

PH103: Reason, Knowledge and Values

An Introduction to Philosophy

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Office Hrs: LAK 5.03, Fri 11:30-13:30

Course Website: <https://moodle.lse.ac.uk/>

Term: Lent 2014

Lecture Room: NAB LG.01

Lecture Time: Thu 14:00-15:00

Course Description

In his Letter to Menoeceus, Epicurus (341-271 BC) advises us that the successful study of philosophy will help one to “live like a god among men.” The aims and objectives of this course are more modest.

Reason, Knowledge and Values provides an introduction to analytical philosophy by using classic and contemporary texts to study a selection of philosophical problems. It aims to acquaint students with some of the central questions of philosophy and to engage students in critical analysis of classic philosophical questions as informed by the natural and social sciences. It also aims to develop students’ ability to think about and discuss philosophical issues systematically, critically, and patiently, and to develop their philosophical curiosity and imagination.

Students should complete this course with knowledge of the basic types of philosophical argument and of the following questions and some classic answers to them:

What is the meaning of life?	Does morality depend on religion?
Is morality relative?	Is evil compatible with the existence of Gods?
How is determinism related to free will?	Is time travel possible?
How can one move given Zeno’s paradox?	Are unobservables like quarks and gluons real?
How is knowledge different than belief?	What makes mathematical knowledge special?

Students will develop the ability to: Think clearly and thoroughly about philosophical issues; Understand a philosophical text on its own terms: determine the aims the author sets him- or herself, consider the meaning of words, concepts, and expressions particular to the text and the argument; ask questions about the context in which the argument is situated; Critically evaluate arguments: distinguish valid from invalid, sound from unsound, deductive from inductive, plausible from implausible arguments; Debate and write about these issues in a philosophical manner.

Meetings

This course meets for weekly 1-hour lectures, as well as weekly 1-hour discussion classes following each lecture, for a total of ten weeks. The class following the final lecture occurs in Summer Term. Thus, the first class meeting in Lent Term is about the final lecture of Michaelmas Term, and there is a final class meeting in Summer Term.

In parallel to these meetings there is a short five-week course on ‘Argumentative Writing in Philosophy’ with practical advice to improve your writing style and with writing exercises, in parallel to this course. Students in the BSc Philosophy and Economics and in the BSc Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method are required to attend (5 hours of workshops in *either* MT or LT) and do all assignments. Other students are encouraged to join in.

Availability

The course is available to all students where regulations permit. But it is compulsory for the BSc in Philosophy and Economics, the BSc in Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method and the BSc in Politics and Philosophy. It is available on the BSc in International Relations and BSc in Social Policy, and available as an outside option to students on many other programmes.

Textbooks and Readings

Please do not purchase any unscrupulously overpriced textbooks for this course. You will be given access to all the required readings and course material on the course website through Moodle.

Formative Coursework

An important aspect of every philosophy course is doing the readings and attending the lectures. Philosophy is about engaging actively with ideas. Participating in lectures, classes and workshops is an essential way to experience it. In addition to attending the meetings, you will be expected to

- Develop your own responses to Discussion Questions posted and participate in class discussions.
- Turn in one 1,500 word formative essay (rather than 2 as in MT), submitted online through the Turnitin link on Moodle, at the beginning of Week 8.

The Discussion Questions for a given lecture should be studied and prepared before the first class meeting after that lecture so that you can participate in the discussion, although you do not have to hand them in.

Note that satisfactory completion of formative coursework is required to gain entrance to the exam in Summer Term.

Assessment

Assessment is based on an exam and an essay. Admission to the exam is contingent upon satisfactory completion of the formative coursework discussed above.

Summary	
67%	2-hour Exam during the School Exam Period
33%	1500-word Essay during the Summer Term

About The Exam

Important Note about Past Exams. The exam format for this year is new, in that it includes both short-answer and essay questions. Past years included only essay questions. But the essay questions from years past should give a good idea of what to expect of the essays this year. Mock exams of previous years which are available via the library webpage. Mock short-answer exam questions are available on the course website.

Timing. The exam is two hours long and will consist of some short-answer questions (40min), and two essay questions (40min each).

Short Answer Questions. These will be based on 4-5 short answer questions made available each week by the course lecturer. The questions on the exam will be chosen at random from this list.

Essays Topics and Format. There are roughly ten topics in the course, each corresponding to 2 weeks. On the exam, there will be at least one essay question on each of these 10 areas. You have to answer 2 questions, one from each term. Since you may get a question that you find difficult to answer even if you've prepared an area, it is advisable to prepare in depth the material of 4 (but not more) of these areas.

The questions will not surprise you; they will always be about one of the central views, questions or problems that were discussed in the lectures.

Qualities of a good answer. A good solution to a short-answer or essay question:

1. **Is a focused answer** to the question. Don't write down everything you know on the topic! Only include material that is relevant to the question set.
2. **Is clear and precise.** Obfuscation will only harm you.
3. **Shows you are familiar with the material**, such as through discussion of the main argument(s) of philosopher(s) relevant to the question, through expression of these ideas in your own words, through illustration with your own examples, and through your own critical evaluation.

You will not do well in either the formative, assessed, or exam essays if you simply reproduce what you have been told in lectures: You will need to have made the material your own (as detailed in point 3). The point is not necessarily for you to develop your own groundbreaking new position. But you must show that you have thought the topic through carefully and come to your own conclusions.

About The Essays

When you write an essay in this course, that essay must contain the following essential elements.

1. *A clear thesis that answers the question.* Whatever question you are assigned or otherwise choose to answer, you must give a 1-2 sentence statement, called a **thesis**, which serves to answer the question in a clear and concise way.
2. *Discussion of the background for your thesis.* In order to understand the thesis, there is always some context that must be explained. This typically includes an explanation of the question, any relevant background needed to understand that explanation, and the views that other authors have taken on the matter.
3. *A compelling argument for that thesis.* An argument is not an opinion. It is a sequence of premises that lead inevitably to your conclusion. Although you should be able to summarize your argument briefly, this argument should be the centerpiece of your essay, and form the bulk of your writing.

You may notice that the requirements for a philosophy essay are different than essays you may have written for other courses. For this reason, participation in the 5-week writing workshop associated with this course is strongly encouraged!

In addition, more information about how to write better philosophy essays can be found in Dr. Roberts' "7 Steps to a Better Philosophy Paper," available at, <http://personal.lse.ac.uk/ROBERT49/teaching/Guide.pdf>.

Internet Access

By enrolling in this course, you agree that you will have regular access to the internet that will allow you to submit your coursework online before the due date. In particular, you are responsible for making sure you have enough time to learn how to submit your coursework online, and to troubleshoot any potential problems before the due date. To avoid such problems, *please don't wait until the last minute*. Give yourself extra time in case something goes wrong, and please contact the course instructor or the technology help desk if you need help submitting your work.

How to do well in this course

The ideas and techniques you will learn about in this class are deep and powerful. But mastering them requires diligence and practice. Come to the course meetings having studied the readings as best you can, take notes, and then review the material again when you go home. Discuss the material with your classmates. You are very welcome to get in touch with your class teachers or with the course lecturer to discuss difficulties when you run into them. Take advantage of our office hours, and feel free to contact us by email. Remember, philosophy takes some time to process. That is normal. The more time you give yourself, the more likely you'll be to succeed.

Academic Integrity

LSE seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. If you are not sure what constitutes plagiarism, visit the Harvard Guide to Using Sources at <http://goo.gl/hFa7EF>. The School's policy and procedures regarding plagiarism are available online at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/resources/calendar/academicregulations/regulationsOnAssessmentOffences-Plagiarism.htm>.

Disability Services

Students with disabilities are warmly encouraged to contact the course lecturer about accommodations. Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability should contact the Disability and Well-Being Office by email at disability-dyslexia@lse.ac.uk or by phone at 020 7955 7767. Please be sure to make an appointment for an Individual Student Support Agreement (ISSA) and contact the course lecturer about any specific requests as early in the semester as possible. The Disability and Well-Being Office is located in the Old Building room G23, and is open Monday to Thursday from 10am-12pm and from 2-4pm.