CONTACT INFORMATION

Instructor: Dr. Barry DeCoster
E-mail: barry.decoster@marist.edu

(This is probably the best way to get in touch with me. Weekdays, I will read email once a day; I generally do not read it over the weekend.)

Office: 320 Fontaine Hall
Mailbox: 200E Fontaine Hall
Phone Messages: 845-575-3000 ext 2323 (I will check messages here. Be sure to leave me enough information so I can reply to your message.)

Office Hours: M/W, 2.00-3.15 pm, Th, 2.00-5.00 pm, and gladly by appointment.

Class Meetings: Section 122: Monday and Wednesday, 3.30 pm – 4.45 pm, LT 004
Course Website: http://www.msu.edu/~decoste4/marist/

(Check frequently. I will post announcements and most handouts here.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

I'm sure that each of us has wondered about one of the following questions at some point in our lives. How do I know I'm not dreaming right now, since sometimes my dreams seem so vivid and real? Can I know whether God is out there? Is there “a point” to life? These are difficult but important questions that we may struggle with at various points in our lives, and they are the kernels to philosophical thinking. We will also take up a number of these and similar questions in this course.

As the course title suggests, this course is an introduction to philosophical thought. We will read and discuss various philosophers and philosophical issues. The course is meant to provide you with an overview of philosophy by exposing you to some of the big questions and threads of philosophical conversations. Included in what we will cover are questions like the following. Does God exist, and how can we know this? What can we know (through science or other sources), and how confident can we be in this knowledge? What role should emotions play in our lives? How do social forces like sexism and racism affect our lives? How should we respond to threats of terror?

Our approach to answering these questions will draw upon philosophical reasoning. (Although this is not a hard and fast rule. We’ll look at a number of non-philosophical sources, and you’re encouraged to bring your own examples to class.) But what is “philosophy”, anyhow? One quote that I think is a nice beginning point in describing the goals of philosophy is the following:

“Thinking through, critically and carefully, what most of us take for granted is, I believe, the chief task of philosophy, and that task makes philosophy a worthwhile activity.”

-- Peter Singer, Animal Liberation, 1975

So, our goal in this course will be to examine a number of topics that we might otherwise have taken for granted, and see what new insights we can take from that exploration to improve our daily lives.
But this understanding is only a beginning point for your work in the class. Philosophy is an activity, a method, a practice – it is something that you do, something that you engage in. Your work in this course will give you not just knowledge about philosophy, but you will gain the skills of philosophical reasoning, a means of observing and engaging with the world. This course will also provide you the foundation for your success in the additional philosophy courses you will take at Marist, as well benefit you in your other coursework.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this course you will have an overview of some of the major topics discussed in various areas of philosophy, such as epistemology, logic, philosophy of science, political theory, and the history of philosophy. You will be able to read and assess complex philosophical texts, identify philosophical problems, and discuss them in a thoughtful, informed, and respectful manner. In both your written work and in-class discussions, you will be able to develop a coherent set of reasons for a conclusion, and critically evaluate different forms of philosophical arguments. Finally, you will gain exposure to philosophical topics and questions within your daily lives (outside of our classroom).

**REQUIRED TEXTS**


(You can purchase these texts from the Marist Bookstore, 845.575.3260. Other local bookstores or online stores like Amazon.com may have used editions for cheaper, but you will need the texts ASAP.)

2 - Course pack [CP]

These readings and a copy of the text will be available online at the course web page, or at the Main Library reserve desk.

**READING SCHEDULE**

Generally, we will stick very closely to the reading schedule (below). However, the point of this course is for you to learn. If we need to negotiate changes to the schedule, we can do so. Also, if you have suggestions about things I can do better in class, please let me know, and I will try to adjust the reading schedule or classroom dynamics so that we can maximize learning.

I reserve the right to make changes in this schedule; if this occurs, changes will be announced in class and on the course website.

[CP] refers to the course packet. Other page numbers refer to *Twenty Questions*, unless otherwise noted. When articles are assigned, you are also responsible for reading the chapter introduction. Realize that these are often brief but difficult articles. You may want to schedule time to reread articles; a quick read-through will not be sufficient to understand the article.

Important administrative dates have been noted between double brackets [[ ]].

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<tr>
<th>OVERVIEW OF COURSE AND INTRODUCTION TO MORAL THEORIES IN APPLIED ETHICS</th>
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<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
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### WHAT ARE PHILOSOPHICAL “ARGUMENTS”?  

**Week 2**  
**Mon 9/10** Logic and critical thinking  
Basic argument patterns  
**Wed 9/12** Metaphors and Fallacies  

### HOW DO I KNOW WHETHER GOD EXISTS?  

**Week 3**  
**Mon 9/17** *In class logic quiz*  
St. Augustine: Faith and Reason (42)  
Saint Anselm: The Ontological Argument (43)  
Saint Thomas Aquinas: Whether God Exists (45)  
**Wed 9/19** William Paley: The Teleological Argument (47)  
David Hume: Why Does God Let People Suffer? (50)  

**Week 4**  
**Mon 9/24** Søren Kierkegaard: The Leap of Faith and the Limits of Reason (58)  
William James: The Will To Believe (61)  
Pascal [CP]  

### WHAT DO I KNOW?  

**Wed 9/26** Plato: The Myth of the Cave (205)  

**Week 5**  
**Mon 10/1** René Descartes: Meditation (207)  
Lewis Carroll: Through the Looking Glass (211)  
**Wed 10/3** Bertrand Russell: Appearance and Reality (212)  
John Locke: Where Our Ideas Come From (214)  

**Week 6**  
**Mon 10/8** George Berkeley: To Be Is to Be Perceived (217)  
Lorraine Code: What Can She Know? (222)  

### HOW IS MY MIND CONNECTED TO MY BODY?  

**Wed 10/10** René Descartes: Mind as Distinct From Body (163)  
Gilbert Ryle: The Concept of Mind (167)  

**Week 7**  
**Mon 10/15** William Lycan: Robots and Minds (174)  
John R. Searle: The Myth of the Computer (180)  
Elizabeth V. Spelman: Woman as Body (185)  
**Wed 10/17** Catch up day  

### HOW DO RACISM AND SEXISM AFFECT MY LIFE?  

**Week 8**  
**Mon 10/22** Jean-Paul Sartre: Anti-Semite and Jew (435)  
**Wed 10/24** Laurence Thomas: What Good Am I? (437)  
W.E.B. DuBois: The Souls of Black Folk (441)  

**Week 9**  
**Mon 10/29** Anthony Appiah: But Would That Still Be Me? (445)  
Elizabeth V. Spelman: The Erasure of Black Women (449)  
**Wed 10/31** Plato: The Equality of Women (487)  
Aristotle: The Inequality of Women (491)  
Immanuel Kant: The Inequality of Women (491)  
John Stuart Mill: The Subjection of Women (492)
| Week 10 | Marilyn Frye: Sexism (499)  
Suggested: Frye, “Oppression” [CP] |
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<td>Sarah McCarry: Selling Out (513)</td>
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**DOES LANGUAGE MAKE ME THINK THE WAY I DO?**

| Week 11 | Jonathan Swift: Getting Rid of Words (230)  
Lewis Carroll: Humpty Dumpty (262) |
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| Ludwig Wittgenstein: Meaning as Use (231)  
Benjamin Whorf: Language, Thought, and Reality (237)  
Steven Pinker: The Language Instinct (246) |

| Week 12 | Language wrapup  
Discussion of movie clip “Thank You for Smoking” |
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<td>Catchup Day</td>
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**WHY ARE MY EMOTIONS IMPORTANT TO ME?**

| Week 13 | Aristotle: On Anger (315)  
René Descartes: The Passions of the Soul (318)  
David Hume: On Pride (321) |
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Annette Baier: Important Feelings (329)  
Jean-Paul Sartre: Emotions as Transformations of the World (332)  
Robert C. Solomon: Anger as a Way of Engaging the World (335) |

| Week 14 | Plato: Two Speeches on Love (339)  
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**HOW SHOULD I RESPOND TO WAR OR TERRORISM?**

| Week 15 | Saint Thomas Aquinas: Whether It Is Always Sinful to Wage War (410)  
Hannah Arendt: Power and Violence (412)  
George W. Bush: Address to the Nation, September 11, 2001 (417)  
John Dear: The Experiments of Ghandi: Nonviolent in the Nuclear Age (418) |
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| Claudia Card: Questions Regarding a War on Terrorism (428)  
Course wrap-up  
Final Exam distributed |

**ASSIGNMENTS (BRIEF CALENDAR)**

Logic Quiz: Mon, Sept 17  
Check-in Papers: Roughly, every other week  
A tentative schedule for check-in papers will be distributed in the second week of class.  
Philosophy and Everyday Life Projects: Due TBA (the class will be divided among 3 due dates)  
Final Exam: Section 122: Monday, Dec. 17 3:30 pm, FN104
COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION

Logic Quiz
5%

Several Check-In Writing projects (6)
6 total possible
average of 5 highest grades (from 6 turned in)
(10% each)= 50%

Philosophy and Everyday Life Project
15%

Final Exam
15%

Attendance
15%

About three-quarters of the way through the course, I’ll ask for suggestions for final exam questions. The final exam will consist of a number of essay questions, distributed at least one week before the exam is due. The exam will have a number of different questions (say, seven), and you will be asked to answer some subset (say, four). (Note, the exact number of questions on the exam will be determined later, but this is the general format of the exam.)

PARTICIPATION

While participation does not have a direct grade given, there are expectations on your activities in class. Because of the complex and controversial nature of the topics we will be discussing, it is essential that you come to class prepared to discuss the day’s readings. Being prepared requires a range of actions. This requires that you have read the assignment for that day, and that you have thought about the material (and have done your reflection papers, if they are assigned). My view on teaching this course is that your active participation is essential. While reading, note any questions that you have. After having finished the article, look back to see if your questions were answered. If not, please raise them in class. (As a student myself, it’s taken me a long time to realize that if I have a question about something, someone else in the class does, too.) Also, please bring all readings with you to class each day, since we will often refer to the text itself to determine what the author is arguing. Finally, being prepared means engaging your classmates in polite and thoughtful conversation, evaluation, and teaching about the topics we’ll investigate.

CHECK-IN PAPERS

Six very short writing assignments will make up a bulk of your grade. They are meant to review the course materials as we progress through the semester. They will be brief (more like a quiz than an exam), but they will require you have a strong grasp on the material we cover. These will typically involve multiple choice questions and short-answer questions. When possible, I will distribute “study questions” in advance. Working on these questions will help you in your check-in papers, but you will need to have a more rounded understanding of the readings to pass. Often these check-in papers will be assigned in class, but on occasion they may be “take home” assignments. There will be no make up for missed check-in papers. (You are allowed to “drop” one assignment for any reason.) If you miss class, you should contact me immediately to find out what you have missed. Papers will be due before the next class. If you know you will be absent, please see me in advance to make accommodations.

PHILOSOPHY IN EVERYDAY LIFE PROJECTS

This will be a short writing assignment where I ask you to find examples from your life (or the “real world” outside of the classroom) of the philosophical problems we are working on in class. More detailed information (including a signup sheet for project due dates) will be provided the second week of class. So, be thinking about which topic(s) you might prefer to explore in greater length.
**Late Work & Absences**

In order to be considerate of yours and my time, please plan out your work schedule in advance. All assignments are due at the beginning of class. Any work passed in late will lose 0.5 points (out of 4.0 points) for each 24-hour-period that it is late. So, if you do not pass in your paper on a Thursday, you will lose significant points by the next Monday. All requests for makeup exams should be made a week in advance. I will require documentation for students who missed exams that have not received prior approval for excused absence.

*NOTE:* Check-in papers cannot be turned in late. This is a firm rule of this course.

If you are absent, you must contact another student to see what you’ve missed. If you wish, you can email me any of your work as an attachment, rather than waiting until the next time we meet in class.

**Written Work**

All written work should be typed, double spaced, 12 point font, “normal” margins (1-inch on all sides), printed clearly, *spell-checked!!!*, stapled, with your student ID and date at the top. [NOTE: write your name on the back of your paper; do not put your name on the top, since I will try to grade your papers in the “anonymous review” fashion.] I will provide a more detailed list of requirements for both our reflection papers and for our two papers, which will be distributed and discussed in advance of the assignments themselves.

**Attendance**

The success of course depends on your active participation. Your presence and participation in class is necessary for your learning and the learning of your classmates. Therefore, you will be graded on your attendance. You will be allowed 2 unexcused absences (a 2.5 hour class meeting). After this, each unexcused absence will deduct from your attendance grade. You are fully responsible for finding out what was covered during any class time that you miss, and for completing any work that was assigned during that time. Videos covered in class will not be available for viewing outside of class time.

**Notes on Academic Honesty**

You are expected to know and follow Marist’s policies on plagiarism. In brief, do not plagiarize the ideas or work of others. If I discover work has been plagiarized, or a person has cheated, I reserve the right to fail the person for the assignment or for the course.

Note: I can gladly say that I have never had to invoke this policy, nor do I want to. Most confusion seems to revolve around how to talk in your writing about what other people have written, and how to use their ideas to facilitate your own discussion on these points. There will be times when you will want to refer to what was written in one of the articles we read; when you use/refer to these, be sure to cite them. The following are some general examples of plagiarism that must be avoided:

- copying text without quotation marks;
- paraphrasing someone else’s writing without acknowledgement;
- using someone else’s facts or ideas without citing your source(s).

Finally, I expect you to have read, understood, and agreed to follow the rules of academic honesty described in the *Marist College Student Handbook*. These are available at https://www.marist.edu/academics/advise/AcademicHonestyPolicy.pdf.
**Writing Help**

I am always willing to discuss improving your writing with you. In addition to my help, I strongly suggest you take advantage of the Marist Writing Center (LB 330). They can assist you with organizing your ideas and improving your overall writing skills (i.e., grammar, clarity, etc). While these skills are not unique to improved philosophical writing, they do allow you to make your ideas clear to the reader. Please visit the Writing Center’s website at http://www.marist.edu/writingcenter/.

**Food Note**

Please feel free to bring coffee, tea, or snacks with you to class. You cannot think and discuss readings at length on an empty stomach. So, eat before you come to class, and bring enough to keep you going. Related to this, also be considerate (to yourself, your instructor, and your classmates) and come to class well-rested and ready to work on the material for the day.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities should contact the Office of Special Services at the beginning of the semester. Please notify me if you have any special requirements or needs of which I should be aware. (SpecServ@Marist.edu, Phone: (845) 575-3274, Web: http://www.marist.edu/specserv/)

*Welcome to the class! I’m glad we’ll be able to explore these topics together!*