1. Course Description

We explore perennial philosophical questions, such as:
— What is knowledge?
— What is it to believe something?
— Can we prove that God exists?
— When you know something, do you know that you know it?
— What is imagination?
— What is consciousness?
— Why is it wrong to lie, and is it always wrong to lie?
— What is truth?
— What is involved in asserting something, and are there norms of assertion?
— Is it possible to act against one’s better knowledge?
— How should we understand the motivation of actions?
— What is the difference between descriptive and normative claims?
— How should we respond to disagreement about value?
— Does the evolutionary history of our ethical beliefs affect their justification?

We focus on some specific problems and study the methods philosophers employ, in particular: arguments, thought-experiments, and examples.

Throughout the semester, we
— practice skills related to philosophical inquiry,
— gather tools that are needed for precise philosophical argument and careful examination of philosophical ideas,
— study questions as they are discussed from the perspectives of different subfields in philosophy,
— think about the relationship between philosophy and other fields.

2. Requirements

Reading
Reading assignments are short, but require active reading:
— After every sentence/couple of lines, ask yourself “what does the author say? how would I reformulate this in my own words?”
— For every term that is at all technical, ask yourself how you would explain it to someone who doesn’t know the term.
— I’m posting a handout for every class on Courseworks. Every handout ends with a small assignment (“homework”), designed to help you think through the material. My recommendation is that you always write up a reply to the homework question, as an exercise and a tool for critical reading.

*Written assignments*

All papers for the class are replies to the homework questions, posed at the end of the handout.

In total, you are required to submit seven half page papers and two one page papers, single-spaced, distributed evenly throughout the semester.

We’ll collect written replies every Monday in class. This means that between Wednesday and Monday you’ll have two prompts to choose from. In order to accumulate sufficiently many papers, you have to submit one paper per week on average, not counting the week of our midterm and not counting holidays, and allowing for two exceptions. Make yourself a plan: look at your schedule, and make a decision for when you want to take a break. Tell your TA ahead of time—if you don’t give us notice, we expect your written work to be handed in.

If you like both prompts in a given week, you can write papers on both prompts. Then you can take the next week off.

Up to the midterm, scheduled for October 10, you’re required to have submitted at least three half page papers and one one page paper.

*Exams*

Midterm
Final

*Grading*

— seven half page papers, single-spaced, each 5% (total 35%)
— two one page papers, single-spaced, each 10% (total 20%)
— Midterm, 20%
— Final, 25%

3. Week-by-Week Plan

*Week 1: What is Knowledge?*

*Wednesday*

Week 2: Knowledge and Belief

**Monday**

**Wednesday**

Week 3: Second-Order Knowledge and Knowing God

**Monday**

**Wednesday**
Anselm’s ontological proof for the existence of God (*Proslogion* Chapters II) <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/anselm-proslogium.asp>.

Week 4: Imagination, Knowledge, and Belief

**Monday**

**Wednesday**

Week 5: Bats and Zombies

**Monday**

**Wednesday**

Week 6: Truth and Truthfulness

**Monday**
MIDTERM
**Wednesday**

**Week 7: Assertion, Retraction, and Lies**

**Monday**
Sections 1 and 2 in Chapter 4 “Truth, Assertion, and Belief,” Williams 2010.

**Wednesday**

**Week 8: What is lying?**

**Monday**
Immanuel Kant, “On a supposed right to lie from philanthropy” (1797); Plato, *Hippias Minor*.

**Wednesday**

**Week 9: Weak Will and Akrasia**

**Monday**

**Wednesday**
Aristotle on Akrasia, *Nicomachean Ethics* VII (selections).

**Week 10: Agency**

**Monday**
NO CLASS

**Wednesday**

**Week 11: Intentions, Reasons, and the Guise of the Bad**

**Monday**
Wednesday

Week 12: Normativity
*Monday*

*Wednesday*

Week 13: Disagreement
*Monday*

*Wednesday*

Week 14: Evolution & Ethics
*Monday*

*Wednesday*

Week 15: Review
*Monday*
Review for final exam.

4. Readings
All readings will be accessible through Columbia’s Libraries and its institutional subscriptions or through Courseworks.

5. Academic Integrity and Honor Code
Please consult Columbia University’s policies on academic integrity as well as Columbia’s honor code:
http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicintegrity
https://www.college.columbia.edu/ccscheronorcode
These policies explain Columbia University’s academic regulations and how you can safeguard the integrity of your original work. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious offenses. Please take the time to familiarize yourself with the details of what constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty. You are expected to confirm to these policies in your academic work. It is important that you understand that academic dishonesty can lead to disciplinary action, including failure in the course and suspension, or even expulsion, from the University.