**Auburn University** Department of Philosophy Fall 2019

*Introduction to Philosophy*

# Instructor Information

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I respond to emails within 24 hrs. M-Thurs. I respond to weekend emails by Sunday evening.

# Course Description

Students in this class will be introduced to *philosophy* by being introduced to the *theory of knowledge* (*epistemology*) and to one of its central problems, *skepticism about the external world*.

The course will begin with Plato’s treatment of knowledge in his dialogue, *Theaetetus.* Topics to be discussed during of investigation of Plato are *the nature of definitions*, *the factivity of knowledge* and *the relativity of truth*.

Next, we will turn to Descartes’ *Meditations* and consider his attempt to isolate what is known with certainty. This will require us to consider two skeptical arguments: *The Dream Argumen*t and *The Evil Demon Argument*. It will also require that we consider the nature of the mind and the body, and examine Descartes’ argument for the existence of God.

We will then look briefly into Berkeley’s *Dialogues*, and we will weigh his argument for the conclusion that *to be is to be perceived*, and for his larger philosophical position, *Idealism*. This will be followed by a partial reading of Russell’s *Problems of Philosophy* and of Austin’s *Sense and Sensibilia*—we will investigate Russell’s case for *sense-data*, and Austin’s arguments against *sense-data theories*.

Finally, we will likely conclude the class by weighing Waismann’s essay, “How I See Philosophy”, engaging his way of understanding *the significance of philosophizing*.

# Course Objectives

The goal of this course is to introduce students to philosophy by introducing them to the *activity* of philosophizing. (“Philosophy is not a body of doctrine, it is an activity.”) To achieve this goal, students will have to learn how to read philosophy, how to understand and test philosophical claims--how to object to such claims, and how to respond to such objections.

# Learning Outcomes

--To recognize and construct and criticize philosophical arguments or claims

--To read and understand philosophical texts

--To participate equably in philosophical discussion

--To hear and understand philosophical lectures/discussions

**Teaching Method** The course will be largely informal lecture (i.e., a mix of lecture and extemporaneous discussion). It will include Discussion Questions as well as Reading Quizzes and two Short Papers (on assigned topics). Many lectures will be accompanied by Lecture Notes (LN) intended to aid the student’s comprehension of the material and the student’s memory of it.

# Course Requirements

Plato, *Theaetetus*

Descartes, *Philosophical Writin*gs Russell, *Problems of Philosophy* Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Berkeley, *Principles*: online)

# Assignments

Grading Policy 90-100 A

80-89 B

70-79 C

60-69 D

59 or below F

Reading Quizzes: Almost every week of the course includes a Reading Quiz (RQ). RQs require students to demonstrate their familiarity with and understanding of the readings. There will be ten RQs during the term. Specific readings will be announced as we move through the term, as will the dates for the RQs.

*Bear in mind that students take RQs so as to demonstrate that they have read the module’s reading assignment and to demonstrate that they have a basic understanding of the assignment. Most of the questions on RQs will be fill-in-the-blank, or T/F, or simple multiple choice. One patient reading of the assignment should equip students to do well on the RQ.*

*The readings for this course are quite challenging—nothing dumbed down here. I hope you will find that exhilarating. But I do not expect any student to understand the readings completely on one reading. Reading philosophy is a matter of reading and re-reading, stopping and starting, pausing to reflect, etc. The best way to succeed in the course is to do the readings, take the RQ, then re-read during the week as you are exposed to the lectures. Also, my lectures will be often devoted to helping you learn how to approach the reading, what questions to ask of it, what pitfalls to avoid, etc. Although I want you to make the effort to read the assignments on your own, before you get any help, I will not leave you stranded.*

Discussion Question: Assignments include Discussion Questions (DQ). DQs require students to demonstrate their comprehension of material in the lectures and readings. Each student will do 3 DQs during the term; I will assign them. (Each student will be made part of a subgroup of

the class and that subgroup will be assigned 3 of the DQs.) Beyond writing the answer to the assigned DQ, each student will be expected to comment on two (2) other answers, given by two other students. Completion of the DQ thus requires answering it, and then commenting on two other students’ answers. For the most part, the answer to the DQ (DQA) will be due soon after the last lecture in the module, and the comments (DQC) will due roughly two days after that. I will announce exact dates as we progress through the term.

Group A: 1, 3, 6

Group B: 2, 5, 8

(Note that there is no DQ4 or DQ7 since written work on those weeks will be devoted to SP1 and of SP2, respectively.)

Students’ discussions must be grammatical and correctly spelled (points will be deducted for failures). No text slang (LOL, e.g.) is allowed, and all discussions must be constructive—no personal attacks or derogatory personal comments are allowed. Note that since this is a philosophy class, disagreement is of course allowed; in fact, it is encouraged. But the tone of disagreement must remain respectful at all times. Any breach of etiquette will result in a zero for the discussion. Repeated offenses can result in a zero for the Discussion grade itself.

Please refer to these guidelines for additional help: <http://studygs.net/netiquette.htm>

Short Papers: Students will write two 4-5 page papers during the term (SP). One will be due around midterm (check the Schedule for the date); the other will be due on the final day of the term (check the Schedule for the date). The SP topics will be assigned, not chosen.

Any student with special needs should meet with me during the first few days of class. I will be happy to make any necessary accommodations. For more information, contact the Office for Students with Disabilities.

# Course Structure, Course Modules

This is the basic structure of the course. Many lectures will take up one day of class, but some will stretch over more than one day: Specific readings will be assigned in class and on the course blog.

Introduction

*No readings*

Lecture 1: What we will do and how we will do it Lecture 2: ditto

Module 1, Plato and the Definition of ‘Knowledge’: Definition Readings: Theaetetus, Geach (RQ1)

Lecture 3: What does Socrates want?

Lecture 4: Socrates definitions and technical considerations

Lecture 5: Is Socrates right to want what he wants? (DQ1) Module 2, Plato and the Definition of ‘Knowledge’: Perception

Readings: Theaetetus (RQ2)

Lecture 6: Why define ‘knowledge’ as *perception*? Protagoras Lecture 7: What is it to see something white? Heraclitus (DQ1A)

Lecture 8: Objections: The memory problem and perception (DQ1C)(DQ2) Module 3, Descartes and the Method of Doubt

Readings: Meditations 1-2, Bouwsma (RQ3)

Lecture 9: The Method of Doubt and the Absolute Conception Lecture 10: Deception, dream and demon (DQ2A)

Lecture 11: Bouwsma’s worries (DQ2C)(DQ3) Module 4, Descartes and God

Readings: Meditation 3 (RQ4)

Lecture 12: Can Descartes prove the existence of God? Lecture 13: Why does God matter?

Lecture 14: Worries about the proof of God’s existence Module 5, Descartes and Certainty

Readings: Meditation 4-6 (RQ5)

Lecture 15: Clarity and Distinctness (SP1) Lecture 16: Certainty regained? (DQ3A)

Lecture 17: The Cartesian Circle? (DQ3C)(DQ5) Module 6, Berkeley: The Principles

Readings: The Principles (RQ6)

Lecture 18: Berkeley, perception and matter Lecture 19: Idealism? (DQ5A)

Lecture 20: Objections to Berkeley’s idealism (DQ5C)(DQ6) Module 7, Russell and Sense Data

Lecture 21: Russell’s desk Lecture 22: Does Matter Exist?

Lecture 23: What is the Nature of Matter?

Module 8: Russell, Berkeley and Idealism

Lecture 24: Idealism

Lecture 24: Russell and Berkeley Lecture 25: Sense-data

Module 9, Austin on the Argument from Illusion Readings: Austin (RQ7)

Lecture 26: What is Austin doing? The importance of scene setting Lecture 27: Austin on perception (DQ6A)

Lecture 28: The terms of the Argument (DQ6C)(DQ7)

Module 10, Austin on the Argument from Illusion Readings: Austin (RQ8)

Lecture 29: The terms of the Argument Lecture 30: Austin on Reality (DQ7A) Lecture 31: Austin on Reality (DQ7C)(DQ8)

Module 11, Austin on the Argument from Illusion Readings: Austin (RQ9)

Lecture 32: Austin’s verdict on the tradition (No DQ9) Lecture 33: Austin’s verdict

Lecture 34: Austin’s verdict

Module 12, Waismann on Philosophy Readings: Waismann (RQ10)

Lecture 35: Metaphilosophy? (DQ8A) (SP 2) Lecture 36: Philosophy as therapy (DQ8C)

Lecture 37: End of our course: Where do we find ourselves? (DQ10) (DQ10A)