

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

PHILOSOPHY 101 (34)
University of Tennessee
Spring 2017
MWF, 12:20-1:10p @ HSS 206

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is real and what is imaginary? What can we truly come to know about our universe and how? What does it mean to be a good person? How should we structure our society? We've all probably asked ourselves some of these things at one time or another. They are among the most fundamental questions one can ask, and countless thinkers have proposed answers to them for centuries. These questions, which are crucial to our everyday lives, are the purview of *philosophy*, one of the oldest and most fundamental forms of inquiry in our intellectual history.

This course will serve as a topical introduction to the discipline of philosophy, its methodology, some of its central questions, and its development throughout history. We'll begin our inquiry as one might expect, with Socrates' (in)famous claims about the value of the examined life. After some methodological stage-setting, we'll take a look some historical takes of the nature of knowledge and reality, from Platonic formalism, to the the rationalist-empiricist divide of the early modern period, to the oft-discussed rift between so-called "analytic" and "continental" methodologies in the 20th century. From here, we'll turn our attention to questions about the good life and various principles governing our conduct, developing a toolkit of moral theories with which to evaluate our actions and those of others around us. We'll expand the scope of our normative inquiry with a look into what makes a society just, all the way from Plato's proposed guardianship of Athens to key developments in contemporary political theory. The course ends with a little something for everyone: a sort of grab bag of applied philosophy, elucidating the everyday relevance of the ideas and methodologies we will have developed throughout the semester.

If you participate actively in class and approach readings and course assignments with attention and care, I suspect that you will grow as a thinker. If you take the knowledge you acquire in this course with you and apply it to your own life and projects, I hope you will flourish as a human being.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

As a result of taking this course, students should be better able to:

- recognize and explain key ideas, figures, and distinctions from the history of philosophy.
- read and understand philosophical texts.
- analyze and evaluate philosophical arguments.
- critically reflect upon their own ideas and beliefs.
- communicate their ideas effectively in speech and writing.

MATERIALS

While we will work our way through a substantial amount of source material in this course, there is no textbook required for purchase. All class reading assignments will be made available to students in PDF format. These and any supplementary materials will be accessible via [Canvas](#).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

In order to be successful in this course, students should do **all** of the following:

- A. **Read this syllabus in its entirety.** Students will be held responsible for all information and policies contained in this document.
- B. **Read all assigned materials in accordance with the course calendar (see below).** Students should complete their reading before class on the day materials are assigned. Please note that philosophy can often be dense, and reading it difficult—so be sure to leave yourself some time to read carefully and critically.
- C. **Attend class regularly and participate in class meetings.** Students should do their best to attend every class, and to come prepared to contribute to daily discussions (by having read and thought about the assignment, taken relevant quizzes, etc.).
- D. **Check UT email and Canvas regularly for course announcements.** Communications will often be made this way in order to keep you informed about class happenings during the semester. (Enabling notifications in Canvas is a good idea in this regard.)
- E. **Complete all class assignments by their designated due dates (see below).** Late assignments will only be accepted in the most serious of circumstances, and ought to be arranged well in advance where possible.

ASSIGNMENTS

Reading Quizzes (30%): Throughout the semester, there will be 12 short reading quizzes. 10 quizzes will count toward your final grade at 3% each, as the lowest 2 quiz grades will be dropped. These will vary in format from multiple choice questions to short essay responses to reading assignments, and are designed to encourage careful and critical reading to prepare you for discussions. All quizzes will be available in advance on Canvas, and are due by the time class starts on the day relevant materials are assigned.

Tests (30%): Roughly corresponding to each topical section of the course, you'll write three take-home tests—one on metaphysics and epistemology, one on ethics and politics, and one on various applications for philosophy. Each test will include a range of question formats, including some short answer questions and essay prompts of some substantive length. Each test will be made available two weeks in advance of its due date (see course calendar), and will constitute 10% of your final grade.

Team Design Project (30%): To culminate your work in this course, you'll work in small teams to design a collaborative mixed-media project which explains or otherwise engages with some view, idea, distinction, or thinker we cover in class. At the end of the term, we will devote a few class meetings to a juried exhibition of student design projects. Your project grades will be based on an

advance project proposal (5%), your understanding and presentation of the ideas in question (15%), and peer reviews from your team members (10%). 3 member design teams will be randomly assigned at the beginning of the term, and the order of final exhibitions will be determined via lottery.

Engaged Participation (10%+): Philosophical learning occurs best in collaboration and connection with others. For this reason, students must attend class regularly, having sufficiently prepared for discussion of any assigned readings or supplementary materials. Regular physical attendance, while usually necessary for a good participation grade, is not sufficient on its own. Grades will be determined by the quality of a student's overall contribution to in-class discussions and the course as a whole. That being said, different students participate in different ways (e.g., speaking in class, responding to others' thoughts, group work, visiting office hours, etc.), and this will be taken into account. Additionally, I reserve the right to raise grades in borderline cases where a student has an exemplary participation record, though this is by no means a guarantee that grades will be rounded up.

ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSIONS

All of your written assignments should be turned in via Canvas, and will be checked for plagiarism upon their submission (see below for policy on academic integrity). Microsoft Word (.docx) format is preferred for ease of grading and feedback (and this software is available for free from OIT). I do use an anonymized grading process, so please don't include any identifying information (e.g., headers, cover pages, etc.) on your assignments themselves. Final design projects will be reviewed during scheduled exhibition days at the end of the term.

GRADING SCALE

For the purposes of this course, we will operate on a university standard +/- grading scale, with point gradations defined as follows:

A 100-94 | A- 93-90
B+ 89-87 | B 86-84 | B- 83-80
C+ 79-77 | C 76-74 | C- 73-70
D+ 69-67 | D 66-64 | D- 63-60
F <60

CLASS POLICIES

Class Attendance: Student attendance is crucial to success in this (and any) course. Attendance records will be taken promptly at the beginning of each class period—so, please make sure you arrive on time. Participation grades can and will be affected by students' attendance. For these reasons, excused absences (which will not count adversely) will be granted only in the most serious of circumstances (university business, religious holidays, significant illnesses, etc.) and ought to be discussed with me in advance when possible. In order for an absence to be excused, you must be able to provide documentation related to meetings missed upon request.

Academic Integrity: All assignments for this course will be checked for plagiarism upon their submission. At Tennessee, plagiarism is defined as "using the intellectual property or product of someone else without giving proper credit," whether intentional or otherwise. Any student found in violation of university policy will immediately receive a failing grade for the course, and may be subject to further disciplinary action at the institutional level. Please refer to the university honor statement and other accompanying [resources](#) to further familiarize yourself with UT's academic honesty policies.

Electronics: The responsible use of laptops, tablets, etc. for note-taking, class assignments, and research tasks is welcome and encouraged in class. This is generally less the case for smartphones (let's be honest—no one takes notes on them). I do reserve the right to ask students to see their notes or work, and to discontinue their usage should it not be consistent with classroom purposes. Participation grades can and will be affected by violations of this policy, and repeated violations will result in being asked to leave class. Relatedly, student audio and video recording of lectures and class discussions is prohibited without prior and explicit permission of all parties involved.

Civility in Discussion: Disagreement and the discussion of sensitive topics are key hallmarks of a modern democratic society, and a free exchange of ideas and perspectives is thus crucial in the university classroom as well. I fully expect and welcome vigorous disagreements in this class. With that being said, please be mindful of some important constraints on our discussions: Be thoughtful and courteous. Respect your classmates by listening to what they have to say, and make an effort to respond to issues raised by those who spoke before you rather than simply waiting your turn to blurt your unconsidered opinion and consider your obligations for the day fulfilled. Please also be conscious of the balance of contributions in class—if you've spoken a lot, make an effort to cede the floor to less vocal classmates who might be waiting to enter the conversation. I will make every possible effort to maintain a collaborative environment for inquiry and learning—I only ask that you do the same with respect to your classmates.

Inclusivity Statement: I consider my classroom and office inclusive spaces for all students. No one should feel unwelcome, undervalued, or unsafe on the bases of their race, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, cultural background, religious belief, age, wealth, or physical/mental ability. I take this policy very seriously, and strive to provide a class environment that is based on full recognition and mutual respect for all who enter. Student violations of this policy will not be tolerated.

Accessibility: We all learn and work in different ways, and I strive to make my courses as widely accessible as possible. Any student who may need classroom or assignment accommodations based on the impact of a disability is encouraged to meet with me to discuss their specific needs. Additionally, students may contact the [Office of Disability Services](#) (ODS) at (865) 974-6087 or ods@utk.edu to document their eligibility for institutional accommodation services.

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Instructor Contact and Office Hours: The best way to get ahold of me in a pinch is via [email](#), and many brief questions or concerns are ideally addressed this way. I'll typically respond to student emails within 24 hours (weekends and holidays excepted). For any and all more substantive concerns and questions pertaining to the course, students are encouraged to visit my weekly office hours. In addition to regularly scheduled times on Mondays and Wednesdays, I am available to meet with students via appointment (either in person or virtually). To request an appointment, just send me an email, and I'll do my best to find times to meet which accommodate all parties involved. I am happy to provide whatever assistance I can to make sure you are successful in class, be it discussing your assignments and grades with you in detail (note that I prefer to discuss grades in person rather than via email), working through assignments and arguments with you one-on-one, etc. I am here to help. All this being said, please remember that I am indeed a human with as many competing priorities as any other, and that I require some advance notice of appointment requests, assignment drafts to read, etc.

UT Student Success Center: The Student Success Center is a valuable resource for UT students, providing academic coaching on matters like time management and study tips, as well as general student support at any time in the semester. From the center's [website](#): "Through academic support programs such as tutoring, supplemental instruction, academic coaching, and other educational enhancement programs, as well as our website and referral to the university's other excellent curricular and co-curricular resources, the staff promotes undergraduate student excellence and persistence to graduation."

UT Writing Center: In addition to using class resources and my office hours to your advantage, the Writing Center can provide extra individualized help with written assignments. From the center's [website](#): "The writing center serves student writers in all disciplines of the UTK academic community by offering free and individualized help throughout the writing process. Thousands of students visit the Writing Center each year from all types of courses on campus. Trained tutors (graduate students and lecturers) read and discuss student writing in one-to-one conversations and offer constructive feedback. We teach students how to think about their written work from the brainstorming stage to final revisions. We work with writers on a walk-in, first-come, first-served basis."

Departmental Resources: The UT Philosophy Department's [website](#) offers a variety of resources helpful to those studying philosophy, as well as information about our degree programs and other opportunities for undergraduates—including our annual scholarship awards, essay contest, and the UT Philosophy Club (all of which are open to non-majors). You are, of course, encouraged to check out these opportunities and consider taking advantage of them!

COURSE CALENDAR¹

Setting the Stage: What is philosophy and why does it matter?

W 01.11.17: Introductions

F 01.13.17: Bertrand Russell, "The Value of Philosophy"

M 01.16.17: Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday—No Class Meeting

W 01.18.17: Plato, *Apology**²

F 01.20.17: Plato, *Apology*

Metaphysics and Epistemology: What is real, and how do we know?

M 01.23.17: Plato, *Symposium*, 172a-197e

W 01.25.17: Plato, *Symposium*, 198a-end

F 01.27.17: René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, I-III*

M 01.30.17: René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, IV-VI

W 02.01.17: Immanuel Kant, Paralogisms from *The Critique of Pure Reason*, I-II

F 02.03.17: Immanuel Kant, Paralogisms from *The Critique of Pure Reason*, III-IV*

M 02.06.17: Immanuel Kant, Paralogisms from *The Critique of Pure Reason*

W 02.08.17: Edmund Husserl, "Consciousness as Intentional Experience"*

F 02.10.17: Edmund Husserl, "Consciousness as Intentional Experience"

M 02.13.17: John Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism"

W 02.15.17: A.J. Ayer, "The Elimination of Metaphysics"

F 02.17.17: John Dewey, "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy"*

Ethics: What is the right thing to do?

M 02.20.17: James Rachels, "The Challenge of Moral Relativism"*

W 02.22.17: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I

F 02.24.17: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II (**Test 1**)

M 02.27.17: John Stuart Mill, "What Utilitarianism Is" from *Utilitarianism*

W 03.01.17: John Stuart Mill, "What Utilitarianism Is" from *Utilitarianism*

F 03.03.17: Immanuel Kant, selection from *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals**

M 03.06.17: Immanuel Kant, selection from *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*

W 03.08.17: Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, "Contemporary Contractarian Moral Theory"

F 03.10.17: Virginia Held, "The Ethics of Care as Moral Theory"*

¹ I reserve the right to make changes to the reading and assignment schedule as needed. In the case of any changes, you'll be notified in advance in class and on Canvas, where an updated version of the schedule will always be posted.

² All assignments marked with an asterisk (*) have a corresponding reading quiz on Canvas, which will be due by the time class starts on the day assigned.

03.13.17-03.17.17: Spring Break!

Political Philosophy: What is a just society?

M 03.20.17: Plato, selection from *Republic*

W 03.22.17: Thomas Hobbes, selection from *Leviathan*

F 03.24.17: John Rawls, "Fundamental Ideas" from *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement**

M 03.27.17: John Rawls, "The Principles of Justice" from *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*

W 03.29.17: Robert Nozick, "The Entitlement Theory" from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*

F 03.31.17: Martha Nussbaum, "The Central Capabilities" from *Creating Capabilities**

Philosophical Problems: How can we apply philosophy to our everyday lives?

M 04.03.17: Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression"

W 04.05.17: Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail"*

F 04.07.17: Tommie Shelby, "Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto" **(Test 2)**

M 04.10.17: Iris Marion Young, "Throwing Like a Girl"*

W 04.12.17: Iris Marion Young, "Throwing Like a Girl" **(Project Proposal)**

F 04.14.17: Spring Recess—No Class Meeting

M 04.17.17: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

W 04.19.17: Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology"

F 04.21.17: Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology"

04.24.17-04.28.17: Design Project Exhibitions

TBA (Final Exam Period): Test 3