

PHIL 110

Introduction to Philosophy

Instructor: Professor Clark Butler, IPFW Chair of Philosophy

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:15-11:00 am, 4:15-5:00 pm, or other times by arrangement through the Philosophy Secretary

This course is a new introduction to philosophy, in that it is more ambitious than has been typical of most introductions to philosophy in the past century. It covers all the main topics that are typically covered in the elementary course, but it treats them within the unifying theme of what is called philosophical world history. The central question here is the meaning of our lives insofar as that meaning is linked to the meaning of history, of the world history to which we belong. This unifying question was central to philosophy under the influence of the German philosopher Hegel until twentieth century philosophy in the English-speaking world. At that time a revolution occurred that denied the seemingly overly ambitious kind of “synoptic” philosophy that could integrate everything in a single philosophical system. This revolution came to be known as the “analytic” revolution in philosophy. Progress was to be made in philosophy by minute, local analysis of concepts and problems.

This course does not deny the gains of analytic philosophy. But its aims are post-analytic or “synthetic”. The interconnection of things is such that to leave the world analyzed into separate parts or fragments is to distort and falsify it. To the objection that Hegelian synoptic philosophy is impossibly ambitious, the answer is that such philosophy will no doubt fall into errors at certain points, but that it will not fall into error regarding its method, which is a method of error correction. To be rational is not to avoid all error. The fear of error, Hegel said, is the very first error. Rationality is the ability to correct error. The truth is discovered only by a process of error correction. Insofar as we possess the truth today, numerous past errors have been corrected. Insofar as we continue to develop towards a fuller grasp of the truth, current errors undoubtedly remain to be corrected.

The text, *A New Introduction to Philosophy*, is by the instructor. It starts with a chapter on the general nature of philosophy. Succeeding chapters then focus on major stopping points in world history, beginning with the concept of prehistory and passing through China, India, Israel, Greece, Rome, Christianity, and the contemporary age of human rights.

Students will be graded objectively by a quiz at the end of the two-week period (10%), a midterm (30%), and a final exam (40%). Ten percent of the semester grade will be determined by attendance, and the final ten percent will be determined by contribution to class discussion. Students earning a high grade for class discussion will be those who impress themselves on the instructor as revealing a significant voice of serious inquiry in the course of the semester. Students are warmly invited to pursue their questions in the instructor’s office as well as in class.

The outline of topics for the semester is:

Weeks One:

The Nature and Method of Philosophy.

Reading: Chapter One

Weeks Two and Three:

Prehistory and the Mind/Matter Problem in Philosophy:

Pre-historical Animism and the Rise of Mind-Matter Dualism

Reading: Chapter Two

Weeks Four:

China and the origin of the State

Reading: Chapter Three

Weeks Five and Six:

Hinduism, Buddhism, and the Concept of Substance

Reading: Chapter Four

Weeks Seven and Eight:

Israel and the Case for the Creator God

Reading: Chapter Five

Weeks Nine and Ten:

Greece and the Problem of Universals

Reading: Chapter Six

Weeks Eleven and Twelve:

Rome, Stoicism, and the Problem of Free Will and Determinism

Reading: Chapter Seven

Weeks Thirteen and Fourteen:

Christianity

Chapter Eight

Week Fifteen:

Modern Art and the Age of Human Rights

Chapter Nine