

Introduction to Philosophy  
Philosophy 1301  
Online Writing Enhanced  
Sam Houston State University  
Fall 2017

Instructor:

Charles Royal Carlson, PhD

Office: CHSS 340

Virtual Office Hours: 2-4pm Tuesday and Thursday

Face to Face Office Hours: Available by appointment

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Required Textbook:

L. Vaughn and L. Pojman, (2016) Philosophy: The Quest for Truth Tenth Edition, New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780190254773

Catalogue 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. Credit 3.

Class Description:

This is an introductory course in philosophy. The objectives of the course are for students to read, think, discuss, and write about complex philosophical topics in a thoughtful and critical way. We will consider many of the central issues with which philosophers have grappled for millennia, and we will encounter some very different approaches to engaging in philosophical inquiry. Along the way we will examine topics including: the nature of the human mind and what we can know about it, the nature of morality and moral knowledge, free will and moral responsibility, the existence of God and the problem of evil, self identity, the nature of truth and claims of certainty, as well as broader applied questions about the proper function of government and what it means to be a citizen. For each topic, students should be able to identify prominent positions and arguments associated with a given topic and develop, articulate, and defend their own views on the matter at hand.

Student Learning Outcomes and Skill Objectives:

1. The student will come to understand the arguments of key figures in the Western Philosophical tradition.

Learning outcome: learning fundamental principles, generalizations, and theories

Skill objective: Critical Thinking—The point of the course is to examine arguments for contrasting positions on classical and contemporary philosophical issues. The arguments are to be critically evaluated from the standpoint of the acceptability of their premises and the cogency of the inference they present. In addition to studying the competing arguments of the sources they encounter, students will be required to present arguments

for their own views on the issues with a clear logical structure and with premises that are arguably acceptable and that are strongly relevant to the conclusion.

2. The student will develop skills explaining and evaluating the ideas of the various philosophers studied.

Learning outcome: developing skill in expressing oneself in writing

Skill objective: Communication—The paper assignments will require written communication that displays an accurate understanding of the course material and a developed view of the issues. Students are expected to participate in class discussion by raising questions, presenting alternatives, and offering reasons pro and con, and to display the structure of their premises and the steps of inference that lead to a conclusion.

3. The student will come to have a more examined approach to the beliefs one holds.

Learning outcome: learning to analyze and critically examine ideas, arguments, and points of view; acquiring an interest in learning more by asking one's own questions and seeking answers

Skill objective: Personal and Social Responsibility—By examining the variety of ethical theories, students can begin to recognize that alternative points of view may have some validity. However, in the end each must choose an ethical stance and articulate what their reasoning is for it, and Personal Responsibility requires that someone be able to give a reasoned explanation for their decisions. Furthermore, the ability to give a reasoned explanation for recommending one policy over another is a core skill for Social Responsibility. In pursuit of this, it is helpful to realize the variety of fundamentally different ways politics and society have been conceived, for example, in relation to what genuine justice requires.

#### Writing Enhanced:

This is a “W” course, which means that a minimum of 50 percent of your course grade must derive from writing activities designed to help you master course objectives. This class meets this requirement as the Reading Summaries and Philosophical Exercises account for 40 percent of the grade and roughly 25% of the grade for the exams are from the written short answer and essay portions of the exams. Some writing activities will require you to draft and revise your work, with or without instructor feedback. You should approach writing in this course as a tool to use as part of your learning as well as a tool your instructor will use to assess your level of learning. This course satisfies the requirements for being listed as “writing enhanced” by providing all students with the opportunity to receive feedback on drafts of Reading Responses, and because the Philosophical Exercises allow students an ongoing place to practice clarifying and making good written arguments as well as to receive low-stakes feedback from other students - to which they may respond.

#### Office Hours and Appointments:

It is important that students feel comfortable to meet with me outside of class time about any issue pertaining to the course. I will be available for virtual office hours two days a week. There is a link in the main menu of our course page. Should students choose to contact me by e-mail remember to use appropriate etiquette. If our conversation requires

a face to face meeting please send me an email with some available times and we can work to schedule something. Having a phone conversation is often the easiest to schedule for hours outside of the posted office hours. If you would like to schedule a phone call please send me a number where you can be reached and times when you will be available to take my call. I check my email only once a day and do not check it outside of business hours, on the weekends, or during holidays.

#### Grading Policy:

It is also important that you feel comfortable asking questions about the grades I assign to your work. You should feel free to discuss with me any issues you have about graded materials, but are encouraged to first take a close look at the assignment, the comments the grader has provided, and reread what you wrote. If you would like to discuss your grade you are encouraged to arrange a meeting with me to do so, either virtual, in person, or telephonically.

#### Grading:

1<sup>st</sup> Exam: 20%

2<sup>nd</sup> Exam: 20%

Final exam: 20%

Reading Summaries: 20%

Philosophical Exercises: 20%

#### Grading Scale:

A 90-100%

B 80-89%

C 70-79%

D 60-69%

F Below 60%

#### Three Exams: (20% of final grade each, 60% total)

The content of the three exams will be derived from both the lectures and the assigned readings. Most of the questions will be in a multiple-choice format. There will also be some short answer and essay at the end. Potential essay questions will be distributed along with a general study guide a few days before the exam. Study groups are encouraged. I'll host an online study chat before each exam.

#### Four Reading Summaries: (5% of final grade each, 20% total)

Four times during the semester, two pages of explanation and analysis will be due. These papers will briefly summarize and then comment on one of the assigned readings. *You are able to choose any of the readings assigned during the time period as your subject.* The list of available articles to choose from can be found on our course page under the 'Reading Summaries' option on the course menu.

The task is to summarize the reading and then provide some commentary on what you found interesting in the reading and to elaborate on the point. It helps to break your Responses into a Summary portion and a Commentary portion. Try to get about 75%

summary and 25% commentary. The due dates for these assignments are listed on the course schedule. I will gladly take a look at drafts of these assignments up until three days before they are due. Minimum word count 500 words.

Reading summaries will remain invisible until the due date at which point they will become available to the whole class to aid in preparation for exams and writing papers. Summaries are due on Blackboard at 10pm of the day listed on Course Schedule below. When submitting, place your summary in the text box rather than attaching a document.

#### Four Philosophical Exercises: (5% of final grade each, 20% total)

This assignment has two parts.

Part One: For these exercises you will be given a writing prompt and will have the length of the session to construct a response. Express your thoughts on the issue and make an argument supported by reasoning and explaining how you derive your conclusion. These are not research papers, but your own philosophical thoughts on the issue. It is a chance to do some real philosophical work on a question. You should have completed the assigned readings and watched the assigned lectures before beginning the assignment. Along with a thoughtful response, *connecting your response to the assigned reading and demonstrating comprehension and understanding of the philosophical issue being discussed* is the key to receiving a high mark on this assignment.

Part Two: Once you submit your answer to the philosophical exercise you will be able to see everyone else's response to the prompt. The second part of the assignment is to respond to two of your fellow classmates answers to the question. Help them make their case by pointing out inconsistencies and drawing out unstated aspects of another person's argument. Connecting to the assigned readings and lectures in your responses is also a good way to help you get a high mark on the assignment. Your answer to the prompt will be worth up to 3 points, and 1 point is earned for each thoughtful and cordial response you make providing analysis of someone else's position. You can earn up to 5 points of extra credit for each exam by making extra responses other than the two required, as long as they are high quality and connect to the course material (either the lectures or the assigned readings) Be nice to each other: rudeness, ad hominem attacks, and arguments inappropriate for an academic setting will result in the loss of points. That being said, argument and disagreement is not only ok, but expected. Just make sure that you do so in a proper philosophical manner that is mindful and respectful of the beliefs, opinions, and cares of others - particularly if they are different from your own. Part 1 of the assignment is due at 10pm on the day listed on Course Schedule below. Part 2 is due three days later. Part One answers should be at least a page (250 words), and should be no longer than 5 pages (1250 words). Your responses to other posts should be at least a paragraph, 3-4 sentences, but can be as long as you like. Just make sure you are kind, helpful, and give a charitable reading of each other's answers to the question. Advance the argument, provide reasons for your positions, and try to connect it your posts to the course material.

#### Academic Integrity:

I am passionate about the prevention of cheating on all assignments, and it is a point of emphasis for online educators in particular. I have many procedures and techniques in place to ensure that it is more profitable for you to spend the time learning the material than it is to spend time trying to beat the system. All submitted written work is processed through plagiarism software to identify similarities between what you have submitted, the entire internet, and what has been submitted in other classes. I have several other methods that identify disingenuous effort. If you play by the rules you will not even notice that these things are there. Be assured that the best way to get a good grade is to do the work: complete the readings, watch the lectures, spend time in discussion with your fellow classmates, and work on the exam study guides until the material falls out of your memory on prompting. I am confident that if you do these things you will find this course intellectually stimulating and that you will be satisfied with the rewards of your effort. If you cheat however, I highly doubt you will enjoy the course and you can expect a failing grade in the course. It is also worth noting that Blackboard tracks everything you do in the course including the amount of time you spend watching lectures and how often you log in. I sincerely want you to succeed in this course and am not without sympathy or understanding. If you feel that you have run out of time or for some other reason feel compelled to submit plagiarized work - DONT. Contact me and we will work something out.

### **Course Schedule**

All of the readings are from the textbook unless it is indicated otherwise. In those cases supplementary readings will be posted through Blackboard. Most sessions are one week long, but a few are two weeks long. Sessions end on Sunday night and new sessions become available after midnight. Please keep in mind this is not a final reading schedule; changes may be incorporated during the semester and will be announced on the course page, and through the class announcements tool. It is incumbent on you to keep abreast of any changes to the reading schedule that might occur as we go along.

#### Session 1: Introduction

*August 23rd – September 3rd*

What is Philosophy? – pg 1-6

Plato – Socratic Wisdom, pg 27-38

Plato – The Allegory of the Cave, pg 39-42

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading Summary Due September 3<sup>rd</sup> at 10pm**

#### Session 2: Why Be Moral?

*September 4th -10th*

Plato – Gyges Ring, pg. 454-460

Louis Pojman - Egoism and Altruism: A Critique of Ayn Rand, pg 461-466

Jean Paul Sartre - Existentialist Ethics, pg 548-555

Alison M. Jaggar – Feminist Ethics, pg 528-538

**1<sup>st</sup> Philosophical Exercise Due September 10th at 10pm**

**Part 2 of Assignment due September 13th at 10pm**

Session 3: Ethical Theory Part 1

*September 11th -17th*

Epicurus – Moderate Hedonism, pg 631-636

John Stuart Mill – Utilitarianism, pg 493-500

Immanuel Kant – The Moral Law, pg 480-493

**2nd Reading Summary Due September 17th at 10pm**

Session 4: Ethical Theory Part 2

*September 18th -24th*

Aristotle: The Ethics of Virtue, pg 508-518

Emmanuel Levinas – Ethics of the Face (on blackboard)

Epictetus – Stoicism, pg 637-646

**2nd Philosophical Exercise Due September 24th at 10pm**

**Part 2 of Assignment due September 27th at 10pm**

Session 5: Proofs for the Existence of God

*September 25th – October 8th*

Thomas Aquinas – The Five Ways, pg 60-63

St. Anselm's Ontological Argument, pg 102-105

Blaise Pascal and his Wager – pg 142-146

**First Exam Opens Wed, Oct. 4th at noon and Closes Thurs, Oct. 5th at 10pm**

Session 6: Evil

*October 9<sup>th</sup> -15th*

John Hick – There is a Reason Why God Allows for Evil – pg. 128-132

Schopenhauer's pessimism – (reading posted on Blackboard)

Soren Kierkegaard – Faith and Truth, pg. 178-182

William James – The Will to Believe, pg 151-159

**3<sup>rd</sup> Reading Summary Due October 15th at 10pm**

Session 7: Knowledge

*October 16<sup>th</sup> – 22nd*

Rene Descartes – Cartesian Doubt and Foundational Knowledge, pg. 192-200

John Locke – The Empiricist Theory of Knowledge, pg. 200-212

Thomas Nagel - What is it Like to be a Bat? pg 341-349

**3<sup>rd</sup> Philosophical Exercise Due October 22nd at 10pm**

**Part 2 of Assignment due October 25th at 10pm**

Session 8: Truth

*October 23<sup>rd</sup> - November 5th*

Bertrand Russell – The Correspondence Theory of Knowledge, pg 230-235

William James – The Pragmatic Theory of Truth, pg. 235-244

Richard Rorty – Dismantling Truth, pg. 244-252

**Second Exam Opens Wed, Nov. 1st at noon and Closes Thurs, Nov. 2 at 10pm**

Session 9: Self Identity

*November 6<sup>th</sup> – November 12<sup>th</sup>*

John Locke – Our Psychological Properties Define the Self, pg. 376-383

David Hume – We have no Substantial Self with which we are identical, pg. 383-386

**4<sup>th</sup> Reading Summary Due November 12<sup>th</sup> at 10pm**

Session 10: Free Will and Determinism

*November 13<sup>th</sup> – November 19<sup>th</sup>*

Baron d'Holbach – We are Completely Determined, pg. 395-400

Harry Frankfurt: Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person, pg 419-428

William James – The Dilemma of Determinism, pg 400-410

**4<sup>th</sup> Philosophical Exercise Due November 19<sup>th</sup> at 10pm**

**Part 2 of Assignment due November 22<sup>nd</sup> at 10pm**

Session 11: Social and Political Philosophy

*November 20<sup>th</sup> – December 1<sup>st</sup>*

John Stuart Mill – Government Must Promote Freedom, pg. 591-597

John Rawls – The Contemporary Liberal Answer, pg. 598-607

Robert Nozick – Against Liberalism, 608-617

Martin Luther King Jr – Nonviolence and Racial Justice, pg 618-621

**Final Exam: Available Tuesday, December 5<sup>th</sup> at noon and closes Wednesday,  
December 6<sup>th</sup> at 10pm**

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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 four points of particular note:

- (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.