

Las Positas College
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Course Outline for PHIL 1

GOD, NATURE, HUMAN NATURE

Effective: Fall 2009

I. CATALOG DESCRIPTION:

PHIL 1 — GOD, NATURE, HUMAN NATURE — 3.00 units

An exploration of the nature and range of philosophical inquiry in relation to everyday problems of humans as individuals, as citizens, as physical creatures, and as creators of spiritual and artistic works. Philosophical texts are analyzed with special attention given to the development of skills in analysis and argumentation. NOTE: Philosophy 2, 4 and 25 are also introductory courses and may be taken before Philosophy 1 if a more detailed examination of ethical problems, the theory of knowledge, or political philosophy is desired.

3.00 Units Lecture

Grading Methods:

Letter Grade

Discipline:

	<u>MIN</u>
Lecture Hours:	54.00
Total Hours:	54.00

II. NUMBER OF TIMES COURSE MAY BE TAKEN FOR CREDIT: 1

III. PREREQUISITE AND/OR ADVISORY SKILLS:

IV. MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this course, the student should be able to:

1. demonstrate an understanding of the central questions and formative figures of the philosophical tradition;
2. evaluate and critique prominent theories about God, nature and human nature;
3. apply theories discussed in class to problems and questions facing humans in modern times;
4. show connections between the field of philosophy and other fields of inquiry such as humanities, religion, art, sociology, psychology, and the applied arts;
5. synthesize personal experience, individual research, and course information into a cogent and defensible philosophical theory;
6. explain personal philosophical positions to others in both written and spoken form;
7. work with others in a group to problem-solve philosophical issues.

V. CONTENT:

- A. Definitions and overview
 1. Definitions of philosophy
 2. Essentials of the philosophical method
- B. Theories of knowledge
 1. The nature of knowledge
 2. The problem of skepticism
 3. Rationalism and empiricism
 4. The scientific method
 5. Self-knowledge and religious knowledge
 6. Naturalism and constructivism
- C. The Nature of reality
 1. Classical theories of reality
 2. Dualism
 3. Materialism
 4. Idealism
 5. Representative realism
- D. Understanding the self
 1. Classical theories of self
 2. Behaviorism and physicalism
 3. Eastern challenges to self-identity
 4. The self in psychology
 5. Existentialist theories of self
- E. Ethics
 1. Classical ethical theories
 2. Ethics and religion

- 3. Relativism
- 4. Utilitarianism
- 5. Modern deontological theory
- 6. Ethical nihilism
- F. Political philosophy
 - 1. Classical political theory
 - 2. Rights and responsibilities
 - 3. Economics and the human condition
 - 4. Theories of human freedom
 - 5. Individual and collective identity
- G. Philosophy of Religion
 - 1. Classical religious philosophy
 - 2. Arguments for God's existence
 - 3. The problem of evil
 - 4. The nature of religious experience
- H. Philosophy of Art
 - 1. Classical aesthetic theory
 - 2. Defining art
 - 3. Debates on the value of art
 - 4. Understanding artistic experience
- I. Logic and argumentation
 - 1. Background, premises, and conclusions
 - 2. Making valid arguments
 - 3. Basics of formal logic
 - 4. Avoiding fallacies in reasoning

VI. METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:

- A. **Lecture** -
- B. **Discussion** -
- C. **Student Presentations** -
- D. Final research and analysis project
- E. Course text readings
- F. Brief written assignments
- G. Multi-media presentations & analysis

VII. TYPICAL ASSIGNMENTS:

A. Lecture 1. "Plato's analysis of the connection between religion and the ethical life in his dialogue Euthyphro" 2. "Descartes' argument for the existence of the human soul as found in his Meditations on First Philosophy" B. Group discussion 1. What role does religion play in the establishing of contemporary ethical beliefs? How would Plato respond to our contemporary ethical ideas? 2. Philosophically evaluate Descartes' argument that the soul can be more easily known than the body. C. Student presentations 1. Using Descartes' characterization of God as a response to Plato's challenges to religious ethics 2. Challenges in contemporary psychology to Descartes' theory of self knowledge D. Multi-media presentations & analysis 1. View clips from the 2008 presidential debates where religious arguments are made to support ethical views, followed by an analysis of Plato's theory in relation to these contemporary arguments. 2. Watch short documentary film *Mysteries of the Mind*, followed by in-class group analysis of the implications for Descartes' theory of direct self-knowledge. E. Course text readings 1. Read Plato's Euthyphro, and be prepared to discuss the central arguments in class. 2. Read Meditation II from Descartes' Meditations on First Philosophy and be prepared to discuss his understanding of the nature of the human mind. F. Brief written assignments 1. Evaluate Plato's arguments about religious ethics from your own point of view. Explain what you find to be the strengths and weaknesses of basing ethics on ones religious point of view. 2. Using your own experience as an example, argue for or against Descartes' claim that we have direct, self-evident access to our own minds. G. Final research and analysis project 1. Look back at the topics in philosophy that we have covered over the course of this class. Choose one topic that is of special interest to you and compose a 5-7 page paper that contrasts the arguments and perspective of two philosophers on that topic. Drawing from research and your own ideas, make a cogent argument for which philosopher's theory is more philosophically defensible.

VIII. EVALUATION:

A. **Methods**

B. **Frequency**

- 1. Frequency
 - a. Group discussions will occur weekly throughout the course.
 - b. Student presentations will be given 1-4 times throughout the course.
 - c. Multi-media presentations and analyses will occur on average 3-6 times per course.
 - d. Brief written assignments will occur on average every other week.
 - e. The final research and analysis project will be submitted at the end of the term.
 - f. Essay and short answer tests will be given 1-3 times throughout the course.

IX. TYPICAL TEXTS:

- 1. Abel, Donald C *Fifty Readings in Philosophy*. 3rd ed., McGraw Hill, 2007.
- 2. Descartes, Rene *Meditations on First Philosophy*. 3rd ed., Hackett, 1993.
- 3. Hume, David *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. . 2nd ed., Hackett, 1998.
- 4. Kessler, Gary E *Voices of Wisdom: A Multicultural Philosophy Reader*. 6th ed., Wadsworth, 2006.
- 5. Plato *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*. 2nd ed., Hackett, 2002.
- 6. Presby, Gail M, Karesten J. Struhl, and Richard E. Olsen *The Philosophical Quest: A Cross-Cultural Reader*. 2nd ed., McGraw Hill, 1999.

X. OTHER MATERIALS REQUIRED OF STUDENTS: