

PH102

Philosophy and the Quest for Truth

1. Course Number and Name: PH102, Philosophy and the Quest for Truth
Credits: 3

2. Course Description: PH102, Philosophy and the Quest for Truth, is an introduction to four topics in philosophy: philosophy of religion, ethics, epistemology and metaphysics. This course will explore what philosophy is through an examination of issues and arguments used in philosophical discussions. This requires familiarity with the meaning of basic philosophical terminology. Through that inquiry the course touches on the philosophic roots of western civilization and assists students in the development of their own philosophical perspectives. The course examines some of the reasoning that underlies the study of liberal arts disciplines such as history, political theory, social ethics, and science. This course provides a essential set of tools students need to grasp the big picture in the world of thought and action in today's world.

3. Course Goals:

This course introduces students to what philosophy by asking what is philosophical inquiry trying to accomplish? What topics does it address? How does it approach issues that we all wonder about. The course focuses on four main subject areas:

- Epistemology
- Metaphysics
- Ethics
- Philosophy of Religion

The course goal is for students to develop an understanding of what important philosophers have said and the philosophical language or terminology that they used and which now makes up what we call "philosophy." By conducting that exercise students will develop their critical thinking skills and gain insight into the philosophic roots of western civilization.

4. Learning Outcomes

4.1 The student will be able to "speak philosophy," using the language of reason to express ideas with cogency and confidence.

4.2 The student will be able to assess the relative strength of those who claim that we can know God through directly intuited experiences of the holy in contrast to those who try to demonstrate the existence of God by purely logical arguments that appeal to meaning of the idea of God or to the complexities of the universe.

4.3 The student will be able to argue whether the existence of God is knowable only through faith experiences or through analysis of human moral experience, the claims of miracles, and whether the existence of evil precludes any consideration of a loving and powerful Supreme Being.

4.4 The student will be able to assess the reasonableness of those who believe moral behavior is guided by our understanding of the results of what people choose to do.

4.5 The student will be able to delineate that details of moralists who reject consequences as the criterion of right behavior by appealing to principles that are know either by reason, by religious understanding, or by inner enlightenment.

4.6 The student will be able to articulate the foundations of epistemology stemming from the debate between the primacy of reason in contrast to the use of the senses.

4.7. The student will be able to convey the revolutionary impact of the thought of Kant that leads to the recent attempts to deny the possibility of finding truth, reducing our efforts to pragmatic attempts to use ideas to further the objectives we choose to achieve.

4.8. The student will be able to explain the sharp contrast between competing worldviews that drive the contemporary conflict between those who believe in a closed system of natural evolutionism and those who claim there is an intelligent force guiding the unfolding of the universe.

4.9 The student will assess worldviews that attempt to bypass the conflict of design and chance in the universe by focusing on the inner experience of the self in its quest for meaning and relevance.

4.10 The student will open the door to the wider world stage where divergent views on the human condition clash with western notions of the free will of human beings in a time when scientific concepts of human life come up against the mindset of traditional understandings found in Asia and Africa.

5. Course Concepts

5.1 What philosophy is.

5.2 Mystical, ontological argument, cosmological arguments.

5.3 Moral arguments, arguments from miracles; fideism; the problem of evil.

5.4 Ethics/metaethics: subjectivism; consequentialism: utilitarianism, Nietzsche, and Moore.

5.5 Kantian deontology; theistic ethics; virtue ethics.

5.6 Rationalism and empiricism.

5.7 Kantian phenomenology; pragmatism, and authoritarianism.

5.8 Materialism, idealism, dualism and naturalism.

5.9 Voluntarism, eastern monism, existentialism, positivism.

5.10 Determinism. African and Asian philosophy. Pre-philosophical worldviews of Africa and Asia.

6. Required Text:

Gustafson, James W. The Quest for Truth: An Introduction to Philosophy, Acton, MA: Copley, 2004, ISBN: 1581523351. \$54.90.

7. Recommended Reading

8. Additional Resources

Course Syllabus

Course Number: Ph102

Course Title: Philosophy and the Quest for Truth

Faculty: James Gustafson, Ph.D.

Performance Requirements/Course Grade:

Recorded lectures for each session of this course are located in "**Resources**" in Izio.

Assessments:

■ **Two Open Book exams**, one after the first fifteen chapters (Units One) of *The Quest for Truth: An Introduction to Philosophy* at the end of Session Five, and a final exam on the remainder of the assigned readings from your required text (at the end of Session Nine). Keeping up with the assignments each week is essential to doing well on the exams. (15% each)

■ **Contributions to Discussion**. Discussion Topics are posted for every Session of the course. You will compose a written response to each topic and post your responses on the Discussion forum. This threaded discussion should be a ton of fun. (30%)

■ **Writing Assignment**. There is one writing assignment in which you select a book from a list of books located in Assignments. You will read that book you select and make connections with the ideas we are studying in the course. This list includes books from classics in philosophy to contemporary titles, both fiction and non-fiction. You may not substitute other titles. Please follow the instructions on what is required in this written assignment by reviewing "Writing Assignment Instructions" located in the Assignments section of your course. (40%)

Course Participation and assignment submissions: Students are responsible for participating in the course through the following academic activities: uploading assignments, posting to discussion folders, and responding to faculty inquiries. Students are expected to be involved in ongoing instructional activities based on the recommended schedule for course completion as detailed in the syllabus. In order to actively participate in a course, Students must make contact with their faculty mentor on a regular basis through one of the following methods:

- Posting of an assignment in the assignment area of the course web site (e.g., a paper, project, etc.).
- Posting of an assignment to share with the faculty mentor and other students in the course web site (e.g., a review of a book or article, a proposal for a research study, a presentation in the form of a PowerPoint presentation file, reporting on participation in a research study, etc).
- Participation in a threaded discussion in the course web site (e.g., commenting on a discussion question posted by the faculty mentor, providing feedback to another student, etc.).
- Viewing instructional materials (e.g., a PowerPoint presentation prepared by the faculty mentor, a streaming audio or video presentation, etc.).

Rubrics

Rubrics that will guide your Instructor's grading of your assignments are located at http://www.yorktownuniversity.com/grad_rubrics.cfm

Academic Integrity

Available both in the student and faculty handbooks.

Recommended schedule for course completion

Course Methods Used to Achieve These Goals:

1. Read textbook expositions of four major philosophic topics
2. Listen to recorded lectures by your Instructor located in "Resources"
2. Take open books exams that will track student progress
3. Respond to Discussion topics enabling you to showcase what you've learned and to interact with other students and the Instructor by raising questions about your reading assignments.

4. Maintain regular communication with the instructor by email.

Course Outline:

Session 1: Introduction to Introduction to Philosophy

Reading Assignment: "Chapter Zero"

Discussion Topics: One of the hot topics in our culture is whether the design argument is convincing. On the one hand are scientists like Michael Behe (University of Pennsylvania) who say intelligent design is the only current theory that explains the scientific data and on the other Stephen J Gould (late of Harvard) who think such ideas are a Trojan Horse for religion. See what you can find out by a brief browse of the Internet. Then express your thoughts on 1. how convincing the design argument is, and 2. how you rank its cogency as compared with the ontological argument.

Learning Outcomes: An understanding of what philosophy is, how philosophers do their work, and of terminology used to express philosophic ideas.

Session 2: Philosophy of religion: mystical, ontological argument, cosmological arguments

Reading Assignments: chapters 1-3.

Discussion Topics: How do you evaluate the relative strength of the evidentialist arguments for God and the evidentialist argument against God presented in chapter six? Secondly, how successful do you think the fideist approach is in defending the case for belief in the existence of God as theists define God?

Learning Outcomes: Explain the terminology used to express philosophic ideas, such as ontology, deontology, and teleological.

Session 3: Philosophy of religion: moral arguments, arguments from miracles; fideism; the problem of evil.

Lecture: Listen to lectures on "Religion"

Reading: chapters 4-6.

Discussion Topics: It is said that current cultural worldviews favor the idea that truth, including moral truth, is chosen by the individual person and that all views are therefore equal. What philosophers in chapters 7-12 would a. agree with this idea, and b. disagree, and why? Do you think that any ethical theory presented in these chapters is especially meritorious or especially dangerous? Explain your analysis.

Learning Outcomes: Discuss how philosophers argue for God on the basis of facts about the human condition.

Session 4: Ethics/metaethics: subjectivism; consequentialism: utilitarianism, Nietzsche, and Moore.

Lecture: Listen to lectures on "Ethics"

Reading Assignments: chapters 7-12.

Discussion Topics: Both Kant and most of the religious ethicists believe that there must be some fixed, objective moral truths on which to base personal and social morality. America's Founding Fathers all believed that democracy could not survive without a high level of morality in the voting population, and that such morality required a religious base. Do you think that Kant's ethics would serve this purpose just

as well as Christian morality? Explain. What are your thoughts on the role of religion and morality in the “public square?”

Learning Outcomes: Grasp various schools of ethical analysis, with emphasis on consequential theories.

Session 5: Kantian deontology, theistic ethics; virtue ethics.

Reading: chapters 13-15.

Discussion Topics: Our culture has entered what philosophers call the post-modern era. That means that we have given up on the quest of modern philosophy to find truth by means of reason and empirical investigation. See what you can find on the Internet on this topic sufficient to answer the question whether rationalism (truth known through rigorous logical analysis) and empiricism (truth know by careful observation) can sustain the post-modern critique. What are the future implications, for the individual and for society, of going the post-modern route?

Learning Outcomes: Understanding non-sequential ethical theories.
Take the first Open Book Exam found in Assignments.

Session 6: Epistemology: rationalism and empiricism.

Reading Assignments: chapters 16-18.

Lecture: Listen to lectures on “Epistemology”

Discussion Topics: Did Kant really solve the impasse faced in his time by rationalism and empiricism. Or did he make matters worse? Can intuitionism or pragmatism truly help us maintain a quest for truth? Explain.

Learning Outcomes: Examine the foundation of epistemology.

Session 7: Epistemology: Kantian phenomenology; pragmatism, and authoritarianism.

Reading Assignments: chapters 19-21.

Discussion Topics: Movies like the Matrix series build on the idea that reality is projected by the human mind. Which philosophers in chapters 22-25 would be closest to this idea and which would object to it? Explain your reasoning. Then tell us how you look at it. What difference does it make, anyway? If any?

Learning Outcomes: Discuss Kantian and post-Kantian developments in epistemology.

Session 8: Metaphysics: materialism, idealism, dualism and naturalism.

Lecture: Listen to lectures on “Metaphysics”

Reading Assignments: chapters 22-25

Discussion Topics: Our culture now gives us access to people advocating all kinds of worldviews—New Age, Scientology, various religions and cults. Some analysts say we live in a very Nietzschean culture, where power and control and self-glorification are virtues. Of the worldviews we have examined so far, which makes the most sense and which the least sense? Explain. Where do you come down in all this pluralism?

Learning Outcomes: Discuss classic world-view systems.

Session 9: Metaphysics: voluntarism, eastern monism, existentialism, positivism.

Reading Assignments: chapters 26-29.

Discussion Topics: Philosophers are seriously talking about human nature being modified by soon-to-come technology. We will be able to live for centuries. Combine humans with machines. Create designer children. Browse the Internet (bioethics, cloning, chimeras, etc.) to get a feel for what is being discussed. Then give your view on where this is headed and whether it is good or bad. Does this have implications for the idea of free will? Of human nature?

Learning Outcomes: Examine some 19th and 20th Century developments in metaphysics.

Take the second open book Exam found in Assignments.

Session 10: Metaphysics: Lectures on determinism, African and Asian philosophy.

Discussion Topics: Islamic terrorist movements are a new example of organic social philosophy. Western individualism, on the other hand, seems to exhibit atomism.

What do you think is the likely outcome of the clash of these present forces in the world community?

Relate your thoughts to the discussion in chapters 34-36, including the idea of rights and duties.

Learning Outcomes: Examine a current debate on a metaphysical issue. Contrast philosophically developed worldviews with pre-philosophical worldviews of Africa and Asia.