

Philosophy 120-881: The Adventure of Ideas

Course Syllabus

Dr. Christopher M. Brown

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Office Hours: M-F, 12:30-1pm, or by appointment

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GSH 2012

Meeting times: M-F, 11am-12:30pm; T 6-9pm

Meeting place: HU204

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Required texts:

Creel, Richard E. *Thinking Philosophically: An Introduction to Critical Reflection and Rational Dialogue*

(Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001). (C)

Postman, Neil. *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992). (P)

Schumacher, E.F. *A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977). (S)

Catalog Course Description: Living issues in current philosophy. An introductory study of the philosophical quest for understanding and wisdom in modern, contemporary, and recent thought. A study of perspectives in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and at the dawn of the twenty-first century

Professor's Course Summary: This introductory course in philosophy will address questions in *metaphysics*—to use Aristotle's famous phrase, the science of being *qua* being—and *epistemology*—the science of the nature of knowledge itself. We will, for example, be entertaining the following sorts of questions: how does knowledge differ from opinion? Is language itself a form of technology? Do we control our technology today or does it control us? Does a good explanation of some phenomenon have to be a scientific explanation? What does someone mean when they say, 'humans have free will'? Is the belief that humans have free will logically compatible with scientific explanations of the world? How should we characterize the relationship between the human mind and the brain? Is human being qualitatively or merely quantitatively different from animal being? Join us on a thinking person's summer vacation as we explore answers—and arguments in defense of such answers—to these questions among others.

Course goals:

- (1) To acquaint the student with the timeless sorts of questions asked in two of the major sub-disciplines of philosophy—metaphysics and epistemology—as well as possible strengths and weaknesses of some answers to those timeless philosophical questions.
- (2) To give the student an opportunity to philosophize in a manner more rigorous than what she is accustomed. My genuine hope is that philosophy might become a habit for some of the students.
- (3) To provoke the student to think about whether certain modern technologies are changing—or have already changed—the way we think about God, family, community, and education through reading and reflecting upon Neil Postman's *Technopoly*. In addition, I want to challenge the student with the thought that they *can* do something about it, if they so choose.

- (4) To improve the student's critical thinking skills. To accomplish this goal the student will be asked to read and analyze philosophical texts, answer questions about those texts, and reproduce and offer criticisms of arguments discussed in class.

Requirements for the course:

- (1) Class participation, 10%. This part of the grade will be calculated by taking into consideration the level of student participation within classroom meetings throughout the term. Examples of ways the student can participate in class include the following: ask the professor to clarify some point during a lecture; answer questions posed to the class by the professor; raise questions about a topic under discussion that have not been posed by other students in the class, the professor, or the author of the textbook; participate in class discussions/activities. See also the following headings below: *on being prepared for class* and *some ground rules for class participation*.
- (2) Quizzes, 30%. This part of the grade will be calculated by adding together the student's scores on quizzes taken throughout the term (not counting the student's lowest quiz score, which will be dropped). All quizzes are cumulative and thus may cover any material from previous lectures, discussions, and assigned readings. However, after the first quiz, quizzes will focus largely on material given since the time of the previous quiz. Quizzes will be multiple-choice and/or essay in format. *No make-up quizzes will be given*. The professor will make review sheets available for quizzes approximately forty-eight hours before a quiz is given.
- (3) Mid-term Exam, 30%. All exams are cumulative and thus may cover any material from previous lectures, discussions, and assigned readings. Exams will be multiple-choice and/or essay in format. The professor will make available a review sheet for the exam approximately seventy-two hours before the exam is given.
- (4) Final exam, 30%. See description of the mid-term exam above.

On being prepared for class. First, the professor expects his students to carefully read and reflect upon the assigned readings for the day—*before class has begun*. Check the syllabus below for the assigned readings for each day. Note that this schedule is *tentative*—the professor may add or delete readings at his discretion throughout the course, depending upon student progress and/or interest. When the professor hands out a list of questions for a particular reading, the student should use those questions to guide her reading. In addition, the student will be expected to come to class ready to offer oral answers to these questions in the class period in which the reading is to be discussed. Second, the student will be expected *to come to class and take notes on class lectures and discussions*. Finally, the professor will be using Blackboard in this class for the purposes of up-dating students, distributing homework assignments, and making handouts available to the students. Therefore, any student who hasn't used Blackboard should familiarize herself with it right away (please do see me soon if you lack experience with Blackboard). Also, in order to keep up with homework assignments for the class, the student should make it a habit of checking Blackboard at least once a day. I probably won't post anything new between 5pm-5am; I will often post new things between 2-5pm.

Some ground rules for classroom participation: (1) Be courteous to other students, e.g., do not talk while another student is talking; (2) Be courteous to the professor, e.g., do not talk, sleep, or exit the classroom while he is talking; students who come to class late or leave class early will be counted absent; also, all electronic devices, e.g., cell phones,

text-messaging devices, MP3 players, etc., should be turned off as soon as the student enters the classroom; take notes in class; (3) If the student wants to offer a comment or ask a question, the student should raise her hand and wait for the professor to call on her—allowing the professor to function as a moderator allows for greater order and fairness in the classroom; (4) Feel free to raise questions and objections to claims and arguments advanced by the authors in your textbooks, the professor, and other students. However, please always do so with a generous measure of kindness and civility.

Academic dishonesty: academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated in this class. If the instructor has evidence that a student has cheated on an assignment, quiz, or exam, the student will receive an automatic ‘zero’ on the particular assignment, quiz, or exam in question and the matter *will* be brought to the attention of the administration. Note: I pay careful attention to what students are doing during quizzes and exams.

On extra-credit work: No extra-credit work will be given in this class (it’s not only unfair but it’s also counter-productive). If the student is concerned about posting a particular grade in this course, she is advised to take all lectures, reading assignments, quizzes, and exams seriously from the very start of the course.

A final note on requirements for the class: the two exams must be completed in order to receive a passing grade in the course.

Grading scale for the course: 100-90%—A; 89-80%—B; 79-70%—C; 69-60%—D; 59-0%—F

Final note: any student eligible for and requesting academic accommodation due to a disability is hereby requested to provide a letter of accommodation from the Student Success Center within the first two weeks of the semester.

Tentative Class Schedule:

Date	Subject-matter	Read these texts for class
June 4	(a) Lecture on the sub-disciplines of philosophy (b) Truth: its nature, importance, and sources	N/A
June 5	(a) Truth, cont.	C, chs. 1, 2, and 10
June 6	(a) Knowledge: what is it? (b) Postman: "The Judgment of Thamus"	C, ch. 11 P, ch. 1
June 7	(a) Knowledge, cont. (b) Postman: "From Tools to Technocracy"	P, ch. 2
June 8	(a) Knowledge, cont. (b) Postman: "From Technocracy to Technopoly"	P, ch. 3
June 11	(a) Quiz #1 (b) Logic: the nature, kinds, and qualities of arguments	C, ch. 12
June 12 a.m.	(a) Freedom and Determinism I: subjective and objective freedom; libertarianism (b) Postman: "The Improbable World"	C, pp. 205-16 P, ch. 4
June 12 p.m.	(a) Freedom and Determinism II: on determinism (b) Postman: "The Broken Defenses"	C, pp. 216-29 P, ch. 5
June 13	(a) Freedom and Determinism III: evaluating determinism (b) The Mind/Body Problem I: Dualistic Interactionism	C, pp. 229-33 C, pp. 237-47
June 14	(a) Quiz #2 (b) Postman: "The Ideology of Machines: Medical Technology"	P, ch. 6
June 15	(a) Mid-term examination	
June 18	(a) The Mind/Body Problem II: Occasionalism and Parallelism (b) Postman: "The Ideology of Machines: Computer Technology"	C, pp. 247-65 P, ch. 7

June 19	(a) The Mind/Body Problem III: Epiphenomenalism (b) Postman: “Invisible Technologies”	C, pp. 265-75 P, ch. 8
June 20	(a) The Mind/Body Problem IV: Physical Monism	C, pp. 265-75
June 21	(a) The Mind/Body Problem V: a Thomistic perspective (b) Postman: “Scientism”	P, ch. 9
June 22	(a) The Mind/Body Problem: Review (b) Postman: “The Great Symbol Drain”	P, ch. 10
June 25	(a) Quiz #3 ; (b) On Philosophical Maps and Levels of Being	S, chs. 1 and 2
June 26 a.m.	(a) Progressions (b) Postman: “The Loving Resistance Fighter”	S, ch. 3 P, ch. 11
June 26 p.m.	(a) “ <i>Adaequatio</i> ” and the Four Fields of Knowledge	S, chs. 4, 5, and 6
June 27	(a) Schumacher on the Four Fields of Knowledge, cont.	S, chs. 7 and 8
June 28	(a) Quiz #4 ; (b) Schumacher on the Four Fields of Knowledge, cont. (c) Two types of problems	S, ch. 9 S, ch. 10
June 29	Final exam	