

PHIL 1301 - Introduction to Philosophy

Syllabus - Fall 2011

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Course Information

Contact Information

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Office Hours Wednesday 11:00am-Noon and 5:00-6:00pm (and by appt)

Course Description

From one perspective, philosophy is an abstruse, useless pursuit — an intellectual game. From another perspective, philosophy treats the most central human problems in the most general terms — and so, the most useful pursuit of all. In this course, we will look at how philosophy can help us think better about issues like death, work, the good life, the existence of god, and the nature of science.

Philosophy is not like other subjects you've taken in school. You will not be asked to memorize facts. There are no fundamental principles that all philosophers accept that you must learn and apply, though you will learn principles that particular philosophers have suggested and be asked to think about how (and whether) they apply. The order in which you learn philosophy doesn't matter that much, though the more philosophy you know, the better you will be at any part of it. The skill of asking questions is much more important than the answers found. Philosophy is analytical and critical, speculative and creative. Philosophy is an activity more than a collection of knowledge, a way of life more than an academic subject. The goal of philosophy is combining the creative adventure of ideas with the rigorous analysis of them; it is a serious play with thought.

There is even a legitimate philosophical question about *what* counts as philosophy! Philosophy seems to lack sharp boundaries, and it may be hard sometimes to tell the difference between a philosopher and a theologian, historian, literary critic, physicist, or psychologist (not surprisingly, if we remember that most of those subjects were once widely regarded as part of philosophy proper). There is even less agreement about how to do philosophy, and we will read many approaches in this course.

Learning Objectives

- Students will examine and analyze a variety of works of philosophy.
- Students will demonstrate familiarity with basic questions, ideas, and methods of philosophy.
- Students will demonstrate awareness of the relevance of philosophy to matters of common concern.
- Students will develop skill with philosophical methods of asking questions, discussion, reading, and writing.

Textbook and Materials

There is no official textbook for the course. Primary texts will be available online via eLearning <http://utdallas.edu/elearning>. Many, many textbooks, readers, and popular works exist that would supplement the required reading. Here are a few that I think are particularly interesting and well-done:

- Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* and *What Does It All Mean?* - Thought-provoking, accessible, interesting essays.
- Simon Blackburn, *Think* - Concise, lively introduction to major areas of philosophy.
- Edwards and MacDonald, eds. *Occasions for Philosophy* 2nd Ed. - Collection of essays (we use a few of them in this class). Hard to find - I think only print-on-demand or used.
- Robert Solomon, *Introducing Philosophy* - One of the better textbooks, if you like textbooks (I don't).
- Kory Schaff, ed. *Philosophy and the Problems of Work* - Classic and contemporary essays on work (we use a few of these, too).
- Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie's World* - Charming presentation of the history of philosophy via a juvenile novel (though the fictional element is quite thin in places). Very basic.
- Robert Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* - Another novelistic work of philosophy, much less systematic and more idiosyncratic.

In some ways it may be a little dated. Still, one of the best exhortations to philosophy that I know of.

Course Schedule and Topics

Listed readings should be read carefully before class. Most of them you should read through once and then read through again more carefully. You are expected to come to each class with questions or discussion points about the reading. It is recommended that you re-read the text after class, in light of our discussion, to help make sure you understand and retain it. **You must bring the text with you to class**, which probably means printing it out (or, see policy on laptops and digital reading devices).

Date	Topic	Readings & Assignments
8/24	Welcome and Introduction to Philosophy	In-class handouts
8/26	History, Problems, and Methods of Philosophy + Syllabus	Sign into eLearning and edit your profile. Jeremy Farris, "Learning Philosophy and Cities" Syllabus questions.
	Death	
8/29	Is Death a Bad Thing?	Thomas Nagel, "Death"
8/31	Death is Nothing to Me	Epicureanism and Daoism on Death
9/2	Writing Day - <i>No class</i>	Read upcoming papers, work on position papers
9/5	Labor Day - <i>No class</i>	
9/7	The Afterlife is Boring	Bernard Williams, "The Makropulos Case"
9/9	Immortality without Boredom	Bortolli & Nagasawa
9/12	Who Wants to Live Forever?	Miller and Wilsdon on Aubrey de Grey
9/14	Problems with Prolonging Life	Fukuyama, "Prolongation of Life" position paper due; votes in by 6pm, 9/15
9/16	<i>Discuss Position Papers</i>	
	God	
9/19	Arguments for the Existence of God	St. Anselm, "The Ontological Argument"
9/21		St. Aquinas, "The Five Ways"
9/23	The Problem of Evil	Dostoevsky, from <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i>
9/26	Faith	Kierkegaard, "Truth as Subjectivity"
9/28	The Death of God	Nietzsche, excerpts from <i>The Gay Science</i> and <i>Thus Spake Zarathustra</i>

9/30	Religion vs. the Religious	John Dewey, from <i>A Common Faith</i> , position papers due; votes in by 6pm, 10/2
10/3	Divine Plans & the Absurdity of Life, <i>Discuss Position Papers</i>	Thomas Nagel, "The Absurd"
10/5	Eastern Spirituality: Guest Lecture by Sabrina Starnaman	TBA
10/7	<i>No Class</i> The Good Life	
10/10	Is God the Source of Morality?	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i>
10/12	Is Morality Relative?	Mary Midgley, "Trying Out One's New Sword"
10/14	The Good as Pleasure	Jeremy Bentham
10/17	The Aesthetic Life	Kierkegaard, "The Rotation Method"
10/19	The Right as Reason	Immanuel Kant, "Morality and the Demands of Reason"
10/21	Life without Principle	Henry David Thoreau
10/24	Ethics of Care	Virginia Held, "Care as Practice and Value"
10/26	The Land Ethic	Aldo Leopold, from <i>Sand County Almanac</i> , Position papers due; votes in by 6pm, 10/27
10/28	<i>Discuss Position Papers</i> Work	
10/31	The Value of Manual Work	Matthew Crawford, "Shop Class as Soulcraft"
11/2	Against Work	Bertrand Russell, "In Praise of Idleness"
11/4	Work, Labor, and Education	Peter Herbst
11/7	Alienated Labor	Karl Marx
11/9	Capitalism and Meaningful Work	Robert Nozick, from <i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i>
11/11		David Schweickart, from <i>Against Capitalism</i>
11/14	Pleasure, Productivity, and Play	Marcus, <i>Eros and Civilization</i> .
11/16	Race, Sex, and Exploitation,	Gary Dymski, Ann Ferguson, Position papers due; votes in by 6pm, 11/17
11/18	<i>Discuss Position Papers</i> Science	
11/21	Believing Where We Cannot Prove	Philip Kitcher, from <i>Abusing Science</i>
11/23	Cargo Cult Science	Richard Feynman
11/28	How parapsychology could become a science	Paul Churchland

11/30	Is science sexist?	Marguerite Holloway & Janet Kourany, position papers due; votes in by 6pm, 12/1
12/2	Science and Society	Paul Feyerabend, "How to Defend Society Against Science."
12/5	<i>Discuss Position Papers</i>	Final paper due.
12/9	Final Exam	Course evaluation due.

Grading

Assignments

1. Classroom citizenship - Attendance, participation, and courtesy - 10 points
2. Quizzes and other assignments - 14 points
3. Visit office hours before end of Unit 1 - 2 points
4. Position papers - 10 points / paper, 2 papers
5. Final paper - 24 points
6. Final exam - 12 points
7. Course evaluation - 5 point

Total possible points: 87

Final Grades

Final grade will be calculated on a 4.0 scale by taking your points divided by twenty. So, for example, a student with 76 total points would get a 3.8, rounding to an A. A 64 would be a 3.2 or B+. The ranges are: 81+ points is an A+, 80-76 points is an A, 75-70 points is an A-, 69-63 is a B+, 62-56 is a B, 55-50 is a B-, 49-43 is a C+, 42-36 is a C, 35-30 is a C-, 29-16 is a D, 15-0 is an F.

Classroom citizenship

You begin the course with a classroom citizenship score of 5. Frequent, appropriate, high-quality participation will increase that score up to a maximum of 10. Each class missed and each class period where you fail to practice proper courtesy will subtract 1 point. Tardiness will subtract half of a point.

In-class assignments and quizzes

Occasionally there will be activities in-class that are graded, usually on the basis of whether you made the effort to seriously participate. There will also be occasional reading quizzes to check that you are keeping up with the readings. Very occasionally a brief assignment will be announced in class that will contribute to this grade. Maximum of 14 points total.

Visit office hours

Just come to my office hours. Say hi. Tell me a little about yourself. Free 2 points. You can even make an appointment if my office hours are inconvenient.

Position papers

You will be given several opportunities in the semester to write position papers on a unit of the course. Position papers should be 300–500 words in length and turned in on eLearning. Papers will be graded on a 4.0 scale multiplied by 2. So, A = 8 points, B = 6 points, etc. Students will read and rate each others' papers and the top 3–4 papers will be distributed and discussed in class. Papers selected will receive an addition 2 points. (10 maximum). More instruction will be given in class.

Final paper

4.0 scale multiplied by 6. More information will be given in class.

Final exam

Cumulative. Not very onerous.

Course evaluation

You will be asked to do a narrative course evaluation, describing your experience in the course, what you liked, what you didn't like. If you actually do it, you get these 5 points. I'll write my own evaluation of the course too and give it to you when you turn yours in. More instruction will be given in class.

Grading Standards

These are the standards for assignments that will be graded on a letter grade / 4.0 scale:

- An **A** grade indicates *excellent* work. **A** work has something to say and says it well. It displays a subtle and nuanced understanding of the text, develops arguments clearly and effectively, and reflects insightfully on the course material. It often rises above other work in terms of creativity and sophistication, or it may add something valuable to the discussion that goes beyond merely fulfilling the letter of the requirements. Only few, minor mistakes in content, mechanics, and style are present.
- A **B** grade indicates *good* work. Such work displays a clear understanding of the text, develops arguments consistently towards a clear claim, and is thoughtful and careful. The presence of serious errors must not impair the clarity of an argument or the overall understanding of a text. **B** work is in many ways successful, but lacks the sophistication or originality of **A** work.
- A **C** grade indicates *adequate* work. It shows an adequate understanding of the key parts of the text. Arguments aim at a central claim, though they may rely on unsupported or insufficiently developed ideas. More serious errors may be present, so long as the central claims and basic understandings are not undermined.
- Work which deserves a grade less than **C** will display some of the following problems: it fails to show adequate understanding of the text; it fails to understand the assignment; it fails to articulate a coherent or adequate argument; it fails to reflect on the content of the course; it displays such pervasive grammatical errors as to be highly obscure in meaning.

Course Policies

Email / eLearning Policy

You are expected to check your official UTD email account and/or eLearning regularly for announcements related to the course. Crucial information will be emailed out at least 24 hours prior.

Email is the best way to contact me. I will generally try to return your emails within 24 hours (often sooner) Monday through Thursday, and within 48 hours on the weekends or holidays. You are welcome to email me a followup or reminder *if* I have not done so within this time frame. You should not count on being able to get in touch with me less than 24 hours before a major assignment is due.

Classroom expectations

You are expected to have read the assignments *before* class, and it would be to your benefit to also read them again after class. You are expected to bring *all* of the texts assigned for each day's class, and have them available to refer to. You are expected to listen respectfully to the professor, your fellow students, and guest speakers, and to participate in class discussions and activities while allowing room for others to do so as well. You should not show up to class very late or leave early.

Respect for others, respectful language

Some of the material in this course will touch on sensitive subjects such as religion, politics, and sexuality. Sometimes in lectures or discussions I may use outrageous examples to clarify points or provoke discussion; if you are offended by something that is said, please accept my apologies in advance and express your concern to me after class. I will not share your concerns with the class without your permission, but I will try to respond to them. While we will encourage informal discussion, I will insist that you always speak to others in the class in a respectful way, and to avoid comments and behaviors that disparage individuals. Speaking informally but respectfully about sensitive subjects is an important skill, and this class will help you learn it.

Note-taking Suggestions

In some classes, faithful note-taking can be an important component of success; this is not one of those classes. Extensive note-taking in class is thus discouraged, especially in those parts of class meetings that are not primarily lecture-based. Taking good notes on lecture and discussion is no guarantee of good performance in the course, and focusing your attention on meticulous notes can interfere with activities that make a greater contribution to your performance: listening, consulting the text, and participating in class discussion.

My suggestion is that you have a paper ready to note down page numbers that you want to look up later, ideas that you want to think about, and to write down questions or responses that you want to add to the discussion when it is your turn.

Laptops and Digital Devices

You may feel unhappy about the sacrifice of trees and toner-cartridge fruits to print out all of the assignments. Or your reading and note-taking habits might involve a really streamlined electronic process. So you may desire to bring your texts to class in electronic form. This is understandable, but be cautious!

Studies on multitasking or on the use of laptops in classrooms demonstrate that the temptations and distractions have a negative impact on learning. (e.g., <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1078740>)

So - laptops and other digital reading and note-taking devices are permitted, but Internet use and game-playing are not. If you wish to use such devices, you must receive explicit permission from the professor, internet access must be disabled, and you must sit in the front row, nearest the instructor. Hands off cellphones during class. Sessions are only 50 minutes long; if something happens that you absolutely *must* text or tweet, you can wait until class is over (write it down on that paper you've got for note-taking!).

Late Work / Make-up Exams

No late work or make-up assignments or exams will be allowed without consent of the professor **prior to** the due/exam date, except in situations where University policy requires it.

Class Attendance

While reading and writing are crucial parts of the course, the central philosophical activity is live discussion. While class will occasionally involve bits of lecture, this is merely an instrument to a more well-informed discussion and other structured activities. *Attendance is thus considered mandatory.* Missed classes will count against your participation grade, and egregious absenteeism will be grounds for an **F** in the course at the professor's discretion. In-class assignments and activities likewise cannot be made up unless the professor agrees to it before the class is missed. Disruptive late arrivals or early departures are poor classroom citizenship and will also negatively impact your citizenship grades.

Further standard University policies can be found at <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>

These descriptions and timelines are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.