

Introduction to Philosophy

Phil 1301-06

This is a revised syllabus to reflect the cancelled week of classes after Hurricane Harvey.
It replaces the original syllabus. Revisions are in red.

Instructor: Dr. Benjamin Mitchell-Yellin

Location: CHSS 242A

Time: M-F 2:00-2:50pm

Office hours: W 11:00am-1:00pm, and by appointment

Office: CHSS 356

Email: bmy@shsu.edu

Course description and objectives

Together in this class we will consider a number of philosophical questions, such as:

What is a person and how should one live?

Is murder wrong because God says it is?

What is justice?

Is America headed for tyranny?

What would the ideal society look like?

We will be thinking through these questions with the father of Western philosophy, Plato. Our goal is to arrive at more informed answers to these questions, all the while developing our skills at critical reflection and discussion. The course does not presume any prior experience with philosophy. It only requires an active mind and serious engagement with the material.

This course is a part of the EWCAT program. This means we will be reading original texts and incorporating Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) discussions into the course schedule.

The course objectives are:

1. Improved ability to read philosophical texts, as measured by in-class reading quizzes and short writing exercises.

2. Improved ability to think critically and analyze arguments, as measured by participation in classroom discussions and performance on written assignments.
3. Improved writing skills, as measured by performance on written assignments and responsiveness to feedback.

Texts

There are two required texts for the course.

1. Plato, *Five Dialogues* (trans. Grube, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981)
2. Plato, *Republic* (trans. Grube, rev. Reeve, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992)

You may purchase these books at the bookstore or online. Please use these translations.

There will also be two readings posted on the Blackboard site for the course.

Make sure to have the assigned texts with you in class each day.

Assignments and grades

There are three kinds of graded assignments for the course.

- (1) *In-class participation*: You are expected to attend every class meeting and actively participate. Active participation can take many forms—for example, asking or answering questions, participating in small group discussions, actively taking notes, nodding along attentively with the discussion, and more. Of particular importance are the PLTL sessions. These will require you to come prepared to discuss the topics assigned for that day. You are expected to contribute to discussion on these days. (More on this below.) (20% of final grade)
- (2) *Short writing exercises*: These will be assigned at various points throughout the course. They will serve several purposes: prompting reflection on the course material, providing an initial starting point for class discussion, assessing understanding of the readings and lectures, helping to develop ideas for longer writing assignments. They will be graded for content as complete/incomplete. There are no make-ups for these assignments. (20% of final grade)
- (3) *Essays*: There will be two essay assignments for the course. Each will be a 3-5 page paper responding to an essay prompt passed out in advance. They will be graded according to a rubric, which will also be provided in advance. Their

due dates are on the course schedule, below. (30% of final grade for each essay)

This course satisfies the requirements for being listed as “writing enhanced” by providing you with the opportunity to write as a means to thinking critically about the material and to receive regular feedback on your writing. We will hold an in-class writing workshop for each of the two essays, which will allow you to incorporate my and your classmates’ feedback when completing these writing assignments. Evaluation of your written work will account for 80% of your final grade.

Final letter grades for the course will be based on the following percentages:

A	90% - 100%
B	80% - 89.99%
C	70% - 79.99%
D	60% - 69.99%
F	59.99% or below

Peer-Led Team Learning

There will be eight PLTL sessions throughout the term. These are a central part of the EWCAT experience and are central to this course. *They are not to be missed.* PLTL sessions are special discussion sections between you and your peers, supervised and evaluated by students who have taken this (or a similar course) in the past. The aim of these sessions is to provide you with the opportunity to engage in discussion of the course material with your peers and in the absence of the instructor. In preparation for these sessions, you will receive a reading assignment and/or a list of discussion questions. The peer leaders will evaluate you on your participation in the discussion, your preparedness, and your contribution level. (There are many ways to contribute to a lively discussion and of demonstrating your preparedness to do so.) They will report back to the instructor so that these evaluations may be incorporated into your participation grade for the course. The guiding idea behind PLTL sessions is that they are a space for you to explore the course themes in detail amongst yourselves and to take greater ownership of your learning experience in the course.

Policies

Class time is for discussion of the course material. Some of the topics covered in the course may be sensitive and some of the positions controversial. Our discussion of these issues will reflect an awareness of the diversity of viewpoints that merit serious and respectful consideration by all.

Please keep all cell phones in your bags or pockets. Anyone using a phone during class will be asked to put it away.

Laptops or tablets may be used *for note taking and reference to reading assignments only*.

Repeated misuse of phones, computers or other mobile devices in class will result in the student being asked to leave class—an *unexcused absence*. This may result in loss of participation points or a missed short writing assignments. (Please don't make me ask you to leave class!)

Class attendance is essential and required. Absences may be excused with proper documentation, as determined by the instructor. In-class short writing assignments may not be made up, but excused absences will lower the total number of such assignments that go into figuring out your overall average for the course at the end of the term.

I will not accept late assignments. To repeat: *No late assignments will be accepted in this course*. Once again: ***You cannot receive credit for late work***. If you plan on missing class on a day an assignment is due, please turn it in early. *I will always accept assignments prior to the due date, provided we have already begun covering the relevant material in class*. If you plan on being sick around the time an assignment is due, complete it and turn it in early. If you plan on going on vacation around the time an assignment is due, complete it and turn it in early. If you plan on visiting your family around the time an assignment is due, complete it and turn it in early. If you plan on sleeping in on a day an assignment is due, complete it and turn it in early. If you plan on caring for a sick friend on a day an assignment is due, complete it and turn it in early. ... You get the idea. **NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

Plagiarism in any form will not be permitted and will be handled according to University policy.

For further information about university policies regarding academic dishonesty, absences for religious holidays, disability accommodations and visitors, please see: <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>. This course will follow all applicable university policy on these matters.

Schedule

Week One

Wed., Aug. 23: Syllabus review

Fri., Aug. 25: Read “Platonically Irrational” (<https://aeon.co/essays/what-plato-knew-about-behavioural-economics-a-lot>)

Week Two

~~Mon., Aug. 28: Read *Euthyphro*~~

~~Wed., Aug. 30: No new reading~~

~~Fri., Sept. 1: Read *Apology*~~

Week Three

Mon., Sept. 4: No class (Labor Day Holiday)

Wed., Sept. 6: **Read *Euthyphro***

Fri., Sept. 8: **Read *Apology***

~~12th Class Day~~

Week Four

Mon., Sept. 11: Read *Republic*, Book 1

Wed., Sept. 13: No new reading

Fri., Sept. 15: No new reading

12th Class Day

Week Five

Mon., Sept. 18: Read *Republic*, Book 2

Wed., Sept. 20: No new reading

Fri., Sept. 22: *PLTL Session 1*

Week Six

Mon., Sept. 25: Read *Republic*, Book 3

Wed., Sept. 27: No new reading

Fri., Sept. 29: *PLTL Session 2*

Week Seven

Mon., Oct. 2: Read *Republic*, Book 4

Wed., Oct. 4: No new reading

Fri., Oct. 6: *PLTL Session 3*

Week Eight

Mon., Oct. 9: Read “Shipping Out” (posted on Blackboard)

Wed., Oct. 11: No new reading

Fri., Oct. 13: First Essay Workshop

Week Nine

Mon., Oct. 16: Read *Republic*, Book 5

First Essay Due

Wed., Oct. 18: No new reading
Fri., Oct. 20: *PLTL Session 4*

Week Ten

Mon., Oct. 23: Read *Republic*, Book 6
Wed., Oct. 25: No new reading
Fri., Oct. 27: *PLTL Session 5*

Week Eleven

Mon., Oct. 30: Read *Republic*, Book 7
Wed., Nov. 1: No new reading
Fri., Nov. 3: *PLTL Session 6*

Week Twelve

Mon., Nov. 6: Read *Republic*, Book 8
Wed., Nov. 8: No new reading
Fri., Nov. 10: *PLTL Session 7*
(Last day for a “Q drop”)

Week Thirteen

Mon., Nov. 13: Read *Republic*, Book 9
Wed., Nov. 15: No new reading
Fri., Nov. 17: *PLTL Session 8*

Week Fourteen

Mon., Nov. 20: Read *Republic*, Book 10
Wed., Nov. 22: No class (Thanksgiving Break)
Fri., Nov. 24: No class (Thanksgiving Break)

Week Fifteen

Mon., Nov. 27: Read “[Sullivan article](#)” (posted on Blackboard)
Wed., Nov. 29: No new reading
Fri., Dec. 1: Final Essay Workshop

Final essay due by Mon., Dec. 4 at 3:30pm