

# Philosophy 180: Great Issues in Philosophy

Fall 2005

Dennis Beach, osb

2-4-6, 9:40 – 10:50, Quad 349

Office hours, Quad 362C: 1-3-5: 1:00 – 4:30 PM

2-4-6: 11:00 AM – noon; 2:15 – 3:00 PM

or by appointment (call 2997)

evenings: after 8 PM in Mary 229 (call 2871)

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## What it's about:

Is the way things appear to us the way they really are? If not, do we have any access to the way things really are? How? And if we don't, how could we ever know or even suspect that the way things appear to us *isn't* perhaps the way they really are? These questions have been with philosophers ever since humankind began to wonder about themselves and the world they live in. And when the questions change from "What is true about the physical nature of the world?" to "What is beauty?" "What is goodness or virtue?" or "Is there a God and can we know anything about this God?" the problem becomes yet more urgent.

We will explore the relation of our knowing to the world first through a contemporary introduction to the problem, and then by looking at key philosophical texts that take a stand on the question of human knowing: Plato's Dialogues, including the Meno, then excerpts from Descartes, Locke, Hume, and other philosophers. Finally, we'll tackle a modern, "phenomenological" account of the relation between knower or person and world.

## What we'll read:

- Norman Melchert, *Who's to Say? A Dialogue on Relativism*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994.
- Plato, *Five Dialogues*. 2nd ed. Translated by G.M.A. Grube. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002.
- *Reality: Hackett Readings in Philosophy*. Ed. Carl Levenson and Jonathan Westphal. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994.
- José Ortega y Gasset, *Some Lessons in Metaphysics* (photocopy packet). Translated by Mildred Adams. New York: W.W. Norton, 1969.

Note: Reading for philosophy classes generally makes up in density for what it lacks in length. That means that an adequate job of reading the assignments will perhaps require a slower, more thoughtful and questioning pace.

## What we'll aim for:

- 1) To gain a critical understanding of the arguments that the author is presenting and their implications. A *critical* understanding implies an ability to make defensible judgments about these arguments, including understanding how and why some opinions are less worthy of belief than others.
- 2) To be able to *think the thoughts* of the major philosophers we will study. This is not the same as knowing what the conclusions of the philosopher are, nor even the major arguments the philosopher uses to support his or her conclusions. *Thinking* is an active and transitive verb here, and it involves being able to think the philosopher's thoughts from the inside, so to speak
- 3) To pursue our own thoughts in extension of or as a challenge to the issues and the thinkers in question. Note that this does not mean offering summary opinions or judgments, but *thinking our way* from the inside out beyond the texts we are studying.
- 4) In sum, we'll try to learn to become *careful, generous and thoughtful* readers and philosophers in our own right.

## What I'll expect you to do:

Philosophy is a *participatory exercise of thought*. That means that you can't do well in the course unless you participate actively in the reading and discussion. I will often give daily assignments to prompt reflection on our reading, such as outlining the arguments in a section of the text, etc. The questions and tasks will vary from requiring simply thoughtful preparation for discussion to written notes or a post to the public folder discussion. These daily assignments will form 20% of your grade. Because they affect class on the day they are assigned, they cannot be made up if missed. There will be 2 significant papers (3-5 pages), one at the end of the introductory text and one in the second half of the semester. There will also be 2½ exams (one mini-exam and two fuller exams). The mini-exam will help determine mid-term grades for First-year students.

The dates of the exams are: **Mini-exam: Tuesday, October 4; Exam 2: Wednesday, November 9** and **Final Exam: SATURDAY, December 17 (8:00 - 10:00 AM – Final Exam period)**. Note that this exam period is scheduled for a SATURDAY. I will not change the exam time. Make work and travel plans accordingly. **Missing an exam will result in a grade of zero that cannot be made up.**

## "What happens if I miss?" (Attendance Policy):

*Regular* and *active* class attendance is expected. If you have to miss class because of illness or some other valid reason, I expect you to contact me about it *before* the absence. Voice-mail and e-mail make it fairly easy to leave a message. Missing class because you are leaving early for the weekend or Thanksgiving Break or for an interview or non-emergency doctor's appointment are not considered excused. Absences will affect your participation grade; *more than one unexcused absence* will occasion a meeting to discuss your continued enrollment in the class, and further unexcused absences will result in loss lowering of grade one full level for each unexcused absence.

## How your grade will be determined:

Each of the major exams and major papers will constitute 20% of your grade; daily assignments, including public folder entries constitute the final 20%. The "mini-exam" will be factored into your average if it helps your grade; otherwise it will be disregarded in the final average. Your participation grade will act as a "ceiling" for your overall grade. In other words, it will determine the highest grade you can receive for the course, no matter what grades you may have received on tests and papers. If you earn an "A" on exams and papers but do no more than sit like a desk potato in class, your final grade will be a "C." If your participation is strong, this may raise your grade one-half grade level (e.g., BC to B, B to AB) especially if your test and paper average is on the borderline.

## Initial Reading Assignments:

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| August 31 (W)   | Introduction. Melchert, <i>Who's to Say?</i> First Conversation.  |
| September 2 (F) | Continue discussion of First Conversation. Electronic Discussion posting due. See Public Folders on Outlook; near the bottom on the left-hand taskbar or folder list. All Public Folders-Academic-Philosophy-Dennis Beach-PHIL180-[unit]. |
| September 6 (T) | Read the Second Conversation, pp. 25-52. See the web schedule (link below) for study questions.   |

Further schedule information, as well as assignments, Public Folder Discussion and this syllabus are to be found on our course web pages: <http://employees.csbsju.edu/dbeach/phil180/>. Bookmark it!