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Philosophy 100 Intro to Philosophy /004 CRN: 78745
 3 Credit Hours
 Fall 2017
 Robinson B201
 Office Hours: By appointment.
 Blackboard Site: <https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu/>

Course Description

In this course, I—the instructor—thematically introduce you—the student—to some of the most important, exciting, and oftentimes vexing philosophical topics that have occupied the attention of philosophers throughout history and in the present. These topics are also of interest to experts in other fields that address the most important and fundamental questions about Life, The Universe, and Everything (e.g., neuroscience, physics, theology, and drivers ed):¹

- The mind/brain problem.
- Knowledge of the external world.
- The existence of physical objects.
- The existence of God.
- Free will.

The answers to questions about whether or not the mind is distinct from the brain, whether God exists, whether we can have knowledge of the external world, whether mind-independent physical objects exist, and whether we have free will have radical implications for how we understand ourselves and the world. This is unlike the answer to the question of what Kylie Jenner named her favorite pet chihuahua.²

We'll also spend some time at the beginning of the course learning how to use the basic conceptual tools of the trade that philosophers have used and developed over the many hundreds of years that philosophers have been philosophizing. These are the tools philosophers use to clarify and reason about the issues above. So we'll study the basics of logic, how to define words (hint: it's not just looking it up in a dictionary), and the difference between possibility and necessity. For example, it is necessarily true that $2+2=4$. Is it necessarily true that water is H_2O or is it possible that water instead be composed of some other entities, such as adorable microscopic baby ducks?

Required Texts

- *Theories of Knowledge and Reality* (2nd Edition), Cover and Garns (McGraw Hill), abbreviated as CG on the course schedule.
- *The Trial and Death of Socrates* (3rd Edition), Plato (Hackett), abbreviated as P.
- *Meditations on First Philosophy* (3rd Edition), Rene Descartes (Hackett), abbreviated as D.
- *Treatise Concerning Principles of Human Knowledge*, George Berkeley (Hackett), abbreviated as B.
- Any other readings for the course will be made available electronically (via link or pdf) through the course Blackboard site.

¹ The answer is **not** 42. 42 is the answer to a different question.

² TRICK QUESTION! The answer was Peño, but Peño is no longer with us (RIP).

Course Objectives

- Learn how to use the conceptual tools that philosophers apply to a wide range of problems, not limited to specifically philosophical problems.
- Learn how to reconstruct arguments for various positions.
- Gain a basic understanding of several important and specifically philosophical problems that have not only occupied the attention of historically important albeit dead philosophers but living philosophers as well (not to mention theologians, physicists, and neuroscientists).

Course Requirements and Grading

- **Attendance:** I don't take attendance. However, with the exception of emergencies, there are *at least* two reasons you should attend class:
 - o **First**, there will be quiz and test questions about material covered in class that are not in the readings or class notes uploaded on Blackboard.
 - o **Second**, I also give pop quizzes when attendance is low. These pop quizzes are meant to **reward** students who attend class and the pop quiz questions are usually *very very* easy.³ In fact, it's nearly impossible to get a pop quiz question wrong if you are in class. There have been semesters where I gave **at least** one pop quiz a week, meaning that students who missed a lot of class lost a lot of points while students who regularly attended class gained a lot of points. I don't have a planned amount of pop quizzes. I'm unpredictable like that. So it's best for you to attend class.
 - o If you have a legitimate reason to miss class let me know and I'll work with you. An example of a legitimate reason to miss class is a medical emergency. An example of a non-legitimate reason to miss class is being hung over or oversleeping because you were up until 6am playing Halo.
- **Participation:** Students are expected to have read the assigned reading **before** class and be prepared to discuss it. Bring a copy of the reading to class as well.
- **Quizzes:** There will usually be at least one **announced**⁴ quiz every week or so, except during weeks in which there are exams. I write "at least" because there may be a surprise pop quiz as well (for more info, read the attendance section).
 - o Each announced quiz is *usually* worth between 10 and 20 points.
- **Exams:** There will be 3 exams this semester.
 - o Some of the exams may be in class and others may be take home. I'll have more information later.
 - o Each exam is worth 100 points.
- **Course Grade Calculation:**
 - o Grades are given on the 10 points scale. 97-100=A+, 94-96=A, 90-93=A-, 87-89=B+, 84-86=B, 80-83=B-, 77-79=C+, 74-76=C, 70-73=C-, 60-69=D, 59 or below is F.
 - o Student grades are calculated by dividing the total number of points a student has earned by the total number of required points. For example, suppose a student has taken three quizzes worth 20 points each and one exam worth 100 points. The student's quiz grades were 16, 18, and 12 and the exam grade was 83. So the student has earned 129 points out of a total number of 160 required points. 129 divided by 160 is 0.80. Move the decimal two points to the right and you get an 80. That's a B-. You can calculate your own grades by using this method.
 - o I will show students how to calculate mid-term and final grades at the appropriate time in the semester.

³ Sample pop quiz question: How do you spell "philosophy"? One time I had my students draw me a pretty picture. Seriously, these pop quizzes are easy points. So don't miss class.

⁴ I will announce the quiz the previous class, as well as on Blackboard and via email.

Course Policies

- **Use of technology:** Turn off or silence your cell phones during class and put them away. The use of laptops or tablets is not permitted, not even for note taking, unless the student provides documentation from the disability center. Students who have permission to use laptops or tablets in class can only do so for note taking purposes, not for surfing Facebook, Instagram, etc. I'm familiar with the tricks students use to pretend like they aren't scrolling through the Facebook newsfeed (e.g., alt-tabbing) and I will find out.
- **Late work:** Students cannot make up missed pop quizzes unless they have a valid excuse (e.g., family or medical trauma), for which I will need documentation. Students can make up missed non-pop quizzes or exams but: there is a 3 point per day penalty for late quizzes and a ten point per day penalty for late exams. Students can take missed quizzes or exams without penalty only in the case of emergencies (e.g., medical or family trauma) for which I will need documentation.
- **Communication:** Occasionally I will email information to the class about upcoming assignments or other pertinent information. **Students are expected to read all emails from me.** I will not accept "I did not read the email" as an excuse for any missed work. The best way to get in touch with me outside of the classroom is through email. In fact, it's the only way.

How To Do Well In This Course

An Introductory philosophy course does not require the brainpower of, say, an introductory rocket science course, but that does not mean that this course requires no effort whatsoever. Nearly anyone can understand the topics discussed in this course. However, this will require not only effort on your part, but *strategic* effort. Here then are some tips on how to do well in this course:

First, I recommend that you do all of the following each week if you want to do well on the quizzes and exams: Read the chapter, attend class and take diligent notes, watch the supplemental videos on Blackboard if available and read the instructor's notes as well.

Second, I recommend that you do all of the above in the following order: **FIRST**, read the readings for the upcoming class before you attend class. Take notes on what you read. Underline key passages. Jot down a few questions as well. Even if it doesn't make sense, just read through it. It will make a lot more sense after we work through the material as a class, but if you haven't read beforehand, you will be lost. **SECOND**, attend class. Take notes, ask questions, participate, etc. If there's a quiz or test coming up, review the notes you took in class, watch the supplemental videos, read my (Davis's notes) on Blackboard (if they are available). If you only show up to class but never read or do any work outside of class, you're not going to do well.

A third important tip: Spread out the work you do outside of class. If you try to cram in all the readings, etc in one day before a major quiz or exam, you have little chance of doing well. I'd suggest spreading out steps the steps over *several* days. It gives your brain time to absorb the information. Also, get some sleep—it actually helps you recall and understand information better.

If you come to me for help, the very first thing I'll ask you about is your study habits. If you tell me that never do the readings, never attend class, or space out in class, I'll tell you to try do the readings, attend class, take notes, read my notes on Blackboard and watch my videos and then come back and see me. There's a strong likelihood that you will see noticeable improvement.

As should be evident, this class will demand some time outside of class. If you are working a full time job and taking four or five other classes, you are probably not going to have enough time to do well in this course.

One final point: Even if you try your best, you are not guaranteed an A. That's life. Some people have a harder time learning philosophy than others. *You should still take this course* (assuming you have time). Your thinking will improve. This in turn will help you in other classes that require critical thinking skills (most college courses). It will help you in life. Most importantly, it will help you be a better human. The philosopher Aristotle famously defined humans as rational animals. We eat, breathe, and sleep just as squirrels, dogs, and elephants eat, breathe, and sleep. Unlike squirrels, dogs,

and elephants, however, we can reflect on the fact that we are eating, breathing, sleeping AND on the fact that we reflect. That's the rationality part of the definition. By learning at least a little bit of philosophy, you'll improve your rational thinking skills— the ability to reflect on various issues. Hence, you'll become a better human. Isn't it swell that you can achieve all of this at George Mason University?

University Policies and Information

- **Academic Integrity:** Students must be responsible for their own work, and students and faculty must take on the responsibility of dealing explicitly with violations. The tenet must be a foundation of our university culture. [See <http://oai.gmu.edu/>].
- **Honor Code:** Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/>].
Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.
- **MasonLive/Email:** Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account. [See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu/>].
- **Patriot Pass:** Once you sign up for your Patriot Pass, your passwords will be synchronized, and you will use your Patriot Pass username and password to log in to the following systems: Blackboard, University Libraries, MasonLive, myMason, Patriot Web, Virtual Computing Lab, and WEMS. [See <https://thanatos.gmu.edu/passwordchange/index.jsp>].
- **Responsible Use of Computing:** Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing. [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible---use---of---computing/>].
- **Students with Disabilities:** Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See <http://ods.gmu.edu>].
- **University Libraries:** University Libraries provides resources for distance students. [See <http://library.gmu.edu/for/distance>].
- **Writing Center:** The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing. [See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>]. You can now sign up for an Online Writing Lab (OWL) session just like you sign up for a face-to-face session in the Writing Center, which means YOU set the date and time of the appointment! Learn more about the [Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/tutoring/email--tutoring). See (<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/tutoring/email--tutoring>)
- **Counseling and Psychological Services:** The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See <http://caps.gmu.edu>].
- **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):** The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), also known as the "Buckley Amendment," is a federal law that gives protection to student educational records and provides students with certain rights. [See <http://registrar.gmu.edu/privacy>].
- **Diversity/Religious Holidays:** If there are any issues related to religious holidays, please inform the instructor the first week of class. See also <http://catalog.gmu.edu/content.php?catoid=5&navoid=104>

N.B. The instructor reserves the right to revise this syllabus as required.

Tentative Schedule (Liable to Change)

Unit 1: Conceptual Tools	
<i>Monday August 28</i>	Course Introduction
<i>Wednesday August 30</i>	Arguments: CG 13-26, P 20-40.
<i>Monday September 4</i>	Labor Day. No class.
<i>Wednesday September 6</i>	Conceptual Analysis: CG 47-55, P 1-12.
<i>Monday September 11</i>	Propositions/Sentences: CG 59-63. <i>Quiz: Arguments and Conceptual Analysis</i>
<i>Wednesday September 13</i>	Modality: CG 64-74.

Unit 2: The Mind/Body Problem	
<i>Monday September 18</i>	Dualism and Materialism CG 186-200, D 47-59. <i>Quiz: Propositions, sentences, and modality.</i>
<i>Wednesday September 20</i>	The Identity Theory: CG 235-241.
<i>Monday September 25</i>	Dualism or Materialism: CG 250-256. <i>Quiz: Dualism, Materialism, and the Identity Theory</i>
<i>Wednesday September 27</i>	Personal Identity: CG 261-273, Locke (BB)
<i>Monday October 2</i>	<i>Exam 1</i>

Unit 3: Knowledge of the External World	
<i>Wednesday October 4</i>	Knowledge and Direct Realism: CG 278-285.
<i>Monday October 9</i>	Columbus Day Holiday: Monday class meets Tuesday
Tuesday October 10	Problems with Direct Realism: CG 285-292. <i>Quiz: Knowledge and Direct Realism</i>
<i>Wednesday October 11</i>	Representative Realism: CG 292-308.
<i>Monday October 16</i>	Problems with Representative Realism: CG 308-317, B §8-10, 14, 19. <i>Quiz: Representative Realism & Problems with Direct Realism</i>
<i>Wednesday October 18</i>	Idealism CG 318-329, B §1-2, 3-7, 23.
<i>Monday October 23</i>	Idealism and Ontology: CG 331-353, B §25-33, 45, 48.
<i>Wednesday October 25</i>	<i>Exam 2</i>

Unit 4: Philosophy of Religion	
<i>Monday October 30</i>	Philosophy and Religion: CG 76-84, Cosmological Arguments: 94-106.
<i>Wednesday November 1</i>	The Contingency Argument: 106-119. <i>Quiz: Cosmological Arguments</i>
<i>Monday November 6</i>	The Ontological Argument: CG 119-137, D 42-47 <i>Quiz: The Contingency Argument</i>

Unit 5: Free Will	
<i>Wednesday November 8</i>	Free Will: CG 355-365.
<i>Monday November 13</i>	Determinism and Compatibilism: CG 365-374.
<i>Wednesday November 15</i>	Indeterminism and the Dilemma: 374-379. <i>Quiz: Free will, determinism, and compatibilism.</i>
<i>Monday November 20</i>	Compatibilism again: CG 379-388.
<i>Wednesday November 22</i>	<i>Thanksgiving Recess</i>
<i>Monday December 4</i>	Agency Theory: 389-398.
<i>Wednesday December 6</i>	<i>Agency Theory Continued.</i>
<i>Monday December 11</i>	Reading Day
<i>Wednesday December 13</i>	FINAL EXAM, 1:30pm to 4:15pm