

DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE AND LANGUAGES

Texas A & M University - Commerce

Spring 2013

PHILOSOPHY 1301: Introduction to Philosophy**Section 21194**

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Office hours: virtual hours daily

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course we (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 basic questions like: What is philosophy? And what is the value of philosophy? We will address questions of *logic* like: What counts as sound reasoning? In *epistemology*, we address questions about knowledge: What counts as knowledge rather than just opinion? In *metaphysics*, we address questions about what exists: Does God exist? In *ethics*, we address questions of morality: On what basis should we make ethical decisions? In *social and political philosophy*, we address questions of collective morality: What is justice? How should power be distributed throughout society?

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. To acquire an overview of the field of philosophy and its major subfields (Logic, Epistemology, Metaphysics, and Axiology).
2. To distinguish arguments 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 distinguish between giving reasons and expressing feelings, thoughts, or beliefs.
5. To learn to identify, understand, analyze, evaluate, construct, and defend arguments regarding philosophical topics.
6. To develop writing skills with emphasis on clarity, organization, concision, coherence, and consistency.
7. To practice the virtues of intellectual and academic integrity: honesty, accountability, rigor, perseverance, and fairness.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Exploring Philosophy: An Introductory Anthology, 4th edition, edited by Stephen Cahn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). ISBN 978-0-19-979727-1.

You must have the book by week 1 or you will not be able to do week 1 assignments. The book is available for purchase or order through the TAMUC campus bookstore.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

Final grades will be based on 20 study question assignments (40%, 2 questions per assignment, 1 point per question, the 4 lowest assignment grades will be dropped), 3 exam essays (30%, 10 points each), and participation on online discussion board (30%, 1 point per post). Late assignments will not be accepted. Grading scale: (90-100 = A; 80-89 = B; 70-79 = C; 60-69 = D; below 60 = F).

STUDY QUESTION RESPONSES

Each week (except during exam week) we will read two articles from the text. After carefully reading the assigned readings, choose one study question at the end of each article, and write a consistent, coherent, grammatically correct, and complete response to that question. Copy the question you have selected into your assignment. Each study question response must be at least 5 sentences in length. Submit your study question responses (2 responses per week in one submission, about one page, single-spaced) to the appropriate basket in the dropbox in our course shell. Study question responses will be graded on their clarity and how well they demonstrate an understanding of the reading. Do not merely express your personal unconsidered or unsupported opinions, thoughts, feelings, or beliefs. Limit your use of first-person (for example, avoid expressions like "It is my opinion that," "I feel," "I believe," etc.). Explicitly refer to the readings and give reasons in defense of your answers as if you were making an argument. You must answer all parts of the question you select to earn credit. Study question responses are due no later than midnight on Sunday for that week and must be submitted to the appropriate basket in the dropbox as a word document attachment. See the schedule of assignments for due dates. Each study question response will count 1 point toward the final grade (2 per assignment). The lowest 4 study question response grades will be dropped (4 out of 24). No late submissions will be accepted.

EXAM ESSAYS

For each exam, you will select 2 essay questions from a list I will provide. Write a clear, coherent, grammatically correct, and consistent response to each question you select. Do not merely express your personal unconsidered or unsupported opinions, thoughts, feelings, or beliefs. Limit your use of first-person (for example, avoid expression like "It is my opinion that," "I feel," "I believe," etc.). Explicitly refer to the readings and give reasons in defense of your answers as if you were making an argument. You must write at least 250 words for each question to earn credit. Exam essays must be submitted as a word document attachment to the appropriate basket in the dropbox no later than midnight Sunday during exam week. Late submissions will not be accepted. Each essay question response will count for 5 points toward the final grade (10 points per exam). Your essay will be evaluated based on how well you follow the instructions below (1 points per criterion).

1. In your first sentence, present a clear, direct answer to the question you select.
2. Give clear and consistent reasons in defense of your answer.
3. Give clear reasons in support of every claim you make.
4. Explicitly refer to the readings in your response and answer all parts of the question.
5. Clearly demonstrate a thorough understanding of the reading.

ONLINE DISCUSSION BOARD

Each week I will post questions or comments for discussion in our course shell. You will earn 1 point of credit for each clear, thoughtful response or comment you submit up to 30 points. You may also post your own questions or comments on the readings or topics for that week. To earn credit, each post must be a new, thoughtful, and grammatically correct contribution to the discussion that questions or comments on current topics and moves the discussion forward. Repeats of other posts or rephrases of other posts will not earn credit. Post at least twice per week. Posts on that week's topic are due by midnight on Sunday for that week. Late posts will not earn credit.

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.
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).

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**.

EMAIL ETIQUETTE AND RESOURCES

Email me your questions at any time. Just give me at least 24 hours to respond. It is basic "netiquette" to always include a subject line, a greeting, and your name when sending emails. And please be as clear and specific as you can with your questions. I can't help you if I can't understand what you're asking.

The textbook companion site is at www.oup.com/us/cahn. This site has student resources, including a glossary of terms, self-test questions, suggested readings, and helpful links. I will also post links to resources in doc sharing and webliography. For help with writing, The Writing Center in the Hall of Languages 103 is open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, 9am-3pm; Tuesday 9am-2pm; Friday 9am-1pm. Also the Writing Center offers the Online Writing Lab, which can be accessed by sending an email to writing.TAMUC@gmail.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.

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.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

1/14-1/20

Monroe and Elizabeth Beardsley, "What is Philosophy?"

Plato, "Defense of Socrates"

Discussion board posts

WEEK 2: THE VALUE OF PHILOSOPHY

1/21-1/27

Bertrand Russell, "The Value of Philosophy"

Plato, from *The Republic*, pp.680-685 in Cahn text.

Discussion board posts

WEEK 3: REASONING

1/28-2/3

Wesley Salmon, "The Scope of Logic"

Stephen Barker, "Improving Your Thinking"

Discussion board posts

WEEK 4: REASONING

2/4-2/10

Morris Cohen and Ernest Nagel, "Fixing Belief"

Carl Hempel, "Scientific Inquiry"

Discussion board posts

WEEK 5: EXAM 1 DUE

2/11-2/17

Discussion board posts

WEEK 6: KNOWLEDGE

2/18-2/24

A.J. Ayer, "What is Knowledge?"

Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"

Discussion board posts

WEEK 7: KNOWLEDGE

2/25-3/3

Robert Nozick, "Conditions for Knowledge"

Bertrand Russell, "Appearance and Reality"

Discussion board posts

WEEK 8: GOD

3/4-3/10

Ernest Nagel, "Does God Exist?"
Richard Swinburne, "Why God Allows Evil"
Discussion board posts

WEEK 9: SPRING BREAK
3/11-3/17

WEEK 10: GOD
3/18-3/24

Michael Scriven, "Faith and Reason"
Robert McKim, "The Hiddenness of God"
Discussion board posts

WEEK 11: EXAM 2 DUE
3/25-3/31

Discussion board posts

WEEK 12: MORAL THEORY
4/1-4/7

James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"
Tom Regan, "How Not to Answer Moral Questions"
Discussion board posts

WEEK 13: MORAL THEORY
4/8-4/14

Onora O'Neill, "Kant's Ethics"
Louis Pojman, "Assessing Utilitarianism"
Discussion board posts

WEEK 14: MORAL THEORY
4/15-4/21

Bernard Mayo, "Virtue Ethics"
Christine Vitrano, "Happiness and Morality"
Discussion board posts

WEEK 15: SOCIAL JUSTICE
4/22-4/28

John Rawls, "A Theory of Justice"
Robert Nozick, "Distributive Justice"
Discussion board posts

WEEK 16: EXAM 3 DUE 5/5