

DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE AND LANGUAGES

Texas A & M University - Commerce

Fall 2012

PHILOSOPHY 1301: Introduction to Philosophy**Sections 81303 and 81610**

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this course is to (1) examine and discuss some of the fundamental questions, ideas, and concepts that have been central to the history of philosophical thought, and (2) learn to identify, understand, evaluate, construct, and defend arguments regarding philosophical topics. We will address questions like: What counts as knowledge rather than just opinion? Does knowledge come from the senses (empiricism) or the mind (rationalism)? Does God exist? What's the difference between believing *that* God exists and believing *in* God? What is the nature of justice? How should power be distributed throughout society? What is the nature of morality? On what basis should we make ethical decisions? What is the definition of art? Is one judgment of taste as good as any other?

What we're trying to do in this course: This is not just a venue for us to express our individual opinions (for example, "I believe X, I believe Y"). To do that is really to only talk about ourselves. And while it is true that "everyone is entitled to their beliefs," it is not true that all beliefs are equally correct, because some beliefs are unjustified, incorrect, or simply false. That is, some beliefs are better than others. With that in mind, our investigation should aim at the truth—what most rational, reasonable people would collectively agree is the justified, right, or correct belief to adopt on a given philosophical topic (for example, "believing X is justified for the following reasons..."). And although there may not be definite answers to philosophical questions (for example, of the kind we find in mathematics), there are answers to philosophical questions nonetheless. The difference is that answers to philosophical questions come in the form of good arguments, and we should accept a philosophical view based only on the merits of the arguments presented in its favor, not on whether it confirms our already held beliefs.

If you are struggling: I am more than willing to help, but I cannot help you if I don't know you are struggling or have questions. So ask questions. Ask for help. Don't struggle silently! Even if you are so confused you can't seem to formulate a question, let me know so I can at least point you in the right direction.

A word about grading: Although in philosophy we deal with many different points of view, your work will be evaluated only according to how well it satisfies the grading criteria for each assignment that is outlined in the syllabus. And while I may offer a variety of different views on a given subject, please do not assume that these are *my* views. Out of respect for you as

students, I will not advocate my personal views or grade your assignments accordingly. As your instructor, I am obligated to evaluate your performance as impartially and as objectively as possible. And please do not take your grades personally. Here we will be discussing some controversial and at times disturbing ideas, ideas that you may not have considered, or ideas that may throw your previously held beliefs into doubt. Rest assured that your grade will not be based on what you believe. Your work will be evaluated only according to how well it satisfies the grading criteria outlined in the course syllabus. In short, I do not *give* grades, I only record the grades you earn.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. To acquire an overview of the field of philosophy and its major subfields (Logic, Epistemology, Metaphysics, Ethics, and Aesthetics).
2. To distinguish arguments from explanations, and from statements of unsupported opinion.
3. To distinguish between descriptive (what is the case) and normative statements (what ought to be the case).
4. To learn to identify, understand, analyze, evaluate, construct, and defend arguments regarding philosophical topics.
5. To develop writing skills with emphasis on clarity, organization, concision, coherence, and consistency.
6. To practice the virtues of intellectual and academic integrity: honesty, accountability, rigor, perseverance, and fairness.

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. G. Lee Bowie, Meredith W. Michaels, and Robert C. Solomon, eds. *Twenty Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*, 7th ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2010). **ISBN-13: 978-1439043967.**
2. Stanley Honer, Thomas Hunt, Dennis Okholm, and John Stafford, eds. *Invitation to Philosophy: Issues and Options*, 10th edition (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2006). **ISBN -13: 978-0-534-56460-5.**

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

Final grades will be based on 25 reading thesis paragraphs (RTPs) (50%, 2 points each), 3 exam essays (30%, 10 points each), and participation on online discussion board (20%, 1 point each for regular posts, 2 points each for current events posts). Late assignments will not be accepted. Grading scale: (90-100 = A; 80-89 = B; 70-79 = C; 60-69 = D; below 60 = F).

READING THESIS PARAGRAPHS (RTPs)

RTPs help students develop the ability to (1) recognize, identify, and understand theses and arguments, and (2) to demonstrate that ability in clear and concise writing. We will cover two readings in the *20 Questions* text per week (except on exam week and week 1). After carefully reading the assigned selection, answer the following questions. **(1) what is the author's thesis?** (i.e., the main claim the author is defending throughout the article) and **(2) what is the argument for that thesis?** (i.e., the reasons given in its support). RTPs must be at least 5

sentences but no longer than 1/2 page in length (typed, double spaced, 12 point font). RTPs must be submitted as word document attachments to the appropriate dropbox in our eCollege course shell no later than 5pm Friday for that week. Late submissions will not be accepted.

EXAM ESSAYS

Exams help students develop the ability to (1) understand and evaluate arguments, (2) construct and defend an argument, and (3) acknowledge and respond to objections to your argument.

For each exam you will **(1)** select an article from the current readings in *20 Questions*, **(2)** select any suitable “question to consider” at the beginning of a relevant chapter in *Invitation to Philosophy*, and **(3)** and write a persuasive essay that answers that question by following the instructions below. You must select a different discussion question for each exam (indicate which question you are addressing). Each essay will be will be 3-4 pages (750-1000 words), and will count for 10% of the final grade (2 points per criterion listed below).

For a **persuasive** essay, follow these instructions.

1. Indicate which question you are addressing and correctly cite at least one **author** from the readings in *20 Questions* in an introductory paragraph (for example, how would author X respond to the question you have selected?).
2. At the end of your introductory paragraph, provide a clear and explicitly stated **thesis**.
3. In the next paragraph(s), present a clear and thorough **argument** in defense of your thesis. Give reasons in support of your claims.
4. In the following paragraph(s), present one clear and thorough **objection** to your thesis. Explain the objection fully and fairly.
5. In a concluding paragraph, provide a clear and concrete **example** that illustrates how your thesis defeats the objection.

The articles and discussion questions you refer to in your essays must be on topics we are currently studying (e.g., Knowledge and the Existence of God, Ethics and Social-Political Philosophy, or Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art). When citing references, use the parenthetical citations—reference list style (see [www.chicagomanualofstyle.com.tools_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.com/tools_citationguide.html)). Exam essays must be submitted to the dropbox no later than 5pm Friday during exam week. Late submissions will not be accepted.

ONLINE DISCUSSION BOARD

The student lounge online discussion board helps students develop the ability to (1) engage in productive dialogue and debate on philosophical topics, and (2) to express their views clearly and respectfully.

Regular discussion board posts: I will regularly post questions in the online “student lounge” in our course shell. You will earn 1 point of credit for each thoughtful response you submit up to 10 points. Discussion board responses must be on the topics we are currently studying and must be posted before the exam concluding that section.

Current events posts: You may also post a link, video, news article, blog, etc., about a current event of philosophical relevance and **(1)** identify the central philosophical question in the article and **(2)** offer an answer to that question in your comments about the article, and **(3)** give reasons in support of your answer. For these posts you will earn 2 points up to 10 points.

Discussion board post replies: You can post several types of replies to the week's readings or to other posts or comments on our site. Here are some examples.

1. Clarification request. You claim p (a proposition), but I don't know what you mean by saying p. Please clarify. Do you mean by this p1, p2...?
2. Argument request. You claim p. I think I know what you mean by p. But why do you claim p? I don't see any argument for p, and I think you need to give an argument for it.
3. Objection. You claim p (and maybe you argue for it). However, I think that p, (or your argument for p), is problematic. Here's my objection to p (or to your argument for p): q. What do you say in response to q?
4. Assistance. You claim p. I agree with you that p, but I think the following additional reason (which you do not mention) can be given in support of p: q.
5. Competing interpretation. You say that the reading claims that p. However, I don't think that this is exactly what it says. Instead, I think it says q (and here's why I think this).
6. Suggestion of parallels. You claim p. P (or your argument for p) reminds me of so-and-so's claim that q (or his argument for q). Are the two really similar? Does comparing p to q help illuminate p, or is it just misleading?

SYLLABUS CONTRACT

Click on that tab in our eCollege course shell, print your name on the contract, and return it to me in the dropbox provided by **Friday of Week 1**.

RESOURCES

I will post philosophy resource links under "doc sharing" and "webliography." Plan to use the www.chicagomanualofstyle.org link for documentation format and stylistic guidelines, or use the library or the Writing Center in the Department of Literature and Languages. For info, see <http://web.tamuccommerce.edu/academics/colleges/artsSciences/departments/literatureLanguages/writingCenter/>. Also, check out <http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/> for guidelines to Research and Documentation Online. For help in the library, please contact Craig Wheeler, Humanities Librarian, 903.886.5719, Craig_wheeler@tamuccommerce.edu and MSN Live: refhead@live.com

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

This course will be conducted within eCollege, which works best within a Microsoft Windows environment, and requires a high-speed internet connection (not dial-up). This means you should use a Windows operating system (XP or newer) and a recent version of Microsoft Internet Explorer (6.0, 7.0, or 8.0). The course will also work with Macintosh OS X along with a recent version of Safari (2.0 or better). eCollege also supports the Firefox/Mozilla (3.0 or better) on both Windows and Mac operating systems. It is strongly recommended that you perform a

“Browser Test” prior to the start of your course. To launch a browser test, login to eCollege, click on the ‘myCourses’ tab, and then select the “Browser Test” link under Support Services. To get started with the course, go to: <https://leo.tamu-commerce.edu/login.aspx>. You will need your CWID and password to log in to the course. If you do not know your CWID or have forgotten your password, contact Technology Services at 903.468.6000 or helpdesk@tamu-commerce.edu.]

CONTACTING eCOLLEGE FOR TECHNICAL SUPPORT

The following support options are available 24 hours a day / 7 days a week:

- **Help:** Click on the '*Help*' button on the toolbar for information regarding working with eCollege (i.e. How to submit to dropbox, How to post to discussions etc...)
- **Chat Support:** Click on '*Live Support*' on the tool bar within your course to chat with an eCollege Representative.
- **Phone:** 1-866-656-5511 (Toll Free) to speak with eCollege Technical Support Representative.
- **Email:** helpdesk@online.tamuc.org to initiate a support request with eCollege Technical Support Representative.

STATEMENTS TO STUDENTS REQUIRED BY THE UNIVERSITY AND THE DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE AND LANGUAGES

- **Retention statement for 1st Year Students:** Grades for students in freshmen level classes will be reported to the Registrar's Office at the end of the fifth week of class during the fall and spring semesters. The Registrar's Office will report grades to students, Advising Services, Academic Departments (faculty advisors) and mentors. This procedure will allow students to be knowledgeable about their academic progress early in the semester. The university, through Advising Services, faculty advisors and mentors, will take steps to assist students who may be experiencing difficulty to focus on improvement and course completion. Early intervention for freshman students is designed to communicate to students the University's interest in their success and willingness to participate fully to help students accomplish their objectives.
- **Notice TExES/TOPT Statement:** Students who plan to teach English, Spanish, or English as a Second Language in Texas public schools must pass the appropriate state certification tests. The Department of Literature and Languages grants approval to take the content-area tests, subject to the policies described at this URL: <http://faculty.tamu-commerce.edu/bolin/texas.html>
- **Behavior:** All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act Statement:** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for

reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the **Office of Student Disability Resources and Services, TAMU-C, Gee Library, Rm 132; call (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835; Fax (903) 468-8148; StudentDisabilityServices@tamu-commerce.edu**

- **Plagiarism:** *Plagiarism* is borrowing the work of others and not giving credit where credit is due. It is unethical and reflects very poorly on a person's character. In short, resist the temptation. Instructors in the Department of Literature and Languages do not tolerate plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. Instructors uphold and support the highest academic standards, and students are expected to do likewise. Penalties for students guilty of academic dishonesty include disciplinary probation, suspension, and expulsion. (Texas A&M University-Commerce Code of Student Conduct 5.b [1,2,3]). See the Plagiarism link at the tab in our eCollege course shell for more information.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: Introduction

8/27-8/31

Invitation to Philosophy, chapters 1 and 2.

1. Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?"
2. Bertrand Russell, "The Value of Philosophy."
3. James Rachels, "Some Basic Points about Arguments." **First RTPs and contracts due.**

These first three articles are posted on our site under doc sharing. The rest are in the *20 Questions* text.

WEEK 2: Knowledge

9/3-9/7

Invitation, chapters 3, 4, and 5.

4. Plato, "The Myth of the Cave"
5. Rene Descartes, "Meditations I and II"

WEEK 3: Knowledge

9/10-9/14

Invitation, chapters 3, 4 and 5.

6. John Locke, "Where Our Ideas Come From"
7. George Berkeley, "To Be is to Be Perceived"

WEEK 4: The Existence of God

9/17-9/21

Invitation, chapter 7

8. St. Thomas Aquinas, "Whether God Exists"
9. William Paley, "The Teleological Argument"

WEEK 5: The Existence of God

9/24-9/28*Invitation*, chapter 7

10. David Hume, "Why Does God Let People Suffer?"

11. William James, "The Will to Believe"

WEEK 6: Exam 1 due**10/1-10/5****WEEK 7: Ethics****10/8-10/12***Invitation*, chapter 8

12. Aristotle, "Happiness and the Good Life"

13. David Hume, "Morality is an Emotional Response"

WEEK 8: Ethics**10/15-10/19***Invitation*, chapter 8

14. Immanuel Kant, "Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals"

15. John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism"

WEEK 9: Social and Political Philosophy**10/22-10/26***Invitation*, chapter 11

16. Plato, "Does Might Make Right?"

17. Thomas Hobbes, "Justice and the Social Contract"

WEEK 10: Social and Political Philosophy**10/29-11/2***Invitation*, chapter 11

18. John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness"

19. Robert Nozick, "The Principle of Fairness"

WEEK 11: Exam 2 due**11/5-11/9****WEEK 12: Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art****11/12-11/16***Invitation*, chapter 9

20. Leo Tolstoy, "What is Art?"

21. Roger Scruton, "Art, Beauty, and Judgment"

WEEK 13: Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art

11/19-11/23

22. C. J. Ducasse, "What Does Beauty Have to do with Art?"

23. Noel Carroll, "Art, Practice, and Narrative"

WEEK 14: Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art**11/26-11/30**

Invitation, chapter 9.

24. Kathleen Higgins, "The Music of Our Lives"

25. Mary Devereaux, "The Male Gaze"

WEEK 15: Exam 3 due**12/3-12/7**