

**PHI171****PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY**

M&amp;W 9:30 - 10:45 in C-348

or

M&amp;W 12:30 - 1:45 in C-348

instructor **Marcello Di Bello**e-mail [marcello.dibello@lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:marcello.dibello@lehman.cuny.edu)

office hrs M&amp;W 2-3, Carman 365

**Overview\***

This course explores a representative sample of philosophical questions. In *part 1*, we will scrutinize arguments that philosophers have formulated to demonstrate the existence of God. In *part 2*, we will ask whether human freedom and moral responsibility still have a role to play in a world governed by the laws of modern physics. In *part 3*, we will explore what constitutes our identity as persons and the relationship between mind, consciousness and matter. In *part 4*, we will investigate the nature of time and change, in particular, whether time and change are mere constructions of our minds.

**Materials**

Course materials will include excerpts from books and scholarly articles, videos, slides, handouts and homework assignments.

**Website**

All course materials mentioned above will be available on the course website. Please check the website regularly

[phi171.wordpress.com](http://phi171.wordpress.com)



\* *Bulletin Course Description* – Introduction to philosophic thinking via a discussion of questions such as "How should I live?," "What is the truth about reality?," and "Can God's existence be known?"

## Requirements

You are required to

- ✦ complete five written assignments
- ✦ complete one oral assignment
- ✦ attend class regularly

## Written assignments (80% of the grade)

There will be five written assignments, as follows:

- #1. argument summary [10%]  
due Wed Sept 16
- #2. formulating objections [10%]  
due Mon Oct 5
- #3. weighing reasons [10%]  
due Wed Oct 26
- #4. paper draft [10%]  
due Mon Nov 16
- #5. final paper [40%]  
due Wed Dec 16

## Oral assignment (20% of the grade)

The oral assignment consists in

- ✦ participation in a "philosophical dialogue" with a fellow student

or

- ✦ a presentation on a topic related with the course materials

More detailed instructions will be provided in in due course.

## schedule

### PART 1 - GOD

**week 1:** Mon Aug 31 & Wed Sept 2

Can we prove God's existence from our experience of the world?

*reading*

*Aquinas, Summa, q.2, art.3*

**week 2:** Wed Sept 9 — No class on Mon Sept 7

Can there be an infinite regress of causes without a first cause?

*watching*

*Craig, The Kalam Argument*

**assignment #1  
due Sept 16**

**week 3:** Wed Sept 16 — No class on Mon Sept 14

Does the idea of God necessarily imply God's existence?

*reading*

*Anselm, Proslogion [selections]*

**week 4:** Mon Sept 21 — No class on Wed Sept 23

Same topic as last week.

### PART 2 - FREE WILL AND DETERMINISM

**week 5:** Mon Sept 28 & Wed Sept 30

Is everything that happens in the world determined in advance?

*reading*

*David Hume, Enquiry [selections]*

**week 6:** Mon Oct 5 & Wed Oct 7

If everything is predetermined, can we still have freedom of choice?

**assignment #2  
due Oct 5**

*reading*

*Inwagen, Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism*

## Course objectives

You will exercise and develop:

- ✦ the ability to appreciate deep and fundamental questions about the world and ourselves
- ✦ analytical reasoning skills, in particular, the ability to weight reasons for/against a claim
- ✦ analytical writing skills, in particular, the ability to formulate a philosophical argument and defend it against objections

## Course etiquette

Just in case you forgot:

- ✦ do the reading and come to class ready to participate
- ✦ disagree with me and your fellow students, but always be polite
- ✦ don't be shy and don't think what's on your mind is not worth sharing
- ✦ when you're in class, don't get too distracted by the other world – i.e. your phone, Facebook, etc.

## No plagiarism!

You may not copy the work of others without proper acknowledgement, and if you do so, *you will fail the class.*

**week 7:** *Wed Oct 14* — No class on *Mon Oct 12*

If everything is predetermined, can we still be morally responsible and legally accountable?

*reading*

Frankfurt, *Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility*

**week 8:** *Mon Oct 19 & Wed Oct 21*

Same topic as last week.

### PART 3 - MIND, BODY AND IDENTITY

**week 9:** *Mon Oct 26 & Wed Oct 28*

Who are we? Are we minds? Are we matter? Both?

*reading*

Spinoza, *Ethics* [selections]

**week 10:** *Mon Nov 2 & Wed Nov 4*

Can physics explain our subjective consciousness?

*reading*

Jackson, *What Mary Didn't Know*

**week 11:** *Mon Nov 9 & Wed Nov 11*

Do we persist through time?

*reading*

Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* [selections]

### PART 4 - TIME AND CHANGE

**week 12:** *Mon Nov 16 & Wed Nov 18*

What is time? What are past, present and future? Do they exist?

*reading*

Augustin, *Confessions*, book 11

**assignment #3**  
**due Oct 26**

**assignment #4**  
**due Nov 16**

## Tutoring services

The Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) is a tutoring center on campus.

ACE provides appointment based and drop-in tutoring in the humanities, social sciences, and writing, as well as general writing and academic skills workshops.

To obtain information about the ACE and the SLC, please visit their website at [www.lehman.edu/issp](http://www.lehman.edu/issp) or call the ACE at 718-960-8175.

## Disability accommodation

Students who have a disability which may necessitate an academic accommodation or the use of auxiliary aids and services in a class should contact the Office of Student Disability Services located in Shuster, room 238, phone number 718-960-8441

**week 13:** *Mon Nov 23 & Wed Nov 25*

Does time flow at the same speed for everybody everywhere?

*reading*

Einstein, *Relativity* [selections]

**week 14:** *Mon Nov 30 & Wed Dec 2*

Is change an illusion?

*reading*

Bardon, *Brief Hist. of the Philosophy of Time* [chapter 1]

**week 15:** *Mon Dec 7 & Wed Dec 9*

Review

**week 16:** *Mon Dec 14*

Review

**Assignment #5**  
**Final paper**  
**Due Dec 16**