
**PHI 495: Reality, Knowledge, and Value
Winter 2005**

Wednesdays 6:00-8:50 pm

Dr. Kelly Parker
213 Lake Superior Hall
e-mail parkerk@gvsu.edu
Web <http://agora.phi.gvsu.edu>
331-3257 (direct)
331-2114 (Philosophy Dept.)

Office Hours:

Mon 10-11:30am, Tues 10-11:30am, Wed 4-6pm, Fri 11am-noon, other times by arrangement.

Orientation

A Capstone course is part of every academic program at Grand Valley. PHI 495 is required of all philosophy majors at the senior level, and is also open to minors who have attained senior standing. The GVSU Catalog says Capstone courses are "aimed at providing the student with a broad and comprehensive perspective on the fundamental assumptions, issues, and problems of the field." The Philosophy Capstone is designed as a forum in which students draw the undergraduate phase of their education to a close. The course serves as a transition to graduate education and/or to ongoing independent scholarship and inquiry about the questions of philosophy.

Class time in PHI 495 is divided between discussion of a) our common readings and b) our individual work. The aim is to revisit the origins of philosophy, and explore the present practice of philosophy as it is exemplified and discussed by leading figures in the field. A significant portion of the class time is devoted to presentation of individual work for peer comment and development.

The course is conducted as a seminar, a gathering of colleagues who are mutually committed to pursuing knowledge about a particular theme or topic. Though the seminar leader may possess more experience or expertise in the area, all will contribute formally by leading the inquiry at some point, and all are in the position of being learners. The root word in "seminar" means "seed." This organic image suggests that the capstone class should be where seeds of thought are planted and nurtured for a time, so that they may continue to grow long after graduation. Individual work allows participants to plant a variety of particular seeds; discussion of common readings establishes an atmosphere of sustaining thought in which participants develop a common vocabulary and support one another's individual efforts.

The questions that serve as the focus of our shared inquiry, and which are addressed in various ways by the common readings, are "*What is the nature of philosophy? What is the role of philosophy and of philosophers in our society?*" Socrates and Plato pose answers that are paradigmatic for the West. Dewey revisits and revives that paradigm in the context of twentieth century American (and global) culture. Writings on East-West comparative philosophy afford another perspective on philosophical activity. A Peircean semiotic theory of interpretation provides a framework within which to understand our own efforts. We will examine a variety of ways that contemporary thinkers have answered the question in their lives and thought. It is expected that consideration of these questions, and of the various answers that are offered, will inform each student's individual thesis work in some way.

Texts

- Baynes, Kenneth. *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* MIT Press, 1987. Required.
- Dewey, John. *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. Dover, 2004. Required.
- Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 6th ed. Modern Language Association, 2003. Recommended.
- Mautner, Thomas. *Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*. Penguin, 2000. Recommended.
- Parker, Kelly. PHI 495 Course Pack. Dollar Bill Copying, 2005. Required.
- Plato. *Five Dialogues*, 2nd ed. Trans and ed. G. M. A. Grube and J. H. Cooper. Hackett, 2002. Required.

Course Requirements

A narrative statement of your past, present, and future directions in philosophy. 6-8 pages.
Prepared with guidance from your philosophy advisor. *Ungraded but required to pass the course.*

For philosophy majors, this will be the final revision of the narrative component of your required Departmental Study Plan. The complete Study Plan (which includes a cover sheet, course listing, and the narrative statement) will be signed by your advisor and submitted to the instructor, for inclusion in departmental records.

For philosophy minors, only the narrative statement need be submitted.

In-class presentations:

- 1) Presentation and discussion of a figure from *After Philosophy* or the Course Pack, including information about the person's recent work. *15%*
- 2) Preliminary presentation and discussion of your proposed thesis project, including written proposal, for peer response. *All written proposals are due by the seventh week* even though your presentation may be scheduled to occur later. *10%*
- 3) Formal presentation of your thesis project to the group. *10%*

Active reading reports on Dewey, and on four philosophers from *After Philosophy* or the Course Pack. 2-3 pages each; no more than one per week. *5 x 6% each = 30%*

A thesis paper presenting the major themes you develop during the semester. **35%**

The thesis should show evidence of substantive independent research, which aids you in supporting and articulating an original contribution to the topic at hand. 25 page maximum length.

Attendance

Your regular attendance and participation is expected by the instructor and the other seminar members. Each absence will incur a 3% penalty deducted from the semester final grade.

Note on inclement weather: GVSU very rarely cancels class or closes due to weather. You should assume that class will be held unless you hear otherwise from TV, radio, or the GVSU website. You should of course use common sense in deciding whether to travel to Allendale. I generally do not penalize absences if the schools or other public institutions are closed in the area from which you are travelling, even though class is being held.

Grade Definitions

- A** Outstanding. Work and class participation display thorough mastery of material and genuine engagement with the subject-matter. Writing is exceptionally good. This grade is reserved for those students who attain the highest levels of excellence in thought and scholarship.
- B** Good. Work and class participation display accurate understanding of material. Writing is clear and free of mechanical errors.
- C** Fair. Work and class participation display basic grasp of material, though occasionally with significant misunderstandings or inaccuracies. Writing is acceptable.
- D** Marginal. Work and class participation display a grasp of the material adequate for credit, but the quality of work indicates lack of effort or aptitude. Writing is inadequate for college level work.
- F** Unacceptable. Excessive absences, assignments not completed, or assignments unworthy of credit. Cheating or plagiarism will earn an automatic F for the assignment and/or the course.

Guidelines for Presentations and Written Work

- You are strongly encouraged to keep a private journal throughout the semester. Carry the journal with you at all times to provide the space for reading notes, brainstorming, rough drafts of works in progress, and the results of fruitful informal conversations. Such material is the stuff out of which outstanding formal coursework is made.
- The collection *After Philosophy* was selected as a common reading source this semester because it presents a convenient overview of some significant figures and directions in contemporary philosophy. There are of course many contemporary figures who merit our attention, but do not appear in this volume. Some others, including several female philosophers (noticeably absent from *After Philosophy*), are included in the Course Pack.
- *The Philosopher's Index* is available in the Zumberge Library Reference section or online through the Library's database collection. PI provides the standard starting point for finding further information about contemporary philosophy. At a minimum, your presentation on a contemporary philosopher must include information about the figure's work since publication of *After Philosophy* in 1987.
- You must provide class members with a brief written synopsis of your thesis project at the time of your thesis proposal presentation. The synopsis should, at minimum, identify the central problem or question to be addressed, the main established approaches to the problem or question, your proposed approach to the problem, and the major primary and secondary sources you will draw upon for the thesis.
- Written work should be typed, double-spaced, and documented following established scholarly form. The *MLA Handbook* (see list of Texts) is the Philosophy Department's preferred style guide.

Structure of the Course

I. Introduction and Foundations (4 weeks)

Readings:

Oxford Companion to Philosophy articles on Philosophical Practice (handout)
 Plato, "Apology"
 Dewey, "Introduction" and "Chapter I: Changing Conceptions of Philosophy," in
Reconstruction in Philosophy
 Holder, "The Uses and Abuses of Comparative Philosophy" (handout)
 Ames & Rosemont, "Appendix II" to Confucius, Analects
 Parker, "Definition of Sign"

Assignments:

Narrative Statement (Philosophy majors include Study Plan and signed cover sheet)
 First reading report on Dewey

II. Common Readings and Discussion (7 weeks)

The first part of each meeting will focus on discussion of common readings.

Readings:

Assigned sections from After Philosophy or Course Pack; other suggested materials.

Assignments:

In-class presentation on a figure from After Philosophy.
 Four Reading Reports

III. Thesis Development (7 weeks)

The second part of each meeting will focus on discussion of individual thesis proposals.

Readings:

Preliminary drafts or other materials provided by presenters, if any.

Assignments:

Written Thesis Proposal
 Presentation of thesis proposal for peer response

IV. Thesis Presentations (3 weeks)

Readings:

As requested by presenters or instructor.

Assignments:

Class presentation of thesis project.
 Thesis Paper.

Important Dates

Drop (100% Tuition Refund)	Fri 1/14, 5pm	First Reading Report Due	Wed 1/19
Drop (75% Tuition Refund)	Fri 2/4, 5pm	Study Plan Due	Wed 2/2
Withdrawal Deadline	Fri 3/4, 5pm	Thesis Proposal Due	Wed 2/23
Spring Break	March 6-13	Thesis Paper Due	Wed 4/27