

Baruch College

PHI 1500: Major Issues in Philosophy

Fall Semester 2012

Instructor: Professor R. Gregory Taylor

Class meetings: (PMWA) Mondays and Wednesdays 5:50 to 7:05 p.m. in VC 4180

(QMWA) Mondays and Wednesdays 7:30 to 8:45 p.m. in VC 11160

Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. in VC 5-272

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Texts (required): Steven M. Cahn, *Classics of Western Philosophy*, Seventh Edition, Hackett Publishing. This huge text may be purchased or rented at the Baruch College bookstore and is not expensive at \$44 new. We will use the textbook extensively during the semester, and students are encouraged to bring it to class if that is not tremendously inconvenient. Those students who fail to obtain a copy of this text promptly—by the beginning of the second week of class, say—should expect to have little success in the course if any.

Course Description from Baruch College Course Catalog:

PHI 1500: Major Issues in Philosophy (3 hours; 3 credits) This course studies basic topics of philosophy, such as the nature of mind, criteria of knowledge, justification of ethical values, and the existence of God. *Corequisite: ENG 2100 or ENG 2100T or ENG 2100H*

Course Objectives: The student should learn the fundamentals of epistemology, metaphysics, moral philosophy, the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of science, the philosophy of language, and the philosophy of logic and mathematics in historical context.

Course Topics (subject to change)

Week 1 [two class meetings] (August 27, 29)

Introduction survey of philosophy; subdisciplines; the nature of philosophy

Weeks 2 and 3 [three class meetings] (September 5, 10, 12)

Oxford ordinary language philosophy. (Cahn: Russell: Selections from *The Problems of Philosophy*; Wittgenstein: Selections from *Philosophical Investigations*; Austin: Selections from *Sense and Sensibilia*)

Weeks 4, 5, and 6 [four class meetings] (September 19, 24, October 1, 3)

The nature of philosophical analysis. Plato's Theory of Knowledge. (Cahn Plato: *Euthyphro*, *Meno*, and *Apology*)

Weeks 7 and 8 [three class meetings] (October 10, 15, and 17)

Kant: Selections from the *Critique of Pure Reason*

Weeks 9, 10, and 11 [five regular class meetings plus midterm examination] (October 22, 24, 29, 31, November 5, 7)

Introduction to moral philosophy. The moral doctrines of Aristotle. Stoic ethics. Virtue ethics and the good life. Kant's Categorical Imperative. (Cahn Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* [selections], Kant: *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* [selections]; possibly: John Stuart Mill: *Utilitarianism*)

Weeks 12 and 13 [four class meetings], November 12, 14, 19, and 21)

Selections from Spinoza's *Ethics* (probably one session only); Locke: Selections from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

Weeks 14, 15, and 16 [six class meetings] (November 26, 28, December 3, 5, 10, 12)

Berkeley: Selections from *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*; first of *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*; Hume: Selections from *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* and/or *A Treatise of Human Nature*

Grading/Tests/Final Project: Most of the work in the course will consist of weekly reading assignments that will then be discussed in class. Typically, readings of up to fifty pages will be assigned each week. It is essential that students complete such reading assignments and take part in discussions. There will be some short, easy quizzes designed to determine which students have completed reading assignments. The goal is to encourage students to do the reading. Quizzes, which will be given toward the beginning of class, will always be announced during the preceding week. They will always be announced in the preceding class, and an announcement will be placed on BlackBoard. The quizzes will not be checking for mastery of the issues covered in the week's reading assignment but, rather, for whether the student has done the reading. Students will receive a letter grade on each quiz. Missed quizzes cannot be taken later. Nor will students who arrive late be permitted to take a quiz, since classroom discussion itself would likely provide most of the answers to the easy quiz questions. However, the student's lowest quiz grade will be dropped, which means that any student can miss one of the quizzes.

There will also be very short writing assignments (typically 350 words) based on assigned reading. Typically, such writing assignments will be due at the beginning of the class in which the assigned reading is to be discussed. Again, they are intended to determine whether a student has completed an assigned reading. Given this aim, such writing assignments will be collected at the beginning of class and will never be accepted late. Most weeks there will be either a quiz or a writing assignment, but rarely both. By the end of the semester, the student should have taken at least six quizzes and submitted at least six writing assignments. Students will receive a letter grade on each writing assignment, but the student's lowest writing assignment grade will be dropped.

There will be a midterm examination roughly half-way through the semester, a final examination during exam week, and a final written project or term paper due toward the end of the semester. The subject of the term paper will be the choice of the student in consultation with the instructor. (The instructor will provide a list of suggested topics.)

Grade Computation: The grade for the course will be determined as follows:

- Quizzes 15%
- Short writing assignments 15%
- Midterm examination 20%
- Final examination 20%
- Final project 30%

Final grades will be calculated using the instructor's grading program, which is an Excel spreadsheet. The following table of correspondences will be used in converting letter grades to numerical equivalents.

| Letter Grade | Numerical Equivalent |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| A | 4.0 |
| A- | 3.66 |
| B+ | 3.33 |
| B | 3.0 |
| B- | 2.66 |
| C+ | 2.33 |
| C | 2.0 |
| C- | 1.66 |
| D+ | 1.33 |
| D | 1.0 |

| | |
|----|-----|
| D- | .66 |
| F | 0.0 |

Attendance: Class attendance is mandatory. An attendance sheet will be circulated during each class unless there is a quiz or collected writing assignment, in which case that quiz or writing assignment functions as a record of attendance. Students are permitted six discretionary absences, which is more lenient than the policy of Baruch College (four discretionary absences). Thus any student who has missed seven classes will immediately receive a WU grade for the course. Classes missed during the first week are recorded and count fully as discretionary absences. Consequently, if a student only enrolls in the course during the second week of the semester, then he or she is recorded as having two discretionary absences. *The instructor takes attendance very seriously. During the Spring Semester 2012, grades of WU were assigned to roughly twenty-five of roughly one hundred thirty-two students.*

For whatever reason, some students log tremendous numbers of absences during the first few weeks of class. Such students are unlikely to succeed in the course subsequently. Consequently, there is an exception to the instructor's policy of six allowable discretionary absences stated above. Namely, any student who fails to attend five of the first ten class sessions (including those of the first week) will immediately be assigned a grade of WU.

Other issues: Students are not permitted to leave the room during quizzes or the midterm and final examination. Use of cell phones and other electronic devices is forbidden during quizzes and the midterm and final. Generally, students should turn off cell phones before class begins.