Coming to Philosophy

by John V. Garner

PEOPLE COME TO PHILOSOPHY for many reasons. No doubt, it is an incredibly useful degree that can help you get a good job. And yet not all—nor the most important—reasons for doing philosophy have to do with being attractive to employers or graduate schools. Here I will summarize philosophy’s undeniable marketability. But my larger purpose is to focus on more essential reasons for pursuing a degree like Philosophy or Religion. I will talk briefly about my own path; and we will also hear from three senior philosophy majors at UWG—Chelsea Anderson, Cordero Schalk, and Alex Pelaez—who have generously shared their own stories of coming to philosophy.

No Salto Mortale

I remember the feeling I had when I decided to switch from a Business major to Religion. I was sitting in an elective religion course, amazed at our interesting questions: Can religious claims count as knowledge? What are humans looking for when they engage in practices like religion, politics, or science? What makes those practices different? At the same time, I found myself contemplating how empty, narrow, and pointless were the questions I was asking in my Marketing class: What kind of packaging shape for a milk carton is both cheap, voluminous, and attractive? The contrast between these two lines of inquiry suddenly struck me profoundly. The former just seemed far more important for me to investigate.

Yet at the moment of my decision, I felt like I was jumping off a cliff. Why? Because I believed at the time that this choice was “unwise” financially. I thought: I bet there’s not much I can really do with this degree. I was torn by what seemed to be a conflict between pursuing “meaning” and “money.” Would my decision be financial salto mortale?

But this feeling was totally unnecessary, and I later realized it stems from a false dilemma. At the time, I was simply ignorant of how many paths a Philosophy or Religion degree make possible (and not just the path of being a professor). First, Philosophy and Religion majors do many things, even like climbing the business ladder. For example, a college friend and fellow Religion major now makes six figures in the field of capital management. Such stories are not rarities. Philosophy and Religion majors regularly succeed in business; in law; in medical school; in running non-profit organizations (which aim to put “meaning” before “money,” but also pay workers well); and in government, ministry, education, and many other things. Choosing “meaning” is therefore very far from a financial cliff dive. Indeed, the rate of unemployment (e.g. around 3.5%) among humanities majors is much lower than average and is quite close to the traditionally “most lucrative” degrees, like Engineering.

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During the Spring semester, UWG's chapter of Phi Sigma Tau, the national philosophy honors society, will be inducting new members. You are eligible to join if you have 45 credit hours, have taken at least two philosophy courses, have a 3.0 overall GPA and over a 3.0 (B average) in your philosophy courses. Members of this group meet a few times per semester to talk about careers and how to translate your philosophy skills to potential employers; applying for graduate school and law school; enrichment opportunities like internships and study abroad; and how to present and publish your philosophy papers. Please email the faculty advisor, Dr. Kellison, at rkelliso@westga.edu for more info if you are interested in joining.

(continued from p. 1)

(e.g. around 2.75%). Those are low numbers. Likewise, humanities majors tend to be happy in their jobs. And Philosophy majors in particular sit in the top third of all majors in terms of mid-career earnings, at over $80,000/year. (This means that most of these jobs are not professorships, by the way.) This is far from financial misery! Indeed, studies show that increases in happiness are negligible after attaining an income of about that amount per year. My point is that maybe you could make some more money by majoring in something else (or maybe not). But you almost certainly are not putting yourself at financial risk by majoring in Philosophy or Religion. Choosing “meaning” does not equate to choosing against financial stability.

A Step into the Real World
What, then, is coming to philosophy all about? Perhaps it is aptly described as coming to consider the complexities of the real world. One account of the real world would suggest that it is a world where people are striving to discover what is good, just, beautiful, etc.; a world of free activity and human interactions; a world of seeking meaning through dialogue; a world from which a clearer light can be shed on our everyday beliefs and collective practices. Perhaps it is the artificial world that encourages people to forego “meaning” in the hopes of maybe making a little more money?

Enough from me! How do others describe coming to philosophy? Senior philosophy major Chelsea Anderson describes her route as follows:

It wasn’t long into my second semester while taking critical thinking that I realized many of the beliefs I held to be true and close to me were taken from my parents and other family members. This is when I decided to have an open mind while developing and reflecting on my own beliefs. […] Throughout my classes I have found that I not only improved my writing skills, gained more knowledge about the history of philosophy and amazing theories developed by outstanding philosophers, but I have also grown as a person in my own life. I have challenged my beliefs while strengthening others, I have discovered new beliefs I didn’t know I had, and I have widely expanded my knowledge in all aspects.

How interesting! Do we not sometimes “live out” certain beliefs before we consciously discern them? As Anderson herself argues, the philosopher Leibniz suggested an idea like this when he envisioned philosophy as a process of uncovering the “petites perceptions” that inform the way we live.

Senior philosophy major Cordero Schalk describes a similar experience linking philosophy to the investigation of beliefs. While he had previously envisioned being a doctor due to his family’s suggestion, Schalk came to think that it is most important to think for oneself about “which

(continued on p. 6)
### Spring 2019 Course Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PHIL-2010-01</td>
<td>Introduction to Philosophy</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>MW 8-9:15am</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A historically framed introduction to philosophy, highlighting major developments that have defined Western philosophical inquiry. Required for philosophy or religion majors and minors. May count for credit in Core area C2.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PHIL-2010-02</td>
<td>Introduction to Philosophy</td>
<td>Dr. Elaine Blum</td>
<td>MW 9:30-10:45am</td>
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<td>Same descriptions as PHIL-2010-01 above.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PHIL-2010-03</td>
<td>Introduction to Philosophy</td>
<td>Dr. Walter Riker</td>
<td>TR 11am-12:15pm</td>
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<td>In this course we will consider several central questions in philosophy. There are good prudential reasons for obeying the law—is there also a moral duty to obey it? Do we ever have a moral duty to break the law? If we live in a deterministic universe, can we be free or responsible for our actions in any real sense? Does “knowledge” require certainty, that we cannot be wrong? Can we prove that God exists? If God is all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful, then why does evil exist? As we consider answers to these questions, we will think about what it means to take a “philosophical” approach to a problem. Required for philosophy or religion majors and minors. May count for credit in Core area C2.</td>
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<td>PHIL-2010-04</td>
<td>Introduction to Philosophy</td>
<td>Dr. Elaine Blum</td>
<td>TR 2-3:15pm</td>
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<td>Same descriptions as PHIL-2010-01 above.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PHIL-2010-91</td>
<td>Introduction to Philosophy</td>
<td>Dr. Carmen Zinn</td>
<td>TR 9-10:15am</td>
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<td>Notice: This course is offered at the Newnan campus. Same descriptions as PHIL-2010-01 above.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PHIL-2020-01</td>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>Dr. John Garner</td>
<td>MW 9:30-10:45am</td>
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<td>This course provides an introduction to logical reasoning and critical thinking. In division one, we will study the power of Socratic questioning and Aristotelian logic. We will discern the differences between deductive and non-deductive reasoning, the temptations of argumentative fallacies, and the clear and unclear uses of language. In division two, we will engage in open, critical discussion about controversial ethical-political and socio-economic questions, including the demands of charity, the purpose of a business, and the ethics of practices like marriage and voting. In division three, students will present their own research on a topic of their choice relating to the class. Overall, this course helps us understand whether we should be persuaded by others’ arguments, by the media, or by our pre-existing beliefs. It helps us to reason better, to be self-questioning, to make better arguments, and to evaluate more accurately the arguments of others. Required for philosophy or religion majors and minors. May count for credit in Core B1.</td>
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<td>PHIL-2020-02</td>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>Dr. John Garner</td>
<td>MW 11am-12:15pm</td>
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<td>An investigation of logical fallacies and patterns of valid reasoning in primarily oral by also written discourse. Required for philosophy or religion majors and minors. May count for credit in Core B1.</td>
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<td>PHIL-2020-04</td>
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<tr>
<td>PHIL-2030-02</td>
<td>Introduction to Ethics</td>
<td>Dr. Robert Lane</td>
<td>TR 9:30-10:45am</td>
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<td>Everyone has beliefs about morality, and to some extent we all agree about what actions are right and wrong; for example, we all agree that murder is wrong and that helping those less fortunate than us is right. But there are many moral questions about which people disagree: is abortion immoral? what about physician-assisted suicide? is it wrong to spend money on expensive cars</td>
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and homes when people in other parts of the world are dying from malnutrition? Do non-human animals have rights? This course will enable you critically to evaluate your own beliefs about concrete ethical issues like these. We'll also be dealing with more theoretical questions, such as: Where does morality come from? (God? Society? Or somewhere else?); what makes an ethical argument good or bad?; and what general rules or principles ought we to live by? No prior experience in philosophy is necessary, so if you want to start thinking critically about morality, this course is a great place to begin. Fulfills Core Area C2. Required for all philosophy majors. Counts toward the philosophy minor and toward the religion minor.

PHIL-2030-03 Introduction to Ethics TBA MW 9:30-10:45am
An introduction to the central concepts in ethics and an exploration of such contemporary ethical issues as abortion, genetic engineering, euthanasia, and capital punishment. Fulfills Core Area C2. Required for all philosophy majors. Counts toward the philosophy minor and toward the religion minor.

PHIL-2030-04 Introduction to Ethics Dr. Robert Lane TR 2-3:15pm
Same descriptions as PHIL-2030-02 above. Fulfills Core Area C2. Required for all philosophy majors. Counts toward the philosophy minor and toward the religion minor.

PHIL-2130-01 Introduction to World Religions Dr. Elaine Blum MW 11am-12:15pm
A comparative study of the beliefs and practices of several world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This course not only explores the history of these faiths and their early doctrinal and communal development, but their place in today's world. Required for religion-track majors and minors.

PHIL-2130-02 Introduction to World Religions Dr. Elaine Blum TR 3:30-4:45pm
Same descriptions as PHIL-2130-01 above.

PHIL-3110-01W Modern Philosophy Dr. John Garner MW 2-3:15pm
The course offers an examination of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European philosophers such as Descartes, Elisabeth of Bohemia, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant. Our readings will focus on the relationship between, on the one hand, theories of knowledge (e.g. does all knowledge come from experience, or are there a priori principles or concepts, etc.?) and, on the other hand, questions of metaphysics (e.g. is there a God, freedom, or immortality?). These thinkers, their theories (such as empiricism, rationalism, idealism, materialism, etc.), and the puzzles they raised were of decisive influence in the history of Western philosophy and science. This class is required for all philosophy majors; it also counts toward the philosophy minor.

PHIL-3120-01W American Philosophy Dr. Robert Lane TR 11am-12:15pm
What is truth? What is the best way for me to form beliefs about the world? Is absolute certainty possible, or must we be satisfied with beliefs that are not certain? What is philosophy, and what is its relationship with science? This course tackles those questions and others by examining how they were treated by the thinkers who founded pragmatism, America's distinctive philosophical tradition. In particular, we will study the works of three classical American pragmatists: Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. We will also study the ideas of more recent neo-pragmatists such as Richard Rorty.

PHIL-4120-01 Professional Ethics Dr. Walter Riker TR 9:30-10:45am
Is the lawyer best understood as an "amoral technician," a mere extension of the client, who should leave personal values out of their work? Does this apply to other professions like physician, engineer, or pastor/priest? Is the physician morally required to deceive a patient for the patient's own good? To what extent is informed consent possible in the professional/client relationship, given the asymmetries in knowledge that cause clients to seek the help of professionals in the first place? Are lawyers, pastors, and physicians morally required to keep all of a client's secrets, no matter how horrible? Should a person be barred from entering a profession for reasons of character? Are members of the professions morally permitted to withhold services from clients by e.g. going on strike? Does professional training cause morally regrettable but nevertheless necessary deformations of a person's character? Required for Law and Justice-track majors.

PHIL-4220-01W Hermeneutics Dr. Janet Donohoe MW 12:30-1:45pm
Hermeneutics is the philosophical discipline investigating the process of textual interpretation. How do we know how to interpret what we read? Is the meaning of a text what the author intended? How would we know what an author intended? Should we understand a text within a historical context? This course addresses the development of the hermeneutic tradition through the primary texts of such influential philosophers as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur. It explores the application of hermeneutic theory in such areas as law, religion, literature, and everyday life.
Registration is Nearly Here!

Remember, if you are a philosophy major, you are required to meet with your advisor before you will be able to register for classes next spring. You may have already heard from your advisor, but if you haven’t, you may want to swing by his or her office to see if you can sign up for a time for advising. The registration schedule is listed below, so be sure to meet with your advisor before your time to register.

**SPRING 2019 REGISTRATION SCHEDULE**

**Spring 2019 On-Time Registration Dates**

for CURRENTLY* enrolled students.
All registration starts at 12:00 am.

Current Seniors & all Graduate level students – October 22
Current Juniors ss# ending in 00-49 – October 23
Current Juniors ss# ending in 50-99 – October 24
Current Sophomores ss# ending 00-49 – October 25
Current Sophomores ss# ending 50-99 – October 26
Current Freshmen ss# ending 50-99 – October 29
Current Freshmen ss# ending 00-49 – October 30

*Currently enrolled students are those taking courses in the current term—fall 2018

Open Registration – Begins November 5, 2018
(Student that are active but not currently enrolled, are currently serving a one term suspension, are readmitted, or are admitted as a transient—must wait until Open Registration to register.)

**West Georgia Philosophical Society**

**INTERESTED IN PHILOSOPHY?**

Join the West Georgia Philosophical Society

West Georgia Philosophical Society is a student organization open to UWG students of any major who want to get together to discuss philosophy in an informal and friendly setting. Currently, the group meets on Wednesdays at 5:30pm in TLC 2237. For more information, visit our Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/groups/136625026403394/ or email Dr. Garner at jgarner@westga.edu.

**PHILOSOPHER’S WISDOM?**

“It is the very nature of every new beginning that it breaks into the world as an ‘infinite improbability,’ and yet it is precisely this infinitely improbable which actually constitutes the texture of everything we call real.”

~ Hannah Arendt, “What is Freedom?”
Hence, while Anderson emphasized discovering and clarifying beliefs, Schalk emphasizes the way philosophy can enable a “break” in beliefs and yield very different ones. Both agree, however, that such inquiry can be life altering. And as Schalk adds, “philosophy has allowed me to find better ways of dealing with the problems that have come up.” What could be more worthwhile than a profoundly meaningful inquiry that also strengthens our handling of everyday life?

Senior Philosophy major Alex Pelaez concurs regarding this real-world value. She writes that she came to philosophy because,

I relished the challenges and obstacles that my mind had to overcome in order to operate in such a different type of way. It was while taking a Critical Thinking class that I noticed that my way of thinking was changing. I possessed less bias towards subjects; I was cautious for loopholes in my arguments.

Such caution isn’t about playing academic games but rather is about gaining a more nuanced perspective on reality. “I was seeing ‘grey,’” she writes, “in what many other individuals would only see as being ‘black and white.’”

In the end then, if philosophers have always talked of the need for humans to escape from a “cave of shadows,” such an escape does not imply leaving the real world. Far from it, philosophy takes us into the complexities of reality and helps us overcome the artifices and illusions within which we often dwell. It helps us overcome the false dilemma between “meaning” and “money”; and, indeed, it helps us challenge any doxa hindering us from inquiring into what really matters.

(continued from p.2)