

**PHILOSOPHY 218 METAPHYSICS & EPISTEMOLOGY**  
**AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT**  
**FALL 2014**  
**MON. & WED. 3:00 - 4:15, NICELY 209**

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**Course Description:** This course is divided into two main parts: *Metaphysics*, which supplies answers to the question *what exists?* and *epistemology*, which answers the question of *how we know* anything. More specifically, **metaphysics** studies the most general features of existence. For example, we find a great variety of things in nature; but metaphysicians suppose that, most fundamentally, only two kinds of thing exist: material and non-material. Furthermore, these things have a *structure*, consisting of *substance* and *properties*, etc. So, metaphysics is concerned with the very basic (or most fundamental) structures (or categories) of existing things. Note that *physics* is also concerned to study what exists on a fundamental level (atoms and quarks, causal laws); however, it does not study the categories that all beings have in common, nor does it study the structure of causation. Nor does it study abstract, non-material, entities. For example, metaphysics is concerned to know whether “universals,” (the property of ‘blue’, for instance, that is shared with many *particular* things) exists, and whether propositions like  $2 + 2 = 4$  exist and in what sense. Metaphysics is also concerned to know which entities exist *necessarily*, or which merely *possibly* or *impossibly*. For example, metaphysicians want to know whether the relation of causes to effects (scientific law) is necessary, possible, and in what sense. Metaphysicians also investigate the nature of *time*, that is, consists of present, past, and future—and whether this makes any sense! Finally, metaphysics is a self-reflective discipline. That is, it asks whether the very structures of thought by which we do metaphysics can actually access a mind-independent world (realism) *or* whether these structures of thought determine and limit our access to the world (anti-realism).

These questions leads us to the closely related second part of the course, **epistemology**, which is 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, our knowledge of nature is gained primarily through our senses and scientific investigation. But how reliable is sense-knowledge? What methods and assumptions does science depend on? We also say that we gain knowledge through reasoning. But what does it mean to reason? How reliable is this mode of knowledge? Are we justified in claiming we know anything? In sum, *what are the possibilities and limits of sense and reason, in revealing to us what exists?* Thus we have to do epistemology to do metaphysics, and metaphysics to do epistemology. These may seem like strange questions; yet they are most fundamental to knowledge and existence. What else is there?

The main *pedagogical* objective of the course is to extend your capacity for *philosophical thinking*, which I take to mean the slow, careful, reflective reading and analysis of texts and concepts. Classes will focus on discussion about the assigned readings, with the aim of understanding the arguments and trying to think of solutions to the problems they present. There are three writing assignments and occasional quizzes.

This course fulfills a GE humanities List I requirement. Its prerequisite is *one previous course in philosophy or consent of instructor*. If you have not had a previous college level philosophy course, you cannot take this one. *Warning: The readings are difficult, complicated, abstract, dry, detailed, 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 that you not take this course. If you are just hoping to fill a Humanities requirement but have no real interest in philosophy, I suggest you not take this course. But if you want to bend your mind for a semester, I welcome you. Occasionally, we will have fun.*

**Program Learning Outcomes**

- The ability to precisely identify the conclusion for which a writer is arguing.
- The ability to accurately represent the argument(s) which someone is using to support his or her conclusion.
- The ability to identify and assess objections to arguments in our readings.

- The ability to develop, explain, and defend your own views.

**Essential:** By taking this class, you agree to understand and to comply with this syllabus. By ‘syllabus’ I mean all of the documents found in the **Syllabus Section** on Moodle. Read this and all syllabus documents carefully. If I make any changes, I will inform you. If you have a question about any policy, I am happy to talk about it. But if it is in the syllabus, you can never say that you did not know it.

**Required Texts:** All texts are available at the AUB Bookstore. See course schedule below for reading assignments.

Bonjour, Lawrence. *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses*, second edition, Roman & Littlefield, 2010. ISBN 978-0-7425-6419-0

Loux, Michael. *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, third edition. Routledge, 2006. ISBN: 978-0-415-40134-0

The occasional article will be handed out or made available on Moodle.

**Graded Requirements:**

- Quizzes: probably 8, making up 10% of course grade
- Take-home mid-term, 1000 words, 20% of course grade
- Mid-term paper , 1000 words, 25% of course grade
- Final paper, 1500 words, 35% of course grade
- Final Exam, short answer questions, one essay, 10% of course grade

**Quizzes:** These are multiple-choice or short answer quizzes given occasionally (according to Course Schedule) designed to keep you up with the readings and to sharpen comprehension. The Quiz for that day will be over the readings assigned for that class (or the previous class) only. Quizzes may *not* be made up. Your lowest quiz score will be omitted from your total Quizzes score. Here is how they are scored: -0 = 100, -1 = 90; -2 = 80; -3 = 70; -4 = 60; -5 = 0. Note that if you cheat on the quiz by looking at someone else’s quiz, or by giving answers to someone else, or receiving them from someone else, or any manner of cheating, you will receive a zero for the quiz.

**Take home midterm:** You will be given several questions to answer. You will be given a window of five hours (or longer) to answer them. The questions will be based on the previously assigned readings. Here are the bases on which I will grade your essay: You must be able to identify and discuss the main idea (thesis) of the readings. You must be able to identify the reasons that are given in support of that thesis. You must be able to critically evaluate that thesis. You must be able to write in clear, grammatically correct, English. Your thoughts must be well-organized. Midterms that fulfill all of the above in an excellent manner will receive 90 points. Those that do so in a “good” manner, or fulfill the criteria partially, will receive 80 points or more. Those essays that need work in at least two of the above criteria will receive 70 points or more. Those that do not fulfill several of the criteria, or do so in a weak manner, will receive 60 points or more. Those essays that fail to display much knowledge of the readings, *or* are incomprehensible or thoughtless in expression, will receive a 59 or less. The best way to prepare for these essays is to read the assigned readings *carefully* and pay attention to how we discuss them in class.

**Mid-term and Final paper:** Clear writing is essential to the practice of philosophy. I will assign paper topics sometime before the papers are due. (I do not allow you to choose your own topic, due to the tendency for students to plagiarize; however, you will have some latitude to choose how you respond to that topic.) You will take a position on the topic and defend it. I will grade the papers according to the “Grading Criteria for Written Assignments” found under the syllabus section on Moodle. You can also find extra writing help under “Writing Guides.”

**Final Exam:** Details to be announced.

**Attendance:** Attendance will be taken, but there is no attendance grade. However, your performance on the papers and exams will depend heavily on your ability to understand the assigned readings and

to think critically about these issues. Also, quizzes cannot be made up. So, it is in your best interest to attend every class, be attentive, and participate. However, if you miss more than seven classes for whatever reason, you will either be dropped from the course and receive a “W”, or you will receive a failing grade of 50.

**Participation and class conduct:** Participation is strongly encouraged. To participate well, you must do the readings *before* class so we can go over them in 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 as you. However, please do not monopolize the discussion. Give others a chance to speak. *Be respectful of me and others by listening to what is going on, rather than talking among yourselves.*

**NOTE:** Repeat offenders of the following behaviors will be ejected from class and will have **points removed from their final grade.** (1) Talking while someone else is talking. (2) Using cell phones in class. All electronic devices must be turned off and put away completely out of sight. If you must take notes with a computer, the internet connection must be turned off. (3) Leaving the room to make or answer phone calls; playing games or reading non-class material during class. (4) Repeated lateness; leaving early. Also, as a courtesy to me, *please do not make preparations to leave class until I say class is over.* If I seem unaware that class time has expired, kindly alert me, thank you.

**Grade Calculation:** I want you to understand how your grades are calculated and assigned, so that you can know better what I expect and so you can exercise more control over your own progress. See “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. Here is a brief explanation: All grades are recorded on Moodle’s “Grades” (as well as on the assignments themselves), so you can view them as soon as I have put them up (Moodle→Administration→Grades).

To estimate your grade at any point in the semester, simply figure your average and multiply it by the “weighted” amount; then sum the weighted amounts (see “Calculating and Estimating. . .”). Be sure to drop the lowest score on your quizzes.

**Grading Criteria:** I want you to understand the criteria I use to grade your papers and essays, so that you can better know what to expect and how to improve your grades. See “Grading Criteria for Written Assignments” on Moodle.

**NOTE:** Never tell me that you “need” a certain course or paper grade, nor ask me to “go easy” on grades or anything else. The request is completely inappropriate and unethical. If made, I will *reduce* your course grade by at least 2 points. The best way to get the grade you need is to do the required work as best you can. I am a hard grader but I try to be fair. But there are no guarantees that you will get the grade you need. Keep in mind I am here to work with you. So, feel free to come to office hours or make an appointment.

**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, the university, and society in general. 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 despise plagiarism and plagiarists.* I take your work and my work seriously. When I read and respond to your work, I consider myself as engaged in a mutual relationship of trust, respect, truth, care, and progress. If I am reading your plagiarized work, then my work becomes a pointless waste of time. I hate wasting time, because I wish to fill my life with meaning and accomplishments. **If you plagiarize anything in this class, you will receive a grade of zero for the assignment and be reported to the Dean. You will face the Discipline Committee, 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). You must also discourage plagiarism by not giving your paper to someone else to copy. Unfortunately, I catch plagiarizers *every semester*. 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 Turnitin, 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, see “**Documenting Sources: Rules & Mechanics**” under the syllabus section on Moodle. 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.** Students must submit all assignments to Turnitin.com. Failure to do so 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](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 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 documented.

To submit your paper to Turnitin, go to Moodle and click on “Turnitin submission” for the current assignment.

**More information on Plagiarism is available on Moodle under the syllabus section**

**The Writing Center:**

If your writing needs 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](mailto:writing@aub.edu.lb)

**Moodle:** Here you will find course material such as the syllabus, helpful reading questions and answers, some course readings, citation mechanics, tips on writing papers, etc. Class notices and announcements will be sent to you by e-mail (via the “News Forum”) so, **check your AUB e-mail** regularly. You may also post your own thoughts on the News Forum for everyone to see.

**E-mail:** So that we may better communicate, you must use your AUB e-mail and “authenticate” it so that I can see your name and know who you are.

See Course Schedule, next page--

**Course Schedule:** This schedule is subject to change, although any changes will be announced 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 Monday to Wednesday's class, as well.

Week	Monday	Wednesday
1. Sept.	1 NO class	3 Intro to syllabus and to course
2	8 Bonjour, Chapters 1, 2, 3 (Cartesian epistemology, basic concepts of knowledge)	10 continued
3	15 Bonjour, Chapter 4 (induction)	17 continued
4	22 Bonjour, Chapter 5 (a priori justification)	24
5 Oct.	29 Bonjour, Chapter 6 (immediate experience) Quiz 1	01 <b>Take-home midterm, due Monday</b>
6	06 <b>Al-Adha NO CLASS</b>	08 Bonjour, Chapter 7 (external world) Quiz 2
7	13 Bonjour, Chapter 9 (foundationalism, coherentism)	15 Quiz 3
8	20 Loux, Chapter 1 (universals 1)	22
9	27 Loux, Chapter 2 (universals 2)	29 Quiz 4 <b>1000 word paper due FRIDAY</b>
10 Nov	03 Loux, Chapter 3 (particulars, substances) up to 101	05 to 117 Quiz 5
11	10 Loux, Chapter (necessary and possible)	12
12	17 Loux, Chapter 6 (causation)	19 Quiz 6
13	24 Loux, Chapter 8 (nature of time) Quiz 8	26 Quiz 7
14 Dec	01 Loux, Chapter 9 (anti-realism)	03 <b>Quiz</b>
15	08 <b>Last scheduled class</b>	10 <b>Make up class? Reading period</b>
16	15 <b>Final Exam Monday Dec. 15, 1 pm</b>	17 <b>1500 word paper due</b>

End of semester Dec 22