

PHIL 1301 - 10 | Introduction to Philosophy

Spring 2017

Dr. Harris B. Bechtol

Class Time: 3:00-3:50 PM College of Humanities and Social Sciences 120

Office Hours: MWF 2:00-3:00 PM and by appointment CHSS 360

Office Location: College of Humanities and Social Sciences 360

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Introduction To Philosophy. 3 Hours.

A general examination of the fields and issues of philosophy as discussed by both classical and modern philosophers. Philosophical problems discussed include the existence of God, the nature of knowledge and truth, the issue of human free will, and theories of moral judgement.

COURSE INTRODUCTION

This course is designed as an introduction to the history of Western philosophy with specific interest in the themes of life, death, and learning to live. What can mortality, finitude, and the universal law that each of us will die teach us about learning to live now? This is the orienting question of this course. Not only will we learn about the different facets of this question, but we will also explore a number of answers to this question. The goal is to introduce students to some of the major figures in philosophy with particular interest in how these philosophers have answered the question of the course. We will move historically through the history of philosophy beginning with some of the pre-Socratic philosophers and ending with the 21st century French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Through this historical survey, students will not only engage with difficult philosophical texts but also have the opportunity to understand the world and their place in it through many different perspectives. For this learning process to be effective, the course will consist of careful reading (on average 30 pages per week), listening to lectures, openness to learning, respectful discussion, and critical writing.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2011. ISBN-13 978-0226026749

Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* and Other Essays. Translated by Justin O'Brien. First Vintage International Edition, 1991. ISBN-13 977-0679733737

Plato, *Five Dialogues*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube 2nd Edition. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002. ISBN-13: 978-0872206335

Seneca, *On the Shortness of Life: Life Is Long if You Know How to Use It*. Translated by C.D.N. Costa. New York: Penguin Books Great Ideas, 2005. ISBN-13 978-0143036326

Schedule, topics, and assignments are subject to change at the discretion of the Instructor.

Readings on Blackboard
COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Students will learn about major philosophers and themes in the history of philosophy.
2. Students will learn how to read and interpret difficult philosophical texts and display these skills in writing about these texts.
3. Students will learn the philosophical practice of self-reflection based on their readings.
4. Students will learn many ways to embrace their finitude, the transience of things, and the loss of others in their life.

COURSE WORK

The basis for your grade is as follows:

(1) Reading Quizzes	20 points (2 points each)
(2) Four Essays	80 points (20 points each)
Total Possible Points	100 points

1. Attendance/Reading Quizzes: Considering that we are reading philosophy, coming to class for lectures and discussion is paramount because often times the reading is difficult to understand. Often only through participation in class (i.e. listening, taking notes, asking questions, and talking during discussion) do the texts begin to make sense. **As an incentive to help you remember to come to class, we will have unannounced reading quizzes periodically throughout the semester. We will have more than 10 quizzes throughout the semester, but I will only count 10 of the quizzes that we have.** If you miss class, it is your responsibility to acquire any information and notes that you may have missed. Get these from your peers. Once you have acquired notes from class, I would be happy to discuss any questions that you may have about the information covered on that day.
2. Assignments: This is a “W” course, which means that at least 50 percent of your course grade will derive from writing activities designed to help you master course objectives. For this course, 80 points out of the 100 points in the course will come from writing. Your essays may be submitted early in draft form so that you can revise your work. You should approach writing in this course as a tool to use as part of your learning as well as a tool that I will use to assess your level of learning. All essays will be turned in to TurnItIn through Blackboard. For these essays,, make-up work or extensions must be pre-approved. Extensions are only granted for *extenuating* circumstances. **Late assignments will not be accepted except with university excused absences or in rare cases at the instructor’s discretion.**

All work, unless otherwise stated, must be typed with 12-point font, Times New Roman, double spaced and 1-inch margins all around. Give yourself enough time to proofread and edit your papers. Format should conform to MLA or Chicago style guidelines. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

Below are the prompts for each of the essays. Each essay must be answered in 2-3 pages. See below for due dates:

- a. **ESSAY #1** — Heraclitus sought out himself in his inquiry on the nature of things. Explain how the images of the fire, river, and especially the bow are integrally connected to this search and inquiry by elaborating on the Heraclitean theme of life/death. Lastly, how does the theme of life/death in all of this speak to your own experience?
- b. **ESSAY #2** — Explain how Socrates and Plato both saw philosophy as a way of life by drawing on Socrates' idea that "the unexamined life is not worth living" and Plato's idea that philosophy is preparation for death and dying. Drawing on this explanation, if you were put in Socrates's shoes—on trial for your life—how would you summarize and defend your own life?
- c. **ESSAY #3** — Pick either Epicurus or Seneca in order to compare and contrast his ethical theory with Aristotle's ethical theory. You must write on Aristotle, but then you can choose to either write on Epicurus or Seneca. Compare and contrast each philosopher's definition of the good life by paying special attention to how each says that we should approach death, mortality, and our finitude. Which approach do you think could help lead to the good life in today's culture?
- d. **ESSAY #4** — Pick two of the three philosophers covered in this last section—Heidegger, Camus, and Derrida—in order to compare and contrast the way that they suggest we should accept our fate and finitude. And which of the two philosophers chooses speaks especially to your own experience of your finitude?

GRADING

Your final grade will be determined based on the above requirements. Late assignments will not be accepted unless I tell you otherwise. Grade equivalents are as follows:

A 89.5-100 B 79.5-89 C 69.5-79 D 59.5-69 F 59.4-0

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Weeks			Sections, Themes, and Readings	Essay Due Dates
Weeks 1-2	W	8/23	Course Introduction -Introductions -Syllabus -Departmental Pre-Test -"How to Read Philosophy" (Blackboard)	

Schedule, topics, and assignments are subject to change at the discretion of the Instructor.

Weeks 3-4	M	9/4	Pre-Socratic Section — Life/Death -Heraclitus Fragments (Blackboard)	
Weeks 5-7	M	9/11	Socrates-Plato Section — Self-Examination and Immortality -Plato, “Apology” (<i>Five Dialogues</i>) -Plato, “Phaedo” (<i>Five Dialogues</i>)	Essay #1 due Week #5
Weeks 7-12	M	10/16	Aristotle and Roman Section — The Goodlife and Mortality -Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> -Epicurus, “Letter to Menoeceus” (Blackboard) -Seneca, <i>On the Shortness of Life</i>	Essay #2 due Week #7
Weeks 12-15	M	11/6	Postmodern Section — Embracing Finitude -Martin Heidegger, “Being-Toward-Death” (Blackboard) -Albert Camus, <i>Myth of Sisyphus</i> -Jacques Derrida, “Learning to Live Finally” (Blackboard)	Essay #3 due Week #12
Week 16	M	12/6	Final Essay #4	

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

A college philosophy class is a serious undertaking. Each one of you deserves a classroom environment that is most conducive for your learning. Cell phones must be turned off or turned to silent. The use of computers for taking notes is allowed, but only for the purpose of taking notes. **Use of the computer for any other purpose will result in having to put the computer away for the remainder of the semester.** You may drink an appropriate beverage in class, and if you need to eat something in class, choose something that is not disruptive. Do not begin preparing to leave class before the end of the class session. I will be keeping my eye on the clock.

ADA POLICY STATEMENT

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Lee Drain Annex (telephone 936-294-3512, TDD 936-294-3786, and e-mail disability@shsu.edu). They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so

that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Services for Students with Disabilities and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Services for Students with Disabilities. For a complete listing of the university policy, see: <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>