

# Introduction to Philosophy

PY 6 a, Spring 2004

Instructor: Dr. David Vander Laan  
Office: Porter Center 4  
E-mail: vanderla@westmont.edu  
Phone: x7041  
Office Hours: MW, 2:00-4:00, and by appointment

## Texts

William F. Lawhead, *The Philosophical Journey, 2nd ed.*  
Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Engaging God's World*  
course reader

## Course Goals

This course aims not only at *knowledge*, but also at certain *skills* and *attitudes*. We will examine such historically important topics as the existence of God, the sources of knowledge, free will, ethics, and the meaning of life. We will try to understand what various philosophers throughout history have thought about these topics, and, to the extent that we can, we will try to reach the truth on them ourselves. Equally important are the reasoning skills we'll practice, such as forming and evaluating arguments, making distinctions, identifying fallacies, and painting the big picture. If all goes well, the process will reinforce both the intellectual humility we'll call "Socratic wisdom" and *philosophia*, love of wisdom.

This project is a natural one at a Christian liberal arts college. We want to understand how the various liberal disciplines fit into our big picture; that is, we want to have an epistemology, a theory of knowledge. We also want to explore what a Christian worldview might look like. As the exploration focuses on the liberal arts, we find why, in Plantinga's words, learning is a spiritual calling. This helps us see what the liberal arts might have to do with the meaning of life.

The success of this class, like any other, depends on both the professor and the students. I have planned the assignments and examinations in a way I hope will help you learn, but this class needs your active questioning and thinking to meet its potential. To borrow the words of Douglas Soccio,

It's easy to forget that this is *your* education. Customize it. Work at it. *You are invited to participate in "the great conversation."* Socrates guided others out of the cave of ignorance, but they provided the effort. I offer you a map to help you on your way to wisdom. The next step is yours. (*How to Get the Most Out of Philosophy*)

Please take the opportunity to drop by my office. Talking one-on-one can help a lot.

## What This Course Will Require of You

Daily assignments will guide you through the readings and help you practice the crucial and more active discipline of thinking them through. The assignments will be announced in class and due at the beginning of the next class. Late work will receive no more than 60% credit, and no late work will be accepted after the last day of class. Your three lowest assignment grades will be discarded. The **daily assignments** (together with an oral quiz) will be worth 40% of your final grade.

I strongly encourage you to think through and write out short answers to the **unassigned questions** in your study guides and textbook as well. This will help you prepare you for class discussion and will make studying for exams much easier.

The **oral quiz** will be in the third week of class, Jan. 29-30. There will be a **written test** (Feb. 13, 20% of final grade), an **oral test** (March 25-26, 20% of final grade), and an **oral final examination** (Monday and Tuesday of exam week, May 3-4; 20% of final grade). Examinations will be designed to test understanding, not memorization, of both class material and readings.

For your benefit, **attendance** is required. Each absence (for worthy reasons or otherwise) beyond the fifth will decrease your final grade by 2.5 percentage points. If you have or develop a medical condition which prevents you from attending class, you must discuss your situation with the instructor in the first week of class, or as soon as possible after the condition arises.

Grades will be calculated as percentages and assigned letters according to the chart below.

$95 \leq x$	A
$90 \leq x < 95$	A-
$86.66 \leq x < 90$	B+
$83.33 \leq x < 86.66$	B
$80 \leq x < 83.33$	B-
$76.66 \leq x < 80$	C+
$73.33 \leq x < 76.66$	C
$70 \leq x < 73.33$	C-
$66.66 \leq x < 70$	D+
$63.33 \leq x < 66.66$	D
$60 \leq x < 63.33$	D-
$x < 60$	F

### **Academic Honesty**

Students are expected to know and abide by the community standards for academic honesty as stated in the Student Handbook and the Academic Policies and Procedures. These policies will be enforced. There is no excuse for plagiarism or any other form of dishonesty.

### **Oral Exam Tips**

1. Practice!

It will be easier to verbalize answers if you've done it before. Ask friends to test you.

2. Don't dawdle.

Missing one question out of eight is better than missing one question out of four.

Take time to be complete, but don't take too long with answers you don't know.

3. Take a moment.

Give yourself permission to think for twenty seconds. The pause can do wonders.

4. Ask for a hint.

You can get significant partial credit this way, and that's better than no credit at all.

5. Know your stuff.

Understanding the material will help you a lot more than these hints will.

6. Don't panic.

It usually feels worse than it is. And your worst answer doesn't get graded.

### **Reading Assignments**

A tentative schedule of reading assignments follows. Due dates will be announced, along with any changes to the schedule.

## **What is philosophy?**

What are philosophers concerned about?

Lawhead, 1.0, Overview of the Journey

Lawhead, 1.1, Socrates and the Search for Wisdom

How should we evaluate arguments?

Lawhead, 1.3, Argument and Evidence: How Do I Decide What to Believe?

Patrick Hurley, *A Concise Introduction to Logic* 1.3, Deduction and Induction

Patrick Hurley, *A Concise Introduction to Logic* 1.4,

Validity, Truth, Soundness, Strength, Cogency

Lawhead, Appendix, Reasoning Effectively: What to Do and What Not to Do

## **Does God exist?**

Lawhead, 4.0, Overview of Philosophy of Religion

Must the universe have a first cause?

Lawhead, 4.1, The Cosmological Argument for God

Must the universe have a designer?

Lawhead, 4.2, The Design Argument for God

Paul Draper, "Irreducible Complexity and Darwinian Gradualism"

Robin Collins, "A Scientific Argument for the Existence of God"

Can God and evil coexist?

Lawhead, 4.5, The Problem of Evil: Atheistic and Theistic Responses

Peter van Inwagen, "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil"

Eleonore Stump, "The Mirror of Evil"

## **What can we know?**

Lawhead, 2.0, Overview of the Problem of Knowledge

Can we know anything, really?

Lawhead, 2.1, Skepticism

Is reason our only tool for forming beliefs?

Lawhead, 2.2, Rationalism

Is science our best source of knowledge?

Lawhead, 2.3, Empiricism

Carl Sagan, "Science and Hope,"

*The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*

Michael Shermer, "Smart People Believe Weird Things"

Does truth vary from person to person?

Lawhead, 2.5, Epistemological Relativism

What approaches to knowledge do we find in the liberal arts?

Lawhead, 1.2, Plato's Allegory of the Cave

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., "Creation," *Engaging God's World*

Is it legitimate to believe things on faith?

Lawhead, 4.4, Pragmatic and Subjective Justifications of Religious Belief

Kelly James Clark, "Without Evidence or Argument"

John Calvin, "Faith: Its Definition Set Forth, and Its Properties Explained"

from *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

James M. Lang, "Divine Revelation," *Notre Dame Magazine*

Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, Ch. 6

Can faith support some one religion above the others?

John Godfrey Saxe, "The Blind Men and the Elephant"

Alvin Plantinga, "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism"

### **What is the nature of human beings?**

- Lawhead, 3.0, Overview of Metaphysics
- Are we physical organisms or immaterial souls?
  - Lawhead, 3.2, Dualism
  - Lawhead, 3.3, Physicalism
  - Lawhead, 3.4, Functionalism and Artificial Intelligence
- Are we free?
  - Lawhead, 3.6, Hard Determinism
  - Lawhead, 3.7, Libertarianism, pp. 278-286, 293-294
  - Lawhead, 3.8, Compatibilism
  - Thomas Morris, "God's Knowledge," *Our Idea of God*
- What is it to be in the "image of God"?
  - Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.93.1-2

### **How shall I live?**

- What makes actions right or wrong?
  - Lawhead, 5.3, Utilitarianism
  - Lawhead, 5.4, Kantian Ethics
- What makes a human life good or bad?
  - Lawhead, 5.5, Virtue Ethics
  - Neal Stephenson, excerpt from *The Diamond Age*
- Is ethics created by God?
  - Phillip Quinn, "God and Morality"

### **What is the meaning of life?**

- What kind of meaning can life have if God doesn't exist?
  - Lawhead, Postscript: Philosophy and the Meaning of Life
  - Lawhead, 3.7, Libertarianism, pp. 286-292
- How might Christians identify the meaning of life?
  - Augustine, *The City of God*, Bk. 22, Ch. 29-30
  - Dallas Willard, excerpt from *The Divine Conspiracy*
  - Adams, *Life, the Universe, and Everything*, Ch. 1
- What is the meaning of *my* life?
  - Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., "Vocation in the Kingdom of God," *Engaging God's World*