CENTRAL QUESTIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

Class code: PHIL-UA9010 - 001

Instructor Details: Peter Cave (The Open University)
pc@petercave.com and petercave@cantab.net

Class Details: Fall 2011
Wednesdays, 2.00 - 5.00 pm
Location to be confirmed.

Prerequisites: None

Class Description: This is an introduction to some central questions, perplexities and concepts within the main areas of philosophy, introducing themes from metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. Some extracts from some classic texts will be engaged – Plato, Descartes and John Stuart Mill, for example – and contemporary approaches will be addressed. Questions include: What am I? Is free will an illusion? What is knowledge? Is belief in God rational? and Whom ought I to save? In discussing these questions, important distinctions will be introduced and there will be attention to rigorous argument, including the nature of deductively sound argument.

The classes will involve informal instruction and discussion, with a focus upon clarity and argument over a range of topics, though also, it is hoped, with a lightness of touch.

Desired Outcomes: An appreciation of some central philosophical problems and how the problems may sensibly be approached.

Assessment Components: There are three required components: a midterm test (part of Session 6); an essay of about 1,500 words (to be submitted by Session 11) on a topic chosen from three given; a 90 minute examination in Session 15, when two essays will need to be written, the paper will provide at least five questions and the topic areas will be provided beforehand though not the precise questions. The final grade will be determined by the midterm test (20%), the essay (40%), and the examination (40%). Each student will receive a grade no lower than that determined by these inputs and in this proportion; but in some cases a higher grade may be awarded to take into account such factors as improvement, contribution to class, and so on. Grades will be lowered by 3% in the case of each unexcused absence and by 1.5 % for each late arrival after warning given.

Failure to submit or fulfil any required course component results in failure of the class.

Assessment Expectations: Grade A: Mastery of the problems, approaches and relevant literature, and an ability to fashion the
material in one’s own way or to make some original contribution.

Grade B: Good grasp of the problems, approaches and relevant literature, but little or no attempt at own contribution or organization.

Grade C: A grasp of the problems, but an uncertain grasp of the approaches and relevant literature.

Grade D: Failure to grasp the problems properly, but some attempt made at understanding them.

Grade F: Not even trying.

**Grade conversion**

NYU in London uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

- A=94-100
- A-=90-93
- B+=87-89
- B=84-86
- B-=80-83
- C+=77-79
- C=74-76
- C-=70-73
- D+=67-69
- D=65-66
- F=below 65

Where no specific numerical equivalent is assigned to a letter grade by the class teacher, the mid point of the range will be used in calculating the final class grade (except in the A range, where 95.5 will be used).

**Grading Policy**

NYU in London aims to have grading standards and results in all its courses similar to those that prevail at Washington Square.

In addition, Stern School of Business classes adhere to the following Stern grading guidelines:

There should be no more than

- 25-35% A's - awarded for excellent work
- 50-70% B's - awarded for good or very good work
- 5-15% C's or below - awarded for adequate or below work

A guideline is not a curve. A guideline is just that—it gives an ideal benchmark for the distribution of grades towards which we work.
NYUL has a strict policy about course attendance. **No unexcused absences are permitted.** While students should contact their class teachers to catch up on missed work, you should NOT approach them for excused absences.

Excused absences will usually only be considered for serious, unavoidable reasons such as personal ill-health or illness in the immediate family. Trivial or non-essential reasons for absence will not be considered.

Excused absences can only be considered if they are reported in accordance with the guidelines that follow.

**Please note that you will need to ensure that no make-up classes – or required excursions - have been organised before making any travel plans for the semester.**

**Absence reporting**

1. On the first day of absence you should report the details of your illness by calling free (from landline) 0800 316 0469 (option 2) or by e-mailing absences@nyu.ac.uk including- class missed, professor, class time and whether any work was due including exams.

2. Generally a doctor’s note will be required to ensure you have sought treatment for the illness. Contact the Gower Street Health Centre on 0207 636 7628 to make an appointment, or use HTH general practitioners if you cannot get an appointment expediently at Gower Street.

3. At the end of your period of absence, you will need to complete an absence form online at 
   http://www.nyu.edu/global/london/academics/attendance_policy.htm

4. Finally you must arrange an appointment to speak to David Crout (freshmen) or Nigel Freeman (non-freshmen) on your first day back at class. You must have completed the absence form before making your appointment.

Absence requests for non-illness purposes must be discussed with the Assistant Director for Freshman Programmes (**Freshmen**) or Assistant Director for Academic Affairs (**non-freshmen**) prior to the date(s) in question – no excused absences for non-illness purposes can be applied retrospectively.

Supporting documentation relating to absences must be submitted within one week of your return to class.

3% will be deducted from the student’s final course mark for each unexcused absence. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence.

Unexcused absences from exams are not permitted and will result in failure of the exam. If you are granted an excused absence from an examination (with authorisation, as above), your lecturer will decide how you will make-up the assessment component, if at all (by make-up examination, extra coursework, viva voce (oral examination), or an increased weighting on an alternate assessment component, etc.). In the past, students have asked about early departure from the program at the end of the semester. This will not normally be allowed. Under no circumstances will we allow a student to take a final exam at any time other than it has been scheduled - neither before the other students in the class, nor afterwards. Students have been
informed not to make return travel plans before the end of the exam week. Exams may not be held during your regularly scheduled class meeting. Please do not make plans during the exam period until you know the exact times of your exams.

NYUL also expects students to arrive to class promptly (both at the beginning and after any breaks) and to remain for the duration of the class. If timely attendance becomes a problem it is the prerogative of each instructor to deduct a mark or marks from the final grade of each late arrival and each early departure.

Please note that for classes involving a field trip or other external visit, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student's responsibility to arrive at an agreed meeting point in a punctual and timely fashion.

Please refer to the Student Handbook for full details of the policies relating to attendance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Late Submission of Work</th>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) Late work should be submitted in person to the Administrative Assistant for Academic Affairs in office hours (Mon – Fri, 10:30 – 17:30), who will write on the essay or other work the date and time of submission, in the presence of the student. Another member of the administrative staff can accept the work, in person, in the absence of the Administrative Assistant for Academic Affairs and will write the date and time of submission on the work, as above. Please also send an electronic copy to <a href="mailto:academics@nyu.ac.uk">academics@nyu.ac.uk</a> for submission to Turnitin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Work submitted within 5 weekdays after the submission time without an agreed extension receives a penalty of 10 points on the 100 point scale.</td>
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<td>(4) Written work submitted after 5 weekdays after the submission date without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.</td>
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<td>(5) Please note end of semester essays must be submitted on time.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Plagiarism Policy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Plagiarism: the presentation of another piece of work or words, ideas, judgements, images or data, in whole or in part, as though they were originally created by you for the assignment, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please refer to the Student Handbook for full details of the plagiarism policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students must submit an electronic copy of each piece of their written work to <a href="http://www.turnitin.com">www.turnitin.com</a> and hand in a printed copy with the digital receipt to their professor. Late submission of work rules apply to both the paper and electronic submission and failure to submit either copy of your work will result in automatic failure in the assignment and possible failure in the class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Electronic Submission</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Turnitin database will be searched for the purpose of comparison with other students’ work or with other pre-existing writing or publications, and other academic institutions may also search it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In order for you to be able to submit your work onto the Turnitin website, you will need to set up an account:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1) Go onto the Turnitin website <a href="http://www.turnitin.com">http://www.turnitin.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Click ‘Create Account’ in the top right hand corner</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) Select user type of ‘student’</td>
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4) Enter your class ID & Turnitin class enrolment password (these will be e-mailed to you after the drop/add period, or contact luke.harper@nyu.ac.uk if you have misplaced these).
5) Follow the online instructions to create your profile.

To submit your work for class, you will then need to:

1) Log in to the Turnitin website
2) Enter your class by clicking on the class name
3) Next to the piece of work you are submitting (please confirm the due date), click on the ‘submit’ icon
4) Enter the title of your piece of work
5) Browse for the file to upload from wherever you have saved it (USB drive, etc.), please ensure your work is in Word or PDF format, and click ‘submit’
6) Click ‘yes, submit’ to confirm you have selected the correct paper (or ‘no, go back’ to retry)
7) You will then have submitted your essay onto the Turnitin website.
8) **Please print your digital receipt and attach this to the hard copy of your paper before you submit it to your professor** (this digital receipt appears on the web site, immediately after you submit your paper and is also sent to your e-mail address). Please also note that when a paper is submitted to Turnitin all formatting, images, graphics, graphs, charts, and drawings are removed from the paper so that the program can read it accurately. Please do not print the paper in this form to submit to your lecturers, as it is obviously pretty difficult to read! You can still access the exact file you uploaded by clicking on the ‘file’ icon in the ‘content’ column.

Please also see the Late Submission of Work policy, above.

Students must retain an electronic copy of their work for one month after their grades are posted online on Albert and must supply an electronic copy of their work if requested to do so by NYU in London. **Not submitting a copy of a piece of work upon request will result in automatic failure in the assignment and possible failure in the class.** NYU in London may submit in an electronic form the work of any student to a database for use in the detection of plagiarism, without further prior notification to the student.

Penalties for confirmed cases of plagiarism are set out in the Student Handbook.

### Required Text(s)

- **Peter Cave, How to Think Like a Bat and 34 Other Really Interesting Uses of Philosophy** (London: Quercus, 2011) ISBN 978-1-84916-481-8


The readings suggested for each session below are indeed just suggestions for an overview. Focus for the subsequent class will be provided from Session 1.

### Further Reading (recommended)

Copies in NYU-L course collection at Senate House Library

- **Can a Robot be Human?** ISBN 978-1-85168-647-6
- **What’s Wrong with Eating People?** ISBN 978-1-85168-620-9
- **Do Llamas Fall in Love?** ISBN 978-1-85168-767-1

A good brief and basic introduction to philosophy is:


The Cottingham anthology above contains the relevant extracts for the course, but students who would
like to read the whole of some important philosophical texts could try


The Instructor’s writings on philosophy of religion and ethics are found in his


and to paradoxes in his

*This Sentence Is False: an introduction to philosophical paradoxes* ISBN: 978-1-84706-220-8

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**Internet Research Guidelines**

*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (http://plato.stanford.edu)
This provides a good source for topics, though it can be quite advanced reading.

On writing a philosophy essay, see [www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html](http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html)

**Additional Required Equipment**

None.

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**Session 1**

‘I think, therefore I am’: thought-experiments, distinctions, and arguments

[Enter date]

Suggested readings: Bat chs 7, 5; Anth. I: 4.

**Session 2**

Are you just a brain? Dualisms and materialisms

[Enter date]

Suggested readings: Bat 8, 9, 3; Anth. IV: 4, 10, 12.

**Session 3**

Can you ever act freely? Determinism and free will

[Enter date]

Suggested readings: Bat 4; Anth. V: 8, 9, 10, 11.

**Session 4**

Can you survive bodily death? Personal identity and waking up as Guy Fawkes

[Enter date]

Suggested readings: Bat 2; Anth. V: 1, 2, 3, 5.

**Session 5**

Arguments concerning God: should we have sympathy for the Devil?

[Enter date]

Suggested readings: Bat 18, 19; Anth. VI: 1, 4, 6, 10.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 6</th>
<th>A short test on previous sessions – followed by: Life and death dilemmas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Enter date]</td>
<td>Suggested readings: Bat 14; Anth. IX: 9, 11.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 7</td>
<td>Ought we to maximize happiness? Approaches to ethics</td>
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<tr>
<td>[Enter date]</td>
<td>Suggested readings: Bat 15, 25; Anth. VIII: 5, 6.</td>
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<td>Session 8</td>
<td>Why obey the law? Is life nasty, brutish and short without government?</td>
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<tr>
<td>[Enter date]</td>
<td>Suggested readings: Bat 23; Anth. X: 1, 3, 4, 5.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 9</td>
<td>What should we respect or tolerate? The Liberty Principle and free expression</td>
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<td>Session 10</td>
<td>Is there more to knowledge than reaching the truth?</td>
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<tr>
<td>[Enter date]</td>
<td>Suggested readings: Bat 6; Anth. I: 12.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 11</td>
<td>Essay deadline.</td>
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<tr>
<td>[Enter date]</td>
<td>What can we know? Problems of induction, deduction and science</td>
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<td>Suggested readings: Bat 10, 11, 34; Anth. VII: 5, 8, 9.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 12</td>
<td>How do you know what you mean? Problems of sense and reference</td>
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<tr>
<td>[Enter date]</td>
<td>Suggested readings: Bat 12, 13; Anth. III: 8, 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 13</td>
<td>Life, meaning and death What do you desire when you desire?</td>
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<tr>
<td>[Enter date]</td>
<td>Suggested readings: Bat 35; Anth. XII: 1, 6, 7, 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 14</td>
<td>Review of topics for Session 15’s examination</td>
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<tr>
<td>[Enter date]</td>
<td>90 minute examination.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 15</td>
<td>90 minute examination.</td>
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<td>[Enter date]</td>
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**Classroom Etiquette**

Toilet breaks should be taken before or after class or during class breaks.

Food & drink, including gum, are not to be consumed in class.

**Mobile phones should be set on silent. Texting, tweeting and similar are not permitted.**

Laptops and recordings are only to be used with the express permission of the Instructor.
Please kindly dispose of rubbish in the bins provided.

**Required Co-curricular Activities**

None.

**Suggested Co-curricular Activities**

London has a variety of occasions for philosophical lectures, discussions and seminars. Information will be provided as available.