

Introduction to Philosophy Syllabus

PHL 1301W
Credit hours: 3

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Course Description: 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 judgment. Through close reading of several philosophical and philosophically relevant literary texts, we will meditate on and discuss a number of perennial questions that continue to occupy philosophers today. These include questions about the role of technology in our lives, alternative worldviews and relativism, the meaning and purpose of life, the breakdown of morality in the modern world, the ideal community, the relation of mind and body, the limits of knowledge, the possibility of free will, the significance of modern scientific discoveries for our lives, the existence of God, the problem of evil, the religious life, and the plausibility of political commitment under contemporary conditions. Our goals are (1) to gain a deep understanding of the ideas formulated by some of the greatest minds of all time, (2) to develop skills of critical thinking to enable us to assess ideas, and (3) to develop, challenge and defend our own personal philosophy.

Stated Objective: Gaining a broader understanding and appreciation of the intellectual and cultural activity of philosophy.

Implied Objectives: Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view; developing a clearer understanding of, and commitment to, personal values; and acquiring an interest in learning more by asking questions and seeking answers.

Required Texts: Note: I have indicated ISBN numbers so that you may purchase these texts via reasonably priced avenues:

Chinua Achebe, <i>Things Fall Apart</i> (A)	ISBN: 9780385474542
Fyodor Dostoevsky, <i>The Grand Inquisitor</i> (GI)	ISBN: 9780872201934
Charles Guignon, <i>The Good Life</i> (GL)	ISBN: 9780872204386
Martin Heidegger, <i>Discourse on Thinking</i> (DT)	ISBN: 9780061314599
Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>Twilight of the Idols</i> and <i>The Anti-Christ</i> (TI)	ISBN: 9780140445145
Richard Rorty, <i>Achieving Our Country</i> (AC)	ISBN: 9780674003125

Other texts will be made available electronically on the course page.

This is a “W” course, which means that at least fifty percent of the grade will derive from writing activities designed to help you master course objectives.

Course Requirements and Grading: The best introduction to philosophy is actually to engage in the activity of philosophy—this means that we will be doing, rather than merely talking about, philosophy. In keeping with the centuries old tradition of doing philosophy, you are encouraged to think along with me during the lectures. Stop, read, listen, think, read some more. To these ends, your fullest possible attention will be required. You are encouraged to “get lost” in the assigned texts: read them multiple times, make notes in the book margins, question what the work wants us to think about, try to understand why I chose the reading for this class—all of these directives will prepare you to engage legitimately in the class discussion. The class discussion page will assist you in these endeavors. Relevant contributions will count toward your attentiveness and participation grade.

Two short (4-6 page) papers will fall due at various points throughout the semester. Topic options for these papers will be distributed at least one week in advance. **No late papers will be accepted.** You must submit all required work in order to pass this course.

Finally, there will be a timed, comprehensive final exam. I will distribute study questions for the exam at least two weeks in advance, though you might anticipate the nature of these questions as we proceed through the readings by thinking about the directives listed above. No make-up exam will be offered. Familiarize yourself with the date-range of the exam and be there.

The following distribution of credit will be used in calculating your final grade:

Attentiveness* and Participation	25%
Combined average of short papers	50%
Final exam	25%

*NB: I use the word *attentiveness* in contrast to the word *attendance* so as to distinguish prepared and visible engagement in the discussions that we will have from mere bodily presence. Your engaged participation in discussion board exchanges will assist you in getting through the material. Given the remote nature of this online course, participation in discussion will be my tangible evidence for determining this portion of your grade.

Departmental Grade Policy:

As of the fall semester 2009, only grades of C or better (A, B, or C) will be counted toward the student’s major in Psychology or Philosophy.

Institutional policies and requirements regarding Q-drops, dates of religious observance, academic dishonesty, disabilities accommodations, etc., may be found at the following link: <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/> Please familiarize yourself with the policies.

STANDARD POLICIES: I have extracted from the full statement a key element as a reminder of the policy in its entirety, but the student must download the posting on SHSU

Online to have the full policy statement. Here are the six standard policy matters: (1) NOTICE TO PERSONS WITH A DISABILITY: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Counseling Center. There will be no retroactive accommodations. (2) ACADEMIC DISHONESTY: Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. (3) CLASSROOM RULES OF CONDUCT: Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. (4) COURSE EVALUATIONS: In accordance with University policy, students will have an opportunity near the end of the semester on a set day and time to complete a course evaluation.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments (subject to modification at Instructor's whim! Keep abreast of changes as they occur!):

Session One: Introductory remarks, **SAKS pre-test**.

Session Two: Heidegger, "Memorial Address" (DT, 43-57).

Session Three: A traditional worldview, the question of cultural relativism. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (A), all

Session Four: Nature and other people. *Good Life*, chapters 1, 17, 22, 23 (GL, pp. 1-9, 211-226, 281-293). **First critical reflection paper falls due.**

Session Five: The pursuit of happiness. *Good Life*, Introduction excerpts, chapters 10 and 13 (GL, vii-xv, 132-142, 173-182).

Session Five: The death of absolutes. Nietzsche, excerpts from *Gay Science* (GL, chapter 18, pp. 227-240).

Session Six: Self-mastery. Plato, excerpts from *Republic* (GL, Chapter 2, pp. 10-21 and "Allegory of the Cave", electronic version available).

Session Seven: What can I know? Descartes, "First Meditation", "Second Meditation", and Thomas Nagel, "How do we know anything?" (both available electronically).

Session Eight: Mind-Body dualism. Descartes, excerpts from *Passions of the Soul* (GL, pp. 143-148). **Second critical reflection paper falls due.**

Session Nine: Determinism vs. Free Will. Derk Pereboom, "Determinism al dente" (on course page).

Session Ten: The existence of God. Anselm, "Ontological Argument" and Aquinas, "Five Ways" (both available on Blackboard), Pascal's "Wager" (lecture notes).

Session Eleven: Proofs of God's existence and The Problem of Evil. Dostoevsky, *Grand Inquisitor* (GI, pp. xxix-xxx, 1-19).

Session Twelve: The Religious Life. Dostoevsky, *Grand Inquisitor* (GI, pp. i-xxviii and 19-80).

Session Thirteen: The Post-Modern Turn. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (TI, pp. 39-122). **Third critical reflection paper falls due.**

Session Fourteen: Political Involvement. Rorty, *Achieving Our Country* (AC, pp. 3-38, 75-107, 125-140).

Session Fifteen: Course wrap-up. **SAKS PostTest.**

Session Sixteen: Final Exam