

PHL 290: Philosophy Proseminar

Winter 2008



The basics

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| <i>Class meetings</i> | Tu/Th 1-:00-2:50, building 1, room 306 |
| <i>Instructor</i> | Michael Cholbi |
| <i>E-mail</i> | mjcholbi@csupomona.edu |
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| <i>Office</i> | Building 1, room 331 |
| <i>Department office</i> | Building 1, room 320 |
| <i>Office hours</i> (winter 2008) | Tuesday 3:00-4:15, Wednesday 1:30-3:00, & by appointment |

Description

The successful study of philosophy demands the development and application of a wide array of skills, including analytical reading, logical reasoning, the construction and rational evaluation of arguments, and argumentative writing. The purpose of the proseminar is to assist students in identifying and fostering these skills. Consequently, whereas other philosophy courses are organized around particular ideas or content (e.g., a subfield of philosophy such as epistemology or ethics, or a historical period of philosophy), this course is organized around the practice of these skills. Students who complete the proseminar should be well situated to study philosophy at an upper-division level.

Course learning objectives

By the conclusion of this course, students will be able:

- [1] To read written philosophical work analytically, resulting in clear statements of authors' conclusions and arguments
- [2] To reconstruct, categorize, and appraise philosophical arguments for (a) validity and soundness, and (b) the presence of fallacious reasoning
- [3] To use a variety of databases or other resources to conduct research in preparation for writing a philosophical essay
- [4] To select an appropriate topic and thesis for a philosophical essay
- [5] To write an organized argumentative philosophical essay in which the thesis is supported by substantive reasoning
- [6] To revise and troubleshoot their own written philosophical work in order to improve it
- [7] To provide constructive feedback on others' philosophical work

- [8] To identify the main features of successful philosophical presentations
- [9] To formulate a plan for how they will utilize their philosophical education in their future studies or career

Prerequisites

This course is intended for students who intend to pursue upper-division coursework in philosophy (as part of a philosophy major or minor, etc.) Thus, while there are no specific courses that function as prerequisites, students enrolling in this course should have taken at least 2-3 philosophy courses at either the lower- or upper-division level.

Evaluation and requirements

Your grade in this course will be determined in the following fashion:

- [1] Participation and involvement in class activities (**20% of quarter grade**): This has two components: (a) In-class participation (see the guide on evaluating class participation at the end of this syllabus for further information). (b) Participation in your writing group meetings. Students will be assembled into groups of four on February 7. The purpose of these writing groups is to enable you to get constructive feedback on your writing and to learn how to critique philosophical writing, both your own and others'. Each group is required to meet twice, for at least one hour each, between February 14 and March 6 and turn in a meeting report. (I will distribute a meeting report form that you will use for this purpose.)
- [2] A logical reasoning exam (**10% of quarter grade**), to be distributed on January 29 and due on January 31. This exam will be graded on a pass/fail basis; the minimum passing grade is 80%. Students who do not pass are encouraged to retake the exam as many times as proves necessary.
- [3] A term paper of approximately 2,000 words (**25% of quarter grade**). The first draft of this paper is due to me and to the members of your writing group via e-mail on *Saturday, March 15*. Members of your writing group are required to provide you written feedback on this draft by *Tuesday, March 18*. You are then required to submit via e-mail a final draft of your paper, incorporating this feedback, to me by *Friday, March 21*.
- [4] Weekly homework assignments (**45% of quarter grade**), distributed each week on Tuesday and due in class on the subsequent Tuesday. There will be nine assignments in total, each graded on a 1-5 scale.

Texts

Required

- [1] Vaughn, Writing Philosophy: A Student's Guide to Writing Philosophy (Oxford, 2006)
- [2] Other resources (articles, handouts, etc.) will be distributed either in class or via Blackboard.

Blackboard

We will be using Blackboard (<http://blackboard.csupomona.edu>) in support of the in-class activities in this course. In order to use Blackboard, you will need to know your university Intranet ID and password. You should be checking the Blackboard site several times weekly for updates on course activities, etc. Discussion forums and paper exchange bins can also be found on Blackboard.

Varia

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will be addressed according to Cal Poly policies. The copyright for these course materials is held by the instructor; any attempt to distribute or sell this material without instructor authorization is in violation of that copyright.

Readings and calendar

A calendar of our topics follows below. Since this course concerns itself with the development and mastery of skills rather than considering particular philosophical content, the calendar is intended to be flexible, and we may modify it to meet your needs. There are 20 course meetings to be utilized as follows:

- 1. January 8-17: Reading philosophy analytically**
- 2. January 22-29: Philosophical reasoning** (Exam distributed 1/29 and due 1/31)
- 3. January 31: Conducting research in philosophy**
- 4. February 5-March 4: Philosophical writing**
 - a. Topic and thesis selection**
 - b. Pre-writing**
 - c. Troubleshooting common problems and revision**
- 5. March 6-11: Oral presentation**
- 6. March 13: Careers and graduate study**

Each Tuesday you will receive a brief outlining the weekly homework and the assigned readings from Vaughn.

Evaluating class participation

Your attendance and participation will determine a portion of your grade in this course. The following standards will be used to evaluate your attendance and participation.

| GRADE LEVEL | CHARACTERISTICS OF ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION |
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| A (90-100) | Student attends all (or nearly all) class meetings and is exceptionally well-prepared for each meeting. Student participates regularly in class discussion, whether online or during class meetings, both spontaneously and in response to instructor questions or comments. More importantly, student's participation is insightful and reflects an active and substantive engagement |

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| | with the class material. Student's participation opens up new and profitable avenues for exploration and thereby advances both her own learning and that of others. If this student were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would suffer greatly. |
| B (80-89) | Student attends nearly all class meetings and is at least adequately prepared for each meeting. Student participates regularly and contributes substantively to class discussion, whether online or during class meetings, but her contributions are more sporadic and only sometimes stimulate further discussion. If this student were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would suffer significantly |
| C (70-79) | Student attends most all class meetings and/or is only somewhat prepared for each meeting. Student participates infrequently, and her contributions are only sometimes substantive. If this student were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would be unchanged. |
| D/F (0-69) | Student attends few or no class meetings and/or is completely unprepared for each meeting. Student participates either not at all, or her participation lacks substance, and disrupts or distracts the class. If this student were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion might be improved. |