PHIL0220: KNOWLEDGE & REALITY
MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE
Spring 2015
Twilight 301
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00AM-12:15PM

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Course Website: http://s15.middlebury.edu/PHIL0220A/
(all lecture notes are posted here)
Instructor Website: http://khalifa.org
Office Hours: Wednesdays 11:00AM-noon; Thursdays 1:15PM-2:45PM; and by appointment

Course Description: This course introduces students to some of the central issues in epistemology (the philosophical study of knowledge) and metaphysics (the philosophical study of reality). We will examine philosophical answers to the following questions: What is knowledge? How do we know what we know? How does knowledge differ from mere opinion? When is it rational to believe something? Does reality exist independently of our minds? What kinds of things can be real for one person/culture and not for another? All of our readings are contemporary.

Course objectives:
(1) To educate you about the different epistemological and metaphysical positions, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of these positions.
(2) To cultivate your critical thinking skills. By critical thinking skills, I include the abilities to recognize, analyze, and criticize arguments in the contexts of reading, writing, thinking, and discussion. I expect you to do this not only with others’ positions but, more importantly, with your own positions.
(3) To encourage you to be active learners. By an active learner I mean a person who has the curiosity, confidence, and passion to take the initiative to seek information that will make the recognition, analysis, and criticism of arguments—once again, both others’ and your own—more poignant, penetrating, and insightful.
(4) To develop your ability to write an analytical essay, i.e. an essay in which you come to a conclusion through careful evaluations of the leading arguments on both sides of an issue.

Evaluation: We will meet our course objectives through discussion and papers. Here is the breakdown of their relative weights:

Papers:
- In-Term (3) 45%
- Final 20%
- Argument reconstructions: 10%
- Blog: 5%
- Workshop: 10%
- Participation: 10%

Alphabetic grades will then be assigned according to the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>92.5-100.0</td>
<td>87.5-89.4: B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>89.5-92.4</td>
<td>82.5-87.4: B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>92.5-100.0</td>
<td>77.5-79.4: C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>89.5-92.4</td>
<td>72.5-77.4: C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>92.5-100.0</td>
<td>77.5-79.4: C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>89.5-92.4</td>
<td>72.5-77.4: C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>92.5-100.0</td>
<td>59.5-69.4: D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>89.5-92.4</td>
<td>69.5-72.4: C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>92.5-100.0</td>
<td>0-59.4: F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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There is no rounding up or down of final grades. Rounding occurs only for the final grade, i.e., individual assignments, tests, etc. are not rounded.
A. General guidelines for writing assignments

The following are general guidelines that apply to all written assignments (papers, argument reconstructions, and workshop materials):

1. **Formatting:** All writing assignments should be typed, double-spaced, standard margins, and in Times New Roman font. You will automatically lose a third of a grade on any assignment that does not follow these guidelines. For citations, use Chicago Author-Date, which can be found here:
   
   [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/16/ch15/ch15_toc.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/16/ch15/ch15_toc.html)

2. **Form:** Spelling, grammar, and overall clarity are determinants of your grade. If I can’t understand what you’re saying, then I can’t assess the content of your claims. Writing clearly demonstrates greater understanding of the text. You will also notice that writing assignments are generally rather brief in page requirements. This means you must be very efficient in your writing if you want to make an interesting point. Avoid being flowery—cut to the chase.

3. **Timeliness:** All assignments should be submitted during the class on which they are due. Any assignment submitted late (i.e. after class) receives an automatic 10 percentage-point penalty. It will be penalized 3 percentage points for every subsequent day it is late. Hence, anyone submitting an assignment after class but on the same day in which it is due can earn no more than 90% of the total points; on the next day, 87%; on the next, 84%; etc. There are exceptions to this rule. See my policy on Dean’s Excuses below.

4. **Objections to grades:** If you object to a grade you receive, send me an email with passages in your paper where you think I was being unfair. Provide reasons why my remarks for this passage were not fair. The email should also include times when you can meet over a one-week period. I will not discuss grades without reading an email first. This process should not be adversarial; rather, it is an extended application of your critical thinking skills. These policies are intended to facilitate clarity and communication, as well as to guarantee that I respond as thoughtfully as I can to your queries and concerns.

5. **Content:** All writing assignments must demonstrate sufficient understanding of the texts, including using only those parts of the text relevant to establishing your thesis. As writing good philosophical papers isn’t the easiest thing to do, you’re always welcome to discuss your writing with me during office hours. Also visit my website for additional guides:

   [http://community.middlebury.edu/~kkhalifa/teaching/guides/](http://community.middlebury.edu/~kkhalifa/teaching/guides/)

   I also strongly recommend reading the following:


   This is an excellent guide for learning how to write good philosophy papers, and will take you an evening to read. If there is sufficient interest, I will run an extra session on discussing this book.

B. In-Term Papers

The course consists of three units: I. Realism & Antirealism, II. Epistemic Relativism, III. Skepticism, Internalism, and Externalism. A paper of approximately 1200 words will be due at the end of each unit. Prompts with further instructions will be provided in due time.

All papers will be submitted in the DROPBOX folder of middfiles. Do NOT send me a hard copy; do NOT email me your paper. If you do so—even if you also submit the paper via DROPBOX—you will lose three points on your assignment. If you’re unsure about uploading documents on DROPBOX, please go to the LIS Helpdesk for further assistance. I will check the DROPBOX folder after the submission time, and will email you if I haven’t received your paper.

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1 There are several brands of reference management software (EndNote, RefWorks, Zotero, etc.) Zotero is freeware; RefWorks is free to all Middlebury users. I strongly recommend that you acquire one of these programs and learn how to use it. All of the programs are relatively easy to use, and any one of them minimizes your chances of violating the Honor Code.
Since this is a College Writing (CW) course, you are allowed to revise each of these papers once—but only after you have had an extensive discussion with me. Revised papers must be submitted no later than 2 weeks after they are returned. If you choose to revise a paper, your grade on the given paper will equal the average of your first and second versions of the paper.

C. Final Paper

During the last three weeks of the term, you will be substantially revising and expanding one of your three in-term papers to at least 1800 words, with the expectation that you will do significant outside research. As you will see, the workshops are designed to improve your final draft. This also must be submitted via DROPBOX, and is subject to the same penalty if submitted physically, via email, etc.

D. Argument reconstructions

Early in the term, we will devote a class to the basics of argument reconstruction. This is a technique of organizing an author’s thoughts so as to facilitate analysis and evaluation of his/her reasoning. When we begin our first unit, you will be expected to reconstruct what you consider to be the most important argument in the reading due for that day. These reconstructions should contain no more than four premises, should be valid, and should accurately reflect the text. (Also include the exact page number on which you’ve found the argument.) I will provide handouts with my reconstructions of the major arguments that I have found in the text. Consider these your “answer keys.” Provided that you show clear evidence of an honest effort, I will only be grading you on the punctuality of your submission. Thus, you receive a 100% if you submit your reconstruction by the end of the class in which it is due. You receive a 75% if you submit it within a week of which it is due. You receive a 25% if you submit it over a week past due. You receive a 0% if you do not submit it at all. If you have a question about differences between our argument reconstructions, see if you can fit it into the flow of the classroom discussion. Otherwise, please feel free to discuss with me after class. Unless otherwise indicated, you will be expected to bring in a typed up reconstruction of an argument for every class.

E. Blog

One of your peers, Annie Pokorny, will have to spend extensive time away from the classroom. I’m using Annie’s situation as an opportunity for all of us to improve our understanding of the material. So, Annie will blog at the end of every week (Saturday), briefly summarizing the main threads of the course, and ultimately putting forward an indication as to where she stands on the issues discussed this week and why. Three of you will then be “on call” for the week, and will have to ask three questions that serve as potential challenges for Annie’s position the next day (Sunday). Annie will then reply to your questions (Monday). The blog’s URL is: http://sites.middlebury.edu/getreal

You are welcome to continue the conversation thereafter, and, so long as the continued discussions show increasingly deeper engagement with the ideas, this will be reflected in your participation grade. Similarly, those who are not “on-call” for the week may nevertheless join the conversation (or start their own conversation) and earn participation points—once again, only so long as there is increasingly deeper engagement with the ideas.

F. Workshop

The last three weeks (six classes) will be spent developing your final papers. In effect, class time will become extra “office hours” in which I work closely with small groups of you on developing your papers. You will have 1-2 partners, ideally working on the same topic as you, and we’ll meet as a group once per week. You and your partners are encouraged to share your work, discuss the issues, etc. outside of class. For each weekly group meeting, each member will share his/her work in progress two days in advance, and each member will come to our meeting with a page worth of questions and feedback for his/her partner(s). Thus, by the end of the term, you’ll have written it at least five drafts of your final paper (the original, one for each of the “workshop weeks,” and the final draft), and for all of your drafts, you will have my comments, plus the comments of at least one of your peers on three of those drafts.

For your workshop grade, I will be considering the following: Did you meet the deadlines? Did you provide insightful feedback to your peers? Did your draft show responsiveness to the
previous week’s feedback? Were you an active and open-minded participant in our weekly meetings? Did you stimulate discussion in the group?

G. Participation
This is a general evaluation of the amount of effort and astuteness you have demonstrated to me in the course. Considerations that are relevant include promptness, attendance, quantity and quality of both contributions and questions in class sessions, responsiveness to other people’s comments in class, discussions outside of class, and appropriate class behavior. This grade reflects your performance in all of those areas of the course other than the graded, written assignments.

If you simply attend all of the required courses, you will receive a 75 (C) on your participation grade. Here are some ways of improving that grade:

• **Asking questions about the material.** These questions can be requests for clarification or challenges to the author’s claims.
• **Answering your peers’ questions.** Some of you will find this material easier than others. For those of you who find this easy, don’t be passive, don’t get bored, etc. Rather, share your knowledge, especially when you have an answer to someone else’s questions.
• **Don’t be shy during discussion sections and office hours.** Some of you feel more comfortable in group setting than others. For those who would rather not speak in front of your peers, feel free to swing by office hours or to use email to be more open with your thoughts and concerns.

**General expectations of student behavior:** Participation also includes behaving like an adult. This includes exhibiting the virtues of civility, accountability, responsibility—particularly as these virtues apply to your education. For most of you, this is second nature. However, for the few of you who have not yet shed your adolescent tendencies, please note that failure to behave like an adult will be reflected in your participation grade. This includes taking the required initiative and responsibility of your workload in the event that you need a Dean’s Excuse (see below).

**Odds and ends:**

**Mandatory lecture:** On April 2nd, at 4:30PM, Catherine Elgin of Harvard University will be giving a talk that has strong connections with the themes of this course. You are required to go. For athletes, this means that you should let your coaches know as soon as possible that you will need to be excused from practice on this day, and, if your coach sees fit, you can make alternative arrangements to make up this missed practice. Parallel points apply to those with other extracurricular commitments. Failure to attend this event will be reflected in your participation grade. Willingness to ask questions of Professor Elgin during the question & answer section of her talk will boost your participation grade.

**Email etiquette/decorum:** Different professors have different expectations about how they are addressed, and especially how they are addressed in email correspondences. I consider my norms to be “semiformal,” i.e. I expect some form of salutation with some acknowledgment that I’m a professor, but within those constraints, you can be fairly colloquial. For instance, the following are all perfectly good ways to start an email: “Dear Professor Khalifa,” “Hey Prof,” “Hi Dr. K,” “Howdy Most Esteemed Educator,” etc. What’s not acceptable is an email either lacking a salutation or failing to acknowledge the fact that I’m a professor. This reads as if I’m a waiter taking your order, which is not a good professor-student dynamic. Examples of bad email introductions include diving into your email without addressing me at all, “Hi,” “Hey,” “Hello,” “Hello Kareem,” “Khalifa,” “Hey Khalifa,” etc. Just so you know, I don’t reply to emails if they don’t follow these very basic rules of decorum. Similar rules apply in face-to-face interactions.

Also, a general rule: most professors (including myself) don’t like to answer emails about logistical issues (how something will be graded, how to access a file, when something is due, etc.) in which the student could have read the syllabus, searched the internet, or asked a classmate in roughly the same amount of time it would take them to write and wait for a reply to an email. This is not a good use of your time (since you often could get the answer to your question more quickly with a little more
effort) and it’s definitely not a good use of my time. If I do not reply to an email within 24 hours, assume that you’re guilty of this offense, and don’t expect a reply from me.

All in all, I prefer face-to-face interactions, where we’re talking about the content of the course. So, wherever possible, you should try to meet under these conditions.

**Dean’s Excuses:** There are exceptions to certain deadlines (e.g., illness, family emergency); however, they require a Dean’s Excuse. The Dean’s Excuse serves the following functions in my course:

- As official documentation to me that your reasons for handing in a tardy assignment are legitimate;
- A mandate for you to initiate a conversation with me about how you will make up any assignments that you’ve missed.
- A mandate for you to initiate this conversation as soon as possible.
  - In general, I prefer that you speak with me prior to my receiving a Dean’s excuse.
  - “As soon as possible” should be read “within a week in which I receive the Dean’s Excuse,” circumstances permitting. If you can attend class, then your circumstances permit you to speak with me about any work you need to make up.

A Dean’s Excuse does NOT serve the following functions in my course:

- A permission slip for you to hand in your assignment at your earliest convenience.
- A mandate for me to seek you out in order to initiate a conversation with you about how you will make up any assignments that you’ve missed.
- Failure to respect these guidelines will result in a reduction of your participation grade AND the relevant assignments.

**Travel:** I realize that, in many cases, you can save a lot of money by leaving a few days earlier. In these cases, if you give me at least two weeks notice, I will try my best to accommodate you; though the earlier you notify me of this, the better. Otherwise, it’s your problem, not mine.

**ADA Statement:** Middlebury College seeks to provide reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with documented disabilities. If you need an accommodation because of a documented disability, please contact Jodi Litchfield in the Office of Student Accessibility Services. Please do so at the beginning of the semester.

**Honor code:** You are expected to abide by all the rules of Middlebury College’s honor code. Failure to do so will lead to reporting you to the proper university authorities.

**Texts:**
All readings will be in the HANDOUTS folder of the course server (middfiles).

**Schedule of readings and assignments** can be found here:
http://s15.middlebury.edu/PHIL0220A/