

Bridgewater State University
Summer 2020
PHIL 151: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY
Online Class

Prof. Gal Kober (gkober@bridgew.edu)

Office Hours: By appointment through Skype, Zoom, WeChat, or WhatsApp.

Semester: May 25 – June 26 2020

Class Credits: 3

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What can we know? How can we know it? This course is an introduction to philosophy through seminal questions concerning knowledge. We will investigate such questions as how we acquire knowledge, the ability to articulate our knowledge, the relation between theoretical and practical knowledge, and especially the relation between external reality and what we can know of it. We will explore these issues through the writings of major figures in the history of Western philosophy, such as Plato, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Wittgenstein, and Moore.

This online course requires the same amount of work as a face-to-face, full-semester course. Students taking a condensed-timeline course like that should be aware that it is challenging, and requires hard work and self discipline. Those choosing to take this course cannot expect shortcuts, or for it to be a do-nothing summer class. Be aware of the demands posed by the shorter timeline, and be prepared to read the material, be available for all interactive sessions, actively participate in online discussion, and submit all work on time.

REQUIRED TEXTS

All texts posted on our **Blackboard** site, and at <http://gkober.weebly.com>

Plato, *Meno*, and *The Republic* (selections).

René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 1 (selections).

Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* (selections).

G. E. Moore, *A Defence of Common Sense*, and *A Proof of the External World*.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty* (selections).

William James, *What Pragmatism Means* (excerpt).

GRADING AND REQUIREMENTS

Grading is on a 100-point scale.

Exam 1: 20% Exam 2: 20% Exam 3: 20% Reading Questions: 20% Participation: 20%

We will have **3 exams**. You will take them at designated times. The exams will include a few essay questions (see exam grading rubric, on Bb) and will be open notes. Be aware that open notes exams are harder, as they require understanding, not quoting the notes or texts. Your answers will have to be your original work, and directly relevant to the questions: they cannot be prepared in advance, and cannot be cut-and-pasted. Exam dates are listed within the schedule, below. There will be **no make-up or late exams**.

10 reading questions are due during the semester (out of 12 that will be posted). Reading questions are posted along with the readings, and should be submitted no later than 12:00 noon on their designated days. There will be no late submissions.

Your **participation** grade is calculated based on consistent participation, timely submissions, and discussion contributions.

All work for this course should be your own independent work. **Plagiarism will not be tolerated**; if you are unsure about how to avoid it, please ask me. Plagiarism will lead to a **failing grade** for the plagiarized assignment, and possibly for the entire course.

There will be **no extra credit**. To get a good grade, you must complete the regular assigned work.

COURSE FORMAT

Content: Each topic covered in the course (and each exam) appears as a separate topic on Blackboard. Each topic will include audio/power point lectures. The material remains available throughout the entire course, you can always go back and listen or read again.

Lectures: Several lectures (Power Points with audio) will be offered for each topic. A pdf version of each lecture will also be posted. The lectures help to simulate the classroom setting, and introduce you

to the material in the course. Lectures are posted in the topic folders on Blackboard. Folders are clearly labeled, and posted in order.

Students who have taken similar online classes in the past recommend that you treat the lectures as though they were classroom lectures; take your own notes while listening to the audio/power point presentation. Creating your own notes will help you understand the readings, post higher-quality discussion points, and perform well on the exams.

To further help simulate the classroom setting, lectures are posted 5 times a week—Monday through Friday by twelve noon (see schedule below for exact dates). This way, you can follow a scheduled routine for reading questions and lectures. The only exception to this lecture schedule are exam days.

Reading: In the content folders, you will find the relevant readings. They are posted in the corresponding Topic on our Blackboard course site. The reading assignments are also listed in the schedule below.

Reading is essential in order to understand the lectures, follow and contribute to discussion, and perform well on the exams. Read carefully, take notes, and ask any questions you may have about the readings in the appropriate discussion forum. Reading a philosophical text is complicated; allow time to read each text more than once.

Reading Questions: Each reading assignment is accompanied by a reading question. You need to complete at least 10 reading questions during the course. Submission links are found within the topic folders, and have strict due dates. You can submit your reading questions only until noon on the day when a reading is listed on the schedule.

Exams: Exams have strict due dates and a limited time to be taken (these dates are also listed in the course schedule, below). Pay close attention to those dates – each exam is open for 24 hrs, after which it becomes permanently unavailable.

- Each exam can only be taken once and only in a single two-hour sitting. You cannot take an exam multiple times, and cannot start-and-stop. Make sure that you are available for an uninterrupted stretch of two hours to take each exam when it is posted.

- Exam dates and times are fixed; you must be available to take them during these periods in order to take this course. After the due date, the exam will no longer be accessible to you – no late attempts are possible.

- Make sure to take exams on a computer that works, using a reliable power source and a stable internet connection. It is your responsibility to make sure the exam was completed and that your grade was recorded. If there is a technical problem, you must report it to me immediately, so I can try and fix it from my end (this happens, but only rarely). If the deadline passes and you have no recorded grade for the exam, you will get a zero for that work.

Discussion: The discussion board is organized by topics (as listed below on the schedule) and can be located under the Discussion Forums link. You are required to contribute to these discussions. Discussion questions are presented at the end of each lecture; you are also welcome to add your own questions to these discussions. You can continue to contribute to each topic until the midnight before the next topic opens. At that point, commenting will be closed. You can always go back to read previous discussions, however.

SCHEDULE

Readings should be done **by the date for which they are listed**.

All the readings are posted on our course websites (Blackboard, and <http://gkober.weebly.com>).

Reading questions are due by **noon on the day they are listed** for.

M	May 25	Lecture 1: Introduction	About philosophy and this course; main themes
Tu	May 26	Lecture 2: Definitions Attaining knowledge	Plato's <i>Meno</i> : - defining virtue Meno's Paradox - read to end of p.13
W	May 27	Lecture 3: Types of knowledge Knowledge and belief	<i>Meno</i> p.14-end; Strawson, <i>Analysis and Metaphysics</i> JTB; Wittgenstein <i>Phil Investigations</i> 65-75
Th	May 28	Lecture 4: Knowledge and reality Knowledge and truth	Plato's <i>Republic</i> , book 5 (start at 474c) <i>The Republic</i> , book 7: The Cave
F	May 29	Lecture 5: The problem of universals	<i>The Republic</i> , book 6: line + sun (509d--end) The Republic, book 10 (595-598)
M	June 1	– First exam –	

Topic 2

Tu	June 2	Lecture 6: Descartes – doubt The cogito	Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> – <i>Meditation 1</i> <i>Meditation 2</i>
W	June 3	Lecture 7: God; Clear and distinct ideas Error; Mind and body	<i>Meditation 3</i> <i>Meditation 4-5</i>
Th	June 4	Lecture 8: Descartes’s Conclusions	<i>Meditation 6</i>
		<u>Topic 3</u> Lecture 9: Hume’s Empiricism	Hume’s <i>Treatise</i> , book 1 part I, sections 1-7; Part II, section 6
F	June 5	Lecture 10: Induction and Causation	<i>Treatise</i> book I part III, sections 1-4, 12-14
M	June 8	Lecture 11: Identity, Substance, Doubt	<i>Treatise</i> book 1 part IV, sections 1,2,7
		<u>Topic 4</u>	
Tu	June 9	Lecture 12: Analytic, synthetic; A priori Intuition, Understanding, Categories	Kant’s <i>Prolegomena</i> , Sections 1-21 <i>Prolegomena</i> , 27-35
W	June 10	Lecture 13: Kant’s system	<i>Prolegomena</i> : Kant handout
Th	June 11	Lecture 14: Kant, Hume and the external world	Review
F	June 12	– Second Exam –	
		<u>Topic 5</u>	
M	June 15	Lecture 15: Skepticism vs. common sense The External World	G.E. Moore: <i>A Defence of Common Sense</i> Moore: <i>A Proof of the External World</i>
Tu	June 16	Lecture 16: Knowledge and Certainty	Wittgenstein: <i>On Certainty</i>
W	June 17	Lecture 17: Certainty, Pragmatism Lecture 18: Pragmatism and Knowledge	Wittgenstein <i>On Certainty</i> James: <i>What Pragmatism Means.</i>
Th	June 18	Lecture 19: conclusions, review	
F	June 19	– Third exam –	

GRADE SCALE

90-100: A (90-92: A-, 93-100: A)

80-89: B (80-82: B-, 83-86: B, 87-89: B+)

70-79: C (70-72: C-, 73-76: C, 77-79: C+)

60-69: D (60-62: D-, 63-66: D, 67-69: D+)

00-59: F

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students completing this course will have learned:

1. How to think abstractly and concretely not only about matters that preoccupy philosophers but also about fundamental issues in other disciplines and practices.
2. How to produce a cogent argument and how to express it with maximum perspicuity, both in writing and orally.
3. How to anticipate and even welcome objections to one's views, how to apply the principle of charity to others' opinions, and how to address objections and competing views effectively and respectfully in one's writing.
4. How to read, analyze, and articulate arguments and viewpoints in primary philosophical texts, both historical and contemporary.
5. How to develop and defend one's own position with respect to problems that have occupied both historical and contemporary philosophers.