

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2015-16

Philosophy 3027: Berkeley

Fall Term 2015
W 11:30-12:30
F 11:30-1:30
TC 203

Instructor: Benjamin Hill
StvH 3142: Tu 10:30-11:30, W 12:30-1:30
519-661-2111 x80143
Email: Please use OWL
bhill28@uwo.ca

DESCRIPTION

This class will involve an intensive and in-depth examination of the philosophy of George Berkeley. George Berkeley, known as The Good Bishop, developed one of the most fascinating — and controversial — philosophical doctrines of all-time, Idealism. According to idealism, only two things exist, minds and ideas. Bodies and material things are impossible objects, fictions created by hare-brained philosophers. What makes this doctrine so interesting and philosophically significant isn't the thesis itself, but Berkeley's defense of it. About Berkeley's arguments for idealism, David Hume once profoundly quipped "that they admit of no answer and produce no conviction; their only effect is to cause momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion." (But if they admit of no answer, then why do they produce no conviction in rational beings?) This course will analyze and assess these arguments and consider whether they do in fact admit of no answer.

TEXTS

Berkeley: Philosophical Writings, ed. Desmond Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), ISBN 978-0-521-70762-6;
Samuel Rickless, *Berkeley's Argument for Idealism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), ISBN 978-0-19-966942-4.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this course include:

1. Being able to describe and articulate the doctrine of Idealism;
2. Being able to describe and articulate the primary argument(s) presented by Berkeley in support of the doctrine of Idealism;
3. Being able to critically evaluate Berkeley's argument(s) in support of the doctrine of Idealism;
4. Being familiar with some of the scholarly interpretations of Berkeley's argument(s) in support of the doctrine of Idealism
5. Being able to situate Berkeley's Idealism within its historical and philosophical

- context(s);
6. Understanding and being able to describe and explain the most significant consequences Berkeley sees following from the doctrine of Idealism;
 7. Being able to defend your preferred interpretation of Berkeley's Idealism, the primary argument(s) for it, and/or the significant consequences that follow from it.

REQUIREMENTS

Mid-term Examinations (20 % total, 10% each) There will be two mid-term examinations. The date of the first examination is Oct. 9. The date of the second is Oct. 28. The students' aims should be to display a mastery of the philosophical material presented in the readings and class discussion. The focus of the exam will be on the ideas, doctrines, and arguments presented in class and in the readings. Students will be expected to present the ideas, doctrines, or arguments, to highlight their philosophically salient features, explain in detail how they work or fit together, and identify any crucial unstated assumptions on which they rely. Students may also be asked to briefly assess an idea, doctrine, or argument and provide specific reasons in support of his or her assessment. Students may also be asked to compare and contrast ideas, doctrines, or arguments between or among various authors or texts.

Final Examination (30 %) There will be a cumulative, three hour final examination worth 30% of the student's grade. The exam will be administered at the date, time, and location to be dictated by the Registrar's Office. Like the mid-term examination, the final examination will be devoted to displaying a mastery of the philosophical material presented in the readings and class discussion. Students will be expected to describe and present the ideas, doctrines, or arguments, to highlight their philosophically salient features, explain in detail how they work or fit together, and identify any crucial unstated assumptions. Students may also be asked to assess an idea, doctrine, or argument and provide specific reasons in support of that assessment. Students should also expect to be able to compare and contrast ideas, doctrines, or arguments between or among various authors or texts.

Term Paper (25 %) All students are required to submit a 1600-2000 word term paper. The paper is due at midnight December 9. It is the student's responsibility to make sure that the paper is uploaded or emailed *before* midnight according to the upload/email timestamp. Take steps to ensure that your paper is not refused or counted late because of a slight error in timing. Late papers are assessed a 5% deduction per day until Thursday December 10. No papers can be accepted after midnight on Thursday December 10 per departmental and Senate policy. As of midnight December 10, all students who have failed to submit a paper will be awarded a score of 0. Papers failing to fall within the required word count will not be accepted and will not be considered submissions; they will be awarded a score of 0 for the assignment.

Each paper should *defend* a philosophically important and interesting *thesis*. What this means is that your papers should not be simply expository, but must be analytic papers in that they will present an argument in defense of a substantive philosophical claim. There are a variety of types of acceptable papers ranging from *analyzing* an argument or doctrine, philosophically *assessing* an argument or doctrine, *interpreting* the doctrine or argument of a certain figure, *critiquing an interpretation* that another has offered of a figure's doctrine or argument, or *defending an interpretation* against the critique of another. Authors should clearly state their

thesis, construct a clear, coherent, and plausible argument in support of their thesis, and anticipate and respond to one or two potential objections to their thesis or argument. Papers will be graded on the following grounds: the historical and philosophical significance of the thesis; the power and adequacy of the argument marshalled in defense of the thesis; the use of the primary texts; the nature of the secondary sources selected and how they are used in the argument; the significance, interest, and power of the potential objection(s) raised; and the clarity, coherence, and plausibility with which the authors dispatch the objection(s) raised. The foci should be on the thesis and the argument developed in defense of it, but in so far as clarity, grammatical and semantical ability, and style are necessary preconditions for the power or impact of the thesis and its defense, they will be taken into account in the grading of each paper. Because thesis selection and development are part of the philosophical process and will be graded here, topics and paper questions are not provided to the students. Students who have questions about this are strongly encouraged to ask for assistance or advice at the earliest possible time. Students are strongly encouraged to seek out and use only reliable, scholarly vetted and peer-reviewed sources. For example, wikipedia and self-published web or blog postings are prima facie frowned upon and should be used with extreme caution. Students choosing to use such material rather than peer-reviewed articles and books or webposting recommended by the instructor should be prepared to justify his or her selection and use of such material.

Attendance (05 %) All students are required to attend every class. A sign-in sheet will be distributed. Attendance does not connote mere physical presence in the classroom. It requires paying attention and not engaging in rude, disruptive, or disrespectful behavior during the class. Examples of such behavior include, but are not limited to: texting, checking email, reading the newspaper, reading material for another class, chatting or joking during class, surfing the internet, internet shopping, etc.. The instructor reserves the right to strike any person's name from the attendance roll for engaging in the above, or any other such disruptive or disrespectful behavior. Students are awarded 2.70 points per hour of class attended.

Class Participation (05 %) Students are required to participate in the classroom discussions of the course material whenever appropriate. At the end of the term the instructor will make a determination of the student's participation based on his perception of the quantity and the quality of the student's contributions to class discussion throughout the term. Students should note that it is difficult to justify assigning a greater value for class participation than the value assigned for attendance. This is because of the principle that one cannot contribute to a discussion when one is not present at or attending to the discussion. There are numerous ways for a student to contribute to the conversation about the material. These ways are not limited to raising questions or objection in class or answering questions or objections in class. For instance, one may contribute to the bulletin boards or forums on OWL or one may meet with me to discuss the material during office hours. The aim is for a broad and inclusive conception of what constitutes class participation, but whatever form it takes, it must clearly display a deep, active, and sustained engagement with the readings and course material as well as further the class's comprehension of the material.

Quizzes and/or Assignments (15 %) A variety of unannounced quizzes, in-class assignments, and/or special homework assignments may be assigned throughout the term. The totality of such assignments will be worth 15% of a student's grade. The specific value of each assignment will depend on the total number of assignments. Quizzes may be administered in-class or via OWL;

Assignments may be announced and/or administered in-class or via OWL. Student will not be allowed to make-up quizzes or in-class assignments missed due to unexcused absences. In the case of excused absences, the instructor will determine a suitable replacement. Late submissions of assignments will not be accepted or graded.

AUDIT

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://www.uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html>. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.