document is available online at <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/engl/writing/plagiar.htm>):

“Definition of Plagiarism

Students plagiarize when they do not credit the sources of their writing—the words, information, ideas, or opinions of others. Plagiarism takes several forms; plagiarism in all its forms deserves a response from the student's instructor and from Calvin College

Context for the policy

Calvin College divides its core curriculum into three parts: knowledge, skills, and virtues. Studying in core courses like [Philosophy 153], students expand their knowledge of God's world, develop their ability to act effectively in that world, and deepen their commitment to living for God and for others. When students plagiarize, they reject the opportunity to learn something new, to understand alternative perspectives, and to develop their own opinions; they fail to develop the skills of research and writing that enhance their ability to understand, inform, and persuade; and they act contrary to the virtues that ought to guide their lives, virtues such as diligence, honesty, courage, stewardship, and justice. Acts of plagiarism affect not only the plagiarizer but also the entire academic community. First, plagiarism taints the trust between instructor and student, creating a climate of suspicion. For example, instructors who have encountered plagiarism might be more inclined to question students' integrity. Moreover, hoping to deter students from plagiarizing, instructors might be more likely to craft exceedingly narrow assignments, limiting students' freedom to pursue academic research as their interests lead them. Acts of plagiarism also taint relationships among students and compromise the fairness of grades. Finally, acts of plagiarism challenge the academic reputation of Calvin College and all its graduates.

Extended Definition

A first step toward avoiding plagiarism is understanding plagiarism in all its forms. The English 101 Committee, therefore, provides the following extended definition of plagiarism.

1. Students plagiarize if they submit as their own work any of the following:
 - a. An entire essay written by someone else. This form of plagiarism includes, for example, essays

purchased from web sites that specialize in academic essays, essays published on the web or in other sources, and unpublished essays written by others.

b. The exact words of someone else without quotation marks around those words. This form of plagiarism can include copying exact wording without quotation marks even if a student provides documentation in the “Works Cited” section.

c. A paraphrase of someone else’s words without documentation. This form of plagiarism includes reordering or replacing someone else’s words while keeping the main idea or the central information.

d. A summary of someone else’s words or ideas without documentation. This form of plagiarism includes using some, few, or even none of the original words to reproduce a shorter version of some or all of someone else’s ideas or text.

e. Undocumented use of information from someone else. In this kind of plagiarism, a student takes information that she found in a particular source and presents it as her own knowledge or as common knowledge. A student must document information that appears in one or only a few specialized sources, is the work or idea of a particular person, or represents a controversial stance on a topic. A student need not document information that is common knowledge.

f. Undocumented use of information that someone else has collected. A student must document research aids such as web-based “research” services and annotated bibliographies.

g. The sequence of ideas, arrangement of material, pattern of thought, or visual representation of information (images, tables, charts, or graphs) from someone else. This form of plagiarism includes any of these textual features even if students present the ideas or information in their own words.

2. Students are accomplices to plagiarism if they do any of the following:

a. They allow a fellow student to submit their work as the student’s own, or they write an essay for another student and allow that student to submit it as his or her own.

b. They do not report a fellow student who plagiarizes.

c. They contribute an essay to a collection of essays (among friends or at a web site) that they know provides opportunity for other students to plagiarize.”

VI. Course Calendar

Though we’ll surely need to make some changes along the way, we’ll attempt to stick as closely as possible to the following schedule. The abbreviation “CP” indicates that the assigned reading is in the course packet.

Week 1

W. Sep. 9

Preliminaries and Course Overview

Opening Remarks and Introductions

F. Sep. 11

Understanding our task: “What is philosophy and why should we care?”

Week 2

M. Sep. 14

Unit One: Analysis

Baseline: Introduction to Analysis

Simon Blackburn, *Think*, “Introduction”, pp. 1-13; “Reasoning”, pp. 193-200, pp. 211-217, pp. 225-232

W. Sep. 16

Introduction to Analysis, continued

Case study: Metaphysics

Peter van Inwagen, “Introduction to Metaphysics”, CP pp. 1-9

F. Sep. 18

Case study: Metaphysics, continued

Week 3

M. Sep. 21

Case study: Epistemology

Rene Descartes, selections from *Meditations*, Editor’s Preface (vii-ix),
Meditations One and Two, pp. 13-24

W. Sep. 23

Case study: Epistemology, continued

Rene Descartes, *Meditations*, Meditation Three, pp. 24-35Simon Blackburn, *Think*, “Knowledge”, pp. 15-48

F. Sep. 25

Case study: Ethics

Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”, CP pp. 10-17

Week 4

M. Sep. 28

Case study: Ethics, continued

Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”, continued

W. Sep. 30

Case study: Philosophy of Religion—The Problem of Evil

J.L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”, CP pp. 18-24

F. Oct. 2

Case study: Philosophy of Religion—The Problem of Evil, continued

Week 5

M. Oct. 5

Unit Two: Hermeneutics

Catch-up—Analysis Wrap-Up and Transition to Hermeneutics

Baseline: Introduction to Hermeneutics

Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Man and Language”, CP pp. 25-30

W. Oct. 7

Introduction to Hermeneutics, continued

F. Oct. 9

Case study: Different Languages, Different Worlds—The Other and Sexism

Simone de Beauvoir, “Introduction to *The Second Sex*,” CP pp. 31-38**Week 6**

M. Oct. 12

Case study: Different Languages, Different Worlds—The Other and Racism

Frantz Fanon, from *Black Skin, White Masks*, Intro. and Chapter 1, CP pp. 39-56

W. Oct. 14

Case Study: Different Languages, Different Worlds—The Other and Speciesism

Mason and Finelli, “Brave New Farm?”, CP 127-136

Mason, “What Can Be Done?”, CP 137-138

- F. Oct. 16 Case Study: Sexism, Racism and Speciesism, continued.
- Week 7**
- M. Oct. 19 Case study: Different Languages, Different Worlds—Christian Belief
Wolterstorff, from *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, CP pp. 57-64
- W. Oct. 21 Case study: Different Languages, Different Worlds—Christian Belief, cont.
Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*
- F. Oct. 23 Case study: Augustine on “Faith Seeking Understanding”, handout
- Week 8**
- M. Oct. 26 Catch-up Day—Hermeneutics Wrap-up and Transition to Spiritual Discipline
- W. Oct. 28 **NO CLASS MEETING—ACADEMIC ADVISING RECESS**
- F. Oct. 30 **Mid-term Examination**
- Week 9**
- Unit Three: Spiritual Discipline**
- M. Nov. 2 Baseline: Introduction to Spiritual Discipline
Pierre Hadot, “Philosophy as a Way of Life”, CP pp. 65-70
- W. Nov. 4 Baseline: Introduction to Spiritual Discipline, continued
Pierre Hadot, “Spiritual Exercises”, CP pp. 72-86
- F. Nov. 6 Case study: The Example of Socrates
Plato, “Socrates Defense (Apology)”, CP pp. 95-107
- Week 10**
- M. Nov. 9 Case study: The Example of Seneca
Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic* (letters 2,5,7,8,18,33,41,48,88,108,110)
- W. Nov. 11 Socrates and Seneca, continued
- F. Nov. 13 Case study: The Example of Henry David Thoreau
Thoreau, from *Walden*, “Economy,” parts A-E, available online at
<http://eserver.org/thoreau/walden00.html>
- Week 11**
- M. Nov. 16 Case study: The Example of Gandhi
Gandhi, from *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, see handout for page #'s
- W. Nov. 18 The Example of Gandhi, continued
Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*
- F. Nov. 20 Case study: The Example of Jesus
Frederica Mathewes Green, from *The Illumined Heart*, pp. 1-12, 25-35

Week 12

M. Nov. 23 The Example of Jesus, continued
Jaroslav Pelikan, "The Rabbi", CP pp. 108-114

W. Nov. 25 Catch-up Day

F. Nov. 27 **NO CLASS MEETING—THANKSGIVING RECESS**

Week 13**Unit Four: Pragmatism**

M. Nov. 30 Spiritual Discipline Wrap-up and Transition to Pragmatism

W. Dec. 2 Introduction to Pragmatism

F. Dec. 4 Case study: Pragmatism and Education
Rorty, "Education as Socialization and as Individualization", CP 115-121

Week 14**Course Retrospective**

M. Dec. 7 Case study: Pragmatism and Religion
Richard Rorty, "Failed Prophecies, Glorious Hopes", CP pp. 122-126

W. Dec. 9 Pragmatism Wrap-up
Philosophical Alternatives: Toward a Fragmented Integration

Fri. Dec. 11 What is philosophy and why should we care? (Reprise)

Week 15**EXAM WEEK**

T. Dec. 15 Final Exam for Section 153D, 1:30 pm, HH 335

F. Dec. 18 Final Exam for Section 153J, 9:00 am, HH 333