

PHILOSOPHY 218 METAPHYSICS & EPISTEMOLOGY
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT
FALL 2010-11
TUES. & THURS. 12:30 108

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Office Hours: After class and by appointment.

Course Description: The general content of this course can be summarized as an attempt to answer two questions: *what is there*, and *how do we know*? The first question concerns metaphysics, i.e., an account of the most general features of existence. For example, despite the variety of forms we find in nature, it could be that these are different varieties of only *one* kind of thing (e.g., matter), or maybe two (matter and non-matter). We may then ask about the *nature* of matter and non-matter—its qualities—and inquire whether these natures really exist or are illusory. And what, by the way, does it mean for something to exist? Further, why does anything at all exist, and why does it exist in the way it does, rather than some other way? And is there an *ultimate cause* of existence, or is existence uncaused? As you can see, these are unusual questions; and their answers will be many and uncertain. This leads us to the second concern, epistemology, i.e., an account, not of *what* we know, but of *how* we know what exists. *Episteme* means ‘science’ or ‘knowledge’; so it is concerned with the modes and justifications of knowledge claims. For example, we say we gain knowledge of nature primarily through our senses and scientific investigation. But how trustworthy is sense-knowledge? What methods and assumptions does science depend on? Does it reveal the true nature of things, or does it simply tell us how we perceive them? We also say that we gain knowledge through reasoning. But what does it mean to reason? How reliable is this mode of knowledge? Can it tell us whether anything exists beyond sensory knowledge? In sum, *what are the possibilities and limits of sense and reason, in revealing to us what exists*? Is knowledge even possible, or must we admit our ultimate ignorance and suspend judgment (skepticism)? Again, these are unusual questions; yet nothing could be more fundamental to our everyday comportment than what we believe to be true and false about the world in which we live. Either we drift lightly on the surface of existence, or we dig in and bring its secrets to light.

Less abstractly, we will study the nature of body, soul, free will, and whether God exists. But the main pedagogical objective of the course is to extend your capacity for philosophical thinking about everyday stuff. You can expect short, but difficult readings; short, once per-week writing assignments, a longer final paper, and *some fun*. This course mainly emphasizes philosophical thinking, which I take to mean the slow, careful, reflective reading and analysis of texts and concepts. Classes will be discussion-driven and centered on student written responses to the assigned readings. Lecturing will be minimal. *Warning: The readings are difficult, complicated, abstract, dry, require sustained, intense concentration, repeated reading, and may induce headaches. If you have no taste or patience for this type of reading, I strongly recommend not taking this course—but I urge you to try, to extend yourself, to turn off the TV and to drink more coffee than usual.*

Important: Read this syllabus carefully. By taking this class, you agree to understand and comply with this syllabus. To maintain class organization and fairness, I must maintain the policies stated herein. If I make any changes to it, I will inform you. If there is anything that you do not understand or agree with, or needs to be added/changed/corrected, feel free to discuss it with me. I am always happy to talk about anything. But if it is in the syllabus, you can never say, “oh, I didn’t know.”

Required Texts: Texts are available at the AUB Bookstore.

- Course packet
- Rosenberg, Jay. *Three Conversations about Knowing*. Hackett, 2000.

Course Requirements:

- Reading Response papers: probably 8, making up 50% of course grade
- Mid-term paper, 1000 words, 20% of course grade

- Final paper, 2000 words, 30% of course grade

Reading Response papers: Response papers consist of your responses to several substantial questions about the assigned readings (for due dates, see Course Schedule, below). The Response questions are posted on Blackboard under “Assignments.” Simply download the question form and type in your responses, single-spaced, leaving the questions in place. Save to your disk, print, SIGN YOUR NAME, staple the pages, and hand in at the end of class. Each response paper is assigned one of the following points¹: 92 (Excellent); 85 (Very Good); 80 (Good); 75 (OK+); 70 (Fair); 60 (Weak or Whoops!) 0 (Fail). To give you an idea of what I am looking for, I keep the following criteria in mind while grading:

- Engagement and thoughtfulness: The writer demonstrates serious and sustained engagement with the text and questions. This means that you really tried to understand the reading and that you had something appropriate and interesting to say about it. You didn’t simply read; you *thought*. The minimally appropriate length for each question is approximately 70 words. More is probably better; but what matters most is that you have sincerely engaged the question.
- Clarity: The writing is clear, that is, word choices have been carefully considered and the words are arranged to facilitate comprehension *for the reader* (i.e., the sentences are grammatically correct, syntactical units are kept together, and flow of ideas is logical and organized). For more information, see “writing guides” on Moodle.
- Mechanics: Minimal grammatical, punctuation, and spelling mistakes. Responses must be typed in 12 point, Times-Roman, and SINGLE-spaced.

These criteria are for your guidance, and I try to follow them closely. Do your best to fulfill them in an *excellent* manner, and you will get 92 points. However, be aware that additional factors may weigh in my judgment. For example, if you are excellently “engaged,” but the mechanics are sloppy, you’ll get docked. Conversely, if your mechanics and clarity are perfect, but your engagement is light, don’t expect to get 92 points. Also, if you repeatedly make the same mistakes after I have repeatedly told you to fix them, I tend to grade more harshly. But progress makes me happy. In addition, note that:

- On occasion I may base your Response grade on only *one* out of several questions. Therefore, since you won’t know which of your answers I will choose to grade you on, you should do your best on each answer.
- These assignments are to be done *before you come to class*, because the topic of discussion for every class will be *your answers to these questions*. In addition, Response papers not completed or not in your hands by the beginning of class will be marked down to the next point level (e.g., from 92 to 85). If you are two days late, two levels; three or more days late, you get 0 points. Response papers cannot be e-mailed in. *Do not e-mail me any work, unless you have asked and I say you can.*
- For your Response score average, your lowest single Response score will be dropped (it won’t be averaged in). However, any zeros you have received, *will* be averaged in. This includes any Responses you fail to hand in.

Mid-term paper: I will give you a question much like a Response question, but one which will require greater length (app. 1000 words, 3-pages double-spaced), involving, e.g., a comparison between two of the readings.

Final Paper: You may choose option A or B.

Option A, **position paper:** By the 8th week of the semester, I will give you paper topics, on which you may compose a 2000 word, double-spaced paper. You are to take a position on the topic and support your position with arguments from the course readings and from your own brain.

Option B, **written dialogue:** This assignment is designed to promote the idea that philosophy is done best in active dialogue with others. At the 5th week of the semester, you will choose a class partner with whom you will begin written discussions over e-mail (at least once per week) pertaining to any issue raised by the readings, class discussions, or response papers. By the 10th week or so, you

¹ For details, see the handout “Calculating and Estimating Your Course Grade”.

should decide on a specific topic on which you and your partner will together compose a 15 page written dialogue. You will refine your dialogic discussion during finals week and submit it on the Final Exam date. In its final, refined form, you and your partner will take opposing positions on a specific issue. Each of you will demonstrate a strong understanding of the issue, recognition of its problems and complexities, logical development of the dialogue, and clear writing. Additional grading criteria are similar to those of the Response papers: engagement, thoughtfulness, clarity, and mechanics. Each person, however, is to do his or her own work and will be graded independently.

Attendance: Class attendance and participation are vital components of this course and will affect your grade both directly and indirectly. If you do not arrive by the time I take attendance, or if you leave the classroom for more than five minutes, you will be marked absent. For every unexcused absence over three, your course points will be reduced by 3. If you accumulate more than eight absences, you automatically fail the course. I accept excuses *only for extreme circumstances that you must discuss with me in person and provide documentation*—no exceptions. Also, please do not ask me if you missed anything in class the day you were absent—you did! Any important notices will be posted on Moodle. **Note: Bonus for good attendance:** if you have no absences throughout the semester, 4 points will be added to your course grade; only one absence, 3 points; two absences, 2 points.

Note: You will not be excused for missing class due to special sessions or make-ups in other classes. If a teacher in another class schedules you for anything that conflicts with this class time, you must tell that teacher that you cannot make it because you already have a class at that time. In other words, no scheduling conflicts are allowed. This rule comes by order of the Dean of FAS. But it is your responsibility to make sure that you do not have any scheduling conflicts.

Participation and class conduct: Participation is strongly encouraged. In order to participate well, you must read and do the Responses before class, and *always bring the assigned text to class*. Ask questions, make comments, and respond (respectfully) to other students. No question or comment is too silly or off-base. Everyone has questions, and surely others have the same questions. Occasionally, I may call on you unexpectedly. A philosophy class is one of the very few places where you will have the opportunity to express and examine opinions. But (1) you should expect to have your opinions challenged; (2) you are expected to listen to and to think about the opinions of your classmates. Therefore, **ONLY ONE PERSON MAY SPEAK AT A TIME, AND NO ONE MAY TALK IN THE BACKGROUND**. For breaching this rule, either you will be marked absent, or points will be taken off your final grade.

ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES MUST BE TURNED OFF AND PUT AWAY. You will be marked absent or have points taken off your final grade for the following behaviors I consider disrespectful: Cell phones going off; text messaging in class; leaving the room to make or answer phone calls; playing games or reading non-class material during class. I reserve the right to take your “Crackberry” until class is over. During class discussions, be respectful of me and others by listening to what is going on, rather than talking among yourselves. Also, as a courtesy to me, *do not make preparations to leave class until I say class is over*.

Grades: Criteria and Calculation: I want you to understand how your grades are assigned and calculated, so that you can know better what I expect and so that you can exercise more control over your own progress. There are two main parts to the grading process: Criteria and Calculation. Above, I have indicated the criteria I consider when grading your Response and Final papers. Additional grading criteria are posted on Moodle. For Calculation, see the document titled “Calculating and Estimating Your Grades,” on Moodle. This will show you completely explicitly how all calculations are made, so that you can do them yourself. But here is a brief explanation: All grades are recorded on Moodle’s “Gradebook,” (as well as on the assignments themselves), so you can view them as soon as I have put them up. To estimate your grade at any point in the semester, simply figure your average and multiply it by the “weighted” amount for that assignment; then sum the weighted amounts. Be sure to drop your lowest Response score, when figuring your average.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the intentional or careless use of someone else’s writing or ideas as if they were your own. I consider it equivalent to stealing, lying, and cheating, and no amount of it will be

tolerated in my class. Plagiarism is wrong for another reason: The general objective of college is to become a better writer, thinker, learner, and person. Plagiarizing severely undermines that objective and harms not only you, but all students, professors, and the university. If you plagiarize, you fail to learn how to write and think. You represent yourself as having skills and knowledge that you in fact do not have. Also, *I intensely despise plagiarism and plagiarists*. I take your work and my work seriously. If you plagiarize, then I am wasting your time and mine. I hate wasting time, because I wish to fill my life with meaning and accomplishments. I also hate false relationships. When I read and respond to your work, I am engaged in a mutual relationship of trust, respect, truth, care, and progress. If I am reading your plagiarized work, then I am having a false relationship with you. I despise false relationships because they destroy the substance of life. **Therefore, if you plagiarize anything in this class, you will automatically fail the course and be reported to the Dean. It will go on your record and you could be dismissed from the university.** This includes any submitted work whatsoever (including essay drafts, single sentences and ideas, using dictionary definitions, encyclopedia entries, or any part thereof, paraphrasing, whether from books, internet, magazines, friends, wherever). Unfortunately, I catch plagiarizers *every semester*, and they are *very unhappy*. I am an experienced reader and can usually tell, simply by reading, when a student has plagiarized. I can tell because the writing does not match the assignment, because the text has an internet feel, or because it uses awkward wording in an attempt to disguise the source. I also use Google and other resources.

You can, of course, easily avoid plagiarism simply by *citing your sources properly*. If you are unsure of how to cite sources properly, check the citation guidelines posted on Moodle, or consult the MLA guide in the library. But *you are responsible for any plagiarism*. If you are struggling with an assignment, or with your English, please come and talk to me. I am here to help.

Turnitin. Unfortunately, due to a few people's insidious attempts to plagiarize, I must force everyone to submit all assignments to Turnitin.com, *in addition* to submitting a hard copy to me. Failure to submit your work to Turnitin results in an automatic 0 for the assignment. Here is how it works: As their website says, "Every paper submitted is returned in the form of a Originality Report. Results are based on searches of billions of pages from current and archived instances of the Internet, millions of student papers submitted to Turnitin, and commercial databases of journal articles and periodicals" (http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_solutions.html). NOTE that Turnitin only submits a "similarity" report, not a plagiarism report. The similarity report shows the percentage of your text that is similar or identical to another text, and therefore helps me determine whether you have plagiarized. Some similarity is fine and to be expected. But identical similarity or paraphrased similarity is plagiarism. NOTE: Writing papers and responses does not consist of using a source and changing a few words here and there. Nor does paraphrasing a source consist of changing a few words here and there. It means making a compact summary of the main point of a paragraph, for purposes of clarification for the reader. All paraphrasing must be cited.

To use Turnitin, go to Moodle and click on the Turnitin for the current assignment.

The following is from http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_article_what_is_plagiarism.html

What is Plagiarism?

Many people think of plagiarism as copying another's work, or borrowing someone else's original ideas. But terms like "copying" and "borrowing" can disguise the seriousness of the offense:

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, to "plagiarize" means

- to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own
- to use (another's production) without crediting the source
- to commit literary theft
- to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.

In other words, plagiarism is an act of fraud. It involves both stealing someone else's work and lying about it afterward.

But can words and ideas really be stolen?

According to U.S. law, the answer is yes. The expression of original ideas is considered intellectual property, and is protected by copyright laws, just like original inventions. Almost all forms of expression fall under copyright protection as long as they are recorded in some way (such as a book or a computer file).

All of the following are considered plagiarism:

- turning in someone else's work as your own
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not (see our section on "fair use" rules)

Most cases of plagiarism can be avoided, however, by citing sources. Simply acknowledging that certain material has been borrowed, and providing your audience with the information necessary to find that source, is usually enough to prevent plagiarism. See our section on [citation](#) for more information on how to cite sources properly.

What is citation?

A "citation" is the way you tell your readers that certain material in your work came from another source. It also gives your readers the information necessary to find that source again, including:

1. information about the author
2. the title of the work
3. the name and location of the company that published your copy of the source
4. the date your copy was published
5. the page numbers of the material you are borrowing

Why should I cite sources?

Giving credit to the original author by citing sources is the only way to use other people's work without plagiarizing. But there are a number of other reasons to cite sources:

1. citations are extremely helpful to anyone who wants to find out more about your ideas and where they came from.
2. not all sources are good or right -- your own ideas may often be more accurate or interesting than those of your sources. Proper citation will keep you from taking the rap for someone else's bad ideas.
3. citing sources shows the amount of research you've done.
4. citing sources strengthens your work by lending outside support to your ideas.

Doesn't citing sources make my work seem less original?

Not at all. On the contrary, citing sources actually helps your reader distinguish your ideas from those of your sources. This will actually emphasize the originality of your own work.

When do I need to cite?

Whenever you borrow words or ideas, you need to acknowledge their source. The following situations almost always require citation:

1. whenever you use quotes
2. whenever you paraphrase
3. whenever you use an idea that someone else has already expressed
4. whenever you make specific reference to the work of another
5. whenever someone else's work has been critical in developing your own ideas.

(end of website)

Citation Mechanics: See Instructions posted on Moodle

Moodle: Here you will find course material such as the syllabus, some course readings, citation mechanics, tips on writing papers, and the Response questions. When the questions are ready, I will alert you by e-mail (via the “News Forum”) so, check your e-mail regularly. You may also post your own thoughts on the News Forum for everyone to see.

The Writing Center:

If you have writing issues that need extra attention, please take advantage of the Writing Center. Their instructors help all students, from first-year to doctoral. Keep in mind that they will *not* proofread or copy-edit your work. Walk in or make an appointment: 9 am - 5 pm, Monday – Friday. West Hall 336; Ext. 3157; E-mail: writing@aub.edu.lb

Course Schedule: This schedule is subject to change, although any changes will be announced well in advance. To be prepared for class discussions, read the assigned material *prior* to class time. *Always* bring the assigned material to class. Bring whatever is assigned for Tuesday to Thursday's class as well.

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
1	28/09 Introduction to Course	30/09
2	05/10 Plato: The Divided Line and The Allegory of the Cave	07/10 Response 1
3	12/10 Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> (Book I, complete)	14/10
4	19/10 Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> (Book IV, VI, VII, VIII selections) Response 2	21/10
5	26/10 Descartes <i>Meditations</i> I & II	28/10
6	02/11 Descartes <i>Meditations</i> V	04/11 Response 3
7	09/11 Anscombe, "Causality and Determination." Hume: On the origin of ideas and on necessary connection.	11/11 Response 4
8	16/11 NO CLASS Ad-Adha	18/11 NO CLASS
9	23/11 Salmon, "The Problem of Induction" Response 5	25/11 Salmon (cont.)
10	30/11 <i>Three Conversations on Knowing</i> Plato, <i>Theatetus</i> (short selection) Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"	02/12
11	07/12 NO CLASS Hijra New Year Midterm paper Due MONDAY DEC. 6TH	09/12
12	14/12 Carnap, "The Rejection of Metaphysics."	16/12 NO CLASS Ashoura
13	21/12 Carnap (cont.) Response 5	23/12 NO CLASS
14	28/12 NO CLASS	30/12 NO CLASS
15	04/01 Perry, <i>A Dialogue on Personal Identity</i>	06/01 NO CLASS Armenian Christmas
16	11/01 "Dialogue" (cont.) Response 5	13/01 "Dialogue" (cont.)
17	18/01 LAST CLASS The Puzzle of Reality: Why Does the Universe Exist And Does the Answer Involve a Necessary Being? Theology and Falsification	20/01
18	25/01 FINAL PAPERS due WEDNSDAY Jan. 26, 5 PM	27/01
19	01/02	03/02 SEMESTER ENDS