Introduction to Philosophy

1. **Course instructor:**

Dr. Andrea Onofri

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Office hour: Wednesday 17.00-18.00 (or by appointment)

1. **Course description and aims**

Do you really know that you have hands? Does God exist? Is your mind a part of the physical world, or is it a non-physical entity? If the world is governed by physical laws, how is it possible for someone to act freely?

This module is a general introduction to philosophy. We will discuss four major philosophical problems: the problem of **skepticism,** the existence of **God**, the **mind-body** problem, and the problem of **free will**. The module does not presuppose any prior experience of studying philosophy, and there are no course requirements.

The main goals of the module are:

* To provide an **interesting, accessible introduction** to some of the most fascinating problems in philosophy. You will find out why many people find philosophy so exciting!
* To provide you with **basic knowledge** about some foundational philosophical issues. We will **focus carefully** on a selection of key readings; this will provide a background that you will have the chance to expand in your future studies. Such a background will prove useful not only for further philosophy courses, but also for courses in **other areas** of the Humanities, such as history and literature.
* To provide a first introduction to **academic writing.** You will learn how to **prepare**, **write** and **revise** an academic text. These skills will prove extremely useful in a number of other courses, both in philosophy and in other areas.
* To teach you how to **identify** and **represent** arguments in a philosophical text; how to **assess** their strengths and weaknesses; and how to **construct** your own philosophical arguments. This will greatly improve your **reading** and **reasoning** skills; you will then have the chance to apply these skills directly in the written assignments for this module.
* To develop your skills as a **critical thinker**. This course will lead you to **question** some of your most fundamental beliefs; this is an important ability, as it leads us to have a more critical attitude towards the views of those around us.

1. **Language**

The language of instruction is English, so all readings, lectures and assignments will be in English. If the language of the course is a problem for you, please get in touch with me.

1. **Readings**

Most readings will be taken from:

John Perry, Michael Bratman & John Martin Fischer (2007), *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, 6th edition, Oxford University Press.

Additional readings will be made available during the course.

Besides the assigned readings, you will find the following resources useful:

* The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>
* The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/>
* PhilPapers (directory of online philosophical articles and books): <http://philpapers.org/>
* Guidelines on writing a philosophy paper (Pryor): <http://courses.dce.harvard.edu/~phils4/pryorguidelines.html>
* How to read a philosophy paper (Pryor): <http://courses.dce.harvard.edu/~phils4/howtoread.html>
* What is an argument? (Pryor): <http://courses.dce.harvard.edu/~phils4/argument.html>
* Vocabulary describing arguments (Pryor): <http://courses.dce.harvard.edu/~phils4/terms.html>
* Some good and bad forms of argument (Pryor): <http://courses.dce.harvard.edu/~phils4/gnbargs.html>
* Analyzing concepts (Pryor): <http://courses.dce.harvard.edu/~phils4/analyses.html>
* A philosophical glossary for beginners (Pryor): <http://courses.dce.harvard.edu/~phils4/glossary.html>

1. **Assessment**

Your final grade for this class will be calculated as follows:

**Attendance:**

* If you know you are going to miss a class, it would be helpful if you could inform me by email beforehand.
* After you have missed 3 classes I will subtract 0.50 from your final grade for every other class you miss, unless you provide a valid excuse for having missed the class (for instance, if you were sick you will have to provide a medical certificate). Informing me of your absence by email is not enough for your absence to be excused. If you are not sure whether your absence can be excused or have any other questions about this point, please get in touch with me.
* The maximum number of participants for this class is 25. If someone asks to register for the course but the course has already reached the maximum number of participants, I reserve the right to de-register those students who have not attended any of the first two lectures.

**Two class tests (each worth 1/3 of the final grade):**

* There will be two class tests during the course, one on 03/05/2017 and one on 21/06/2017. In each test you will have 45 minutes to answer one question.
* You will not be allowed to use any of the course materials, including:
  + The textbook
  + The handouts I will distribute during the course
  + Your notes
  + Any other text
  + You will also not be allowed to use the Internet, cell phones, laptops and tablets
* The questions will be on the readings for the course (see course plan below)
* The exam will be anonymous: you should only write your matriculation number on the exam sheet, but not your name. Please bring your matriculation card; you will not be able to take the exam unless you have your matriculation card with you.
* Those who missed a test must get in touch with me; I will then arrange a special test for them, on a different date and with a different question. Those who missed a test will also have to justify their absence in order to pass the course (for instance, if you were sick you will have to provide a medical certificate).
* It is not possible to pass this course without having completed all three assignments (the two tests and the essay)

**Essay (worth 1/3 of the final grade)**

* There will be one essay assignment. You will choose one of the following options:

1. ***Summarize and evaluate an argument for the existence of God or an argument against the existence of God. The argument you discuss must be one of those that were examined in class***
2. ***Summarize and evaluate Jackson’s Knowledge Argument***

* The deadline to submit your essay is 23.55 on 12/07/2017. The penalty for late essays is as follows: I will assign a 0.50 penalty to the essay grade for each day passed after the deadline. So you will get a 0.50 penalty if you upload the essay on 13/07/2017, a 1.0 penalty if you upload it on 14/07/2017 and so on. I will not accept essays delivered more than two weeks after the deadline.
* The essay should be approximately 1500 words long.
* In class I will give specific advice about how to write an essay. You will also read a text on this topic.
* Essays must be uploaded on Moodle. Please note that your essay should be completely anonymous. So your name should not appear anywhere in the text. Your name should also not appear in the name of the document you upload on Moodle. The name of the document you upload on Moodle should be your matriculation number. You should also write your matriculation number on the first page of the essay, together with the essay title.

1. **Class structure**

Every session will last 90 minutes. In the first 60 minutes I will give a lecture on the weekly reading (with active participation from students). We will then use the last 30 minutes to discuss the reading together. (The class structure will be different when we have a class test).

1. **How to prepare for this course**

To do well in this module, you will have to prepare adequately. Specific advice on how to write your essays will be given during the lectures. Moreover, you can always consult me for suggestions about how to prepare for essays and class tests. Here are some general tips:

* Always do the weekly reading *before* the class. Classes are useless if you have not done the reading in advance. There will be class tests on the readings, so you will need to be adequately prepared. When studying at home, use the handout I will distribute every week. Start doing the reading from the first week, or you will quickly fall behind.
* You should always *attend the lectures*: if you don’t, you will fall behind and enjoy the course a lot less! (See above for attendance requirements). Take notes, and discuss with your classmates those parts of the reading that you found hard. You should also make a positive contribution to class discussion: this is a great chance to ask questions, and discussing the material in class will make the weekly reading a lot easier.
* Do the reading *very carefully*. Make notes for yourself as you read. Once you are done, try to identify and summarize the main arguments. You can only say you have properly understood the text once you are able to state the argument clearly.
* Use *additional sources* when preparing essays and class tests. The weekly reading is your starting point; however, employing additional material (such as online encyclopedias) will make the reading easier and give you the background knowledge needed for a good essay/class test.

1. **Plagiarism and referencing**

(These are only some general guidelines. We will talk about plagiarism and referencing in much greater detail in class, and you will also read some material on this topic. For further instructions about how to avoid plagiarism and how to reference, please consult me or refer to your undergraduate handbook).

When completing the assignments for this module, you are expected to do the main reading carefully and use additional materials. However, these resources must be used *appropriately*. Whenever you are *copying directly* from one of these sources, you have to signal this through quotation marks and reference the source in question; whenever you are *paraphrasing* or using a *substantial* thesis/argument from a source, you have to reference that source appropriately.

When in doubt, *always* reference the source you are using. Also, I strongly encourage you to discuss the readings with your classmates. However, your work should *never*include material coming from other students’ work, not even in paraphrase: this will also be considered a serious form of plagiarism.

You will find the following resources on plagiarism and referencing useful:

1) “Avoiding Plagiarism”: <http://www.ucd.ie/library/supporting_you/support_learning/plagiarism/>

2) “Plagiarism: Avoid It At All Costs!”: <http://www.ucd.ie/library/elearning/plagiarism/story.html>

3) “Referencing: How To Cite and Reference Using The Harvard Style”: <http://libguides.ucd.ie/ld.php?content_id=450286>

4) “How To Cite And Reference Using The Harvard Style”: <http://www.ucd.ie/library/elearning/refcite/Harvard/story.html>

1. **Day and time:**

Wednesday, 15.15 – 16.45

1. **Venue:**

UR 09.51, 5th floor, Institut für Philosophie, Karl-Franzens-Universität, Heinrichstraße 26

The following online resources were of great help in preparing this syllabus:

http://www.dirkkindermann.com/teaching.html

Yablo, Stephen. *24.251 Introduction to Philosophy of Language*, Fall 2011. (MIT OpenCourseWare: Massachusetts Institute of Technology), http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/linguistics-and-philosophy/24-251-introduction-to-philosophy-of-language-fall-2011 (Accessed 30 Sep, 2014). License: Creative Commons BY-NC-SA

Tentative calendar

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| **Part I: Skepticism** | *Lecture 1: Introduction to the module*  No reading |
| *Lecture 2: Arguments, pt. I*  Reading: J. Perry, M. Bratman, J. Fischer, “Logical toolkit” |
| *Lecture 3:*  *Arguments, pt. II*  *Plagiarism*  Readings:  1) J. Pryor, “How to read a philosophy paper”  2) Re-read: J. Perry, M. Bratman, J. Fischer, “Logical toolkit” |
| *Lecture 4:*  *The problem of skepticism, pt. I*  *Referencing*  Reading: C. Grau, “Bad Dreams, Evil Demons, and the Experience Machine: Philosophy and *The Matrix*” |
| *Lecture 5: The problem of skepticism, pt. II*  Reading: R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, pp. 136-142 (Meditations I & II) |
| **Part II: God** | *Lecture 6: God, pt. I*  Readings:  1) St. Anselm, “The Ontological Argument”  2) St. Thomas Aquinas, “The Existence of God” |
| *Lecture 7: God, pt. II*  Reading: J. Pryor, “Guidelines on writing a philosophy paper” |
| *Lecture 8:*  *God, pt. III*  *Writing a philosophy paper, pt. I*  Reading: J. L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence” |
| **Part III: The Mind-Body Problem** | *Lecture 9 (make-up lecture)*  *The mind-body problem*  Reading: I. Ravenscroft, *Philosophy of Mind: A Beginner’s Guide*:  Introduction and chapter 1 |
| *Lecture 10:*  *God, pt. IV*  *The mind-body problem, pt. I*  *Writing a philosophy paper, pt. II*  Reading: F. Jackson, “What Mary Didn’t Know” |
| *Lecture 11: The mind-body problem, pt. II*  Reading: G. Harman, *Thought* (excerpts) |
| *Lecture 12:*  *The mind-body problem, pt. III*  Reading: P. Van Inwagen, “The Powers of Rational Beings: Freedom of the Will” (pp. 385-390) |
| **Part IV: Freedom and Necessity** | *Lecture 13:*  *The problem of free will, pt. I*  Reading: P. Van Inwagen, “The Powers of Rational Beings: Freedom of the Will” (pp. 390-396) |
| *Lecture 14:*  *The problem of free will, pt. II*  Readings:  1) “Avoiding Plagiarism”: <http://www.ucd.ie/library/supporting_you/support_learning/plagiarism/>  2) “Plagiarism: Avoid It At All Costs!”:  <http://www.ucd.ie/library/elearning/plagiarism/story.html>  3) “Referencing: How To Cite and Reference Using The Harvard Style”:  <http://libguides.ucd.ie/ld.php?content_id=450286>  4) “How To Cite And Reference Using The Harvard Style”:  <http://www.ucd.ie/library/elearning/refcite/Harvard/story.html> |
| *Lecture 15:*  *The problem of free will, pt. III*  *Recap session*  No reading |