

Phil 301: Introduction to Philosophy
Spring 2016
TTH 12:30-1:45

Instructor: Brian Miller
Email: brianmiller@utexas.edu
Office: WAG 411
Office hours: TH 2:00-4:00

Teaching Assistants:

Brad Saad
Email: bradsaad@utexas.edu
Office: WAG 421
Office Hours: M 3:00-5:00

Gleb Domnenko
Email: g.domnenko@utexas.edu
Office: BRB 2.116
Office Hours: T 3:00-5:00

Course Description

This course is an introduction to some central issues in philosophy and to the methods that philosophers use to address those issues. We'll be asking three sorts of questions:

Metaphysical questions: What sorts of things exist, and what is the fundamental nature of those things?

Epistemological questions: What is knowledge? What is required in order to obtain knowledge? What should I believe?

Ethical questions: What is valuable in life? How should I act? How should we organize the political institutions in our society?

Course Materials

All readings will be made available through Canvas.

Evaluation

Student performance will be evaluated using papers and pop-quizzes.

1. First Paper — around 1100 words, 25 points
2. Second Paper — around 1100, 25 points
3. Term Paper — around 1500 words, 35 points
4. Pop Quizzes — 5 quizzes worth 3 points each = 15 points

Quizzes: The quizzes will be quick and typically pretty easy, provided that you are present in class, have done the reading, and are paying attention to the lecture. They will typically be a surprise, but I might tell you that one is coming up. I might even tell you what the questions will be.

Papers: I will provide prompts for each of the papers. If you would prefer to come up with your own prompt then you are welcome to do so, but **YOU MUST CLEAR IT WITH ME FIRST**. I'm not trying to crush your creativity here. It's just that picking a good topic for a paper — not too big, not too small, not involving some confusion — is an art in itself and I'd hate for you to get off on the wrong foot.

All papers must be submitted through Canvas. All papers will be graded blind, meaning that the grader will not know whose paper they are grading. For that reason, **PLEASE DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME OR OTHER IDENTIFIER ON YOUR PAPER**. Why is this important? It helps to avoid implicit bias and ensure fair grading.

Pace of the Course

We will do our best to work at whatever pace we find comfortable. As such, the reading list below is subject to revision and I will use Canvas updates (and in-class announcements) to keep you on track with all assigned readings. It is crucial that you understand how to access Canvas and that you check it regularly. This is the Canvas homepage at UT: [Succeeding in the Course](#)

You'll find that the readings are generally short (I've done this intentionally). They will, however, require careful study. Be sure to read the relevant text before class and I suggest reading it again sometime shortly after. You will want to focus on finding the arguments on offer and then thinking critically about them — this is something I'll be helping you with throughout the course.

Tyler Burge, a prominent living philosopher, offers the following words of wisdom concerning the study of philosophy:

Whatever the reader's background and interests [...] I offer this council, firmly and insistently: patience. Patience is a primary virtue in philosophy. Genuine understanding is a rare and valuable commodity, not to be obtained on the cheap. One cannot reap philosophy's rewards breathlessly, or by looking for the intellectual equivalents of sound bites. Very large claims are at issue here, claims that bear on understanding some of the matters most important to being human. Understanding requires investing time, close reading, and reflection.

Participation

You are encouraged to ask questions and to discuss the readings. The best way to learn philosophy is by doing philosophy, and part of doing philosophy is talking philosophy. Come to class ready to talk and don't rely on others to carry the weight. Try answers on for size. Very often progress is made by

first putting a bad answer on the table and then getting an idea of what is wrong with it and how it could be improved upon. Offering a “baD” answer doesn’t make you bad at philosophy or mean you are being dumb or dense. Some of the most important works in philosophy were merely conversation starters, and some of the best and smartest philosophers have offered really “bad” answers to certain questions.

Here are some examples of fantastic questions:

“I don’t understand what you just said. Would you please explain it again?”

“You just claimed that X, but I don’t see why I should believe X. What can you say to convince me?”

“You just drew conclusion Y from premise X, but I don’t see how X supports Y. What can you say to convince me?”

“I’ve lost the forest for the trees. Can you zoom out and tell me how this small point that we’ve been discussing fits in to the larger issues?”

And here is a list of every stupid question I’ve ever been asked:

[blank — there are no stupid questions]

Helpful Resources

Professor James Pryor (NYU) has two helpful guides for reading and writing philosophy. They can be found at:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

and

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Phones and The Laptops

You are welcome to use your laptop, tablet or phone to take notes or to consult the day’s readings. If you must do other things with your devices — text, email, check Facebook — then please sit in back so that you don’t distract the more serious students. If your device usage is disruptive then you will be asked to put that device away or to leave.

University of Texas Honor Code

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. Instances of plagiarism will be reported to the University, and maximum penalties will be sought. For information regarding what constitutes plagiarism, see the following website:

http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php

Students should be aware that all required writing assignments will be submitted to a plagiarism-detection tool such as [Turnitin.com](http://turnitin.com). Turnitin is a software resource intended to address plagiarism and improper citation. The software works by cross-referencing submitted materials with an archived database of journals, essay, newspaper articles, books, and other published work. In addition, other methods may be used to determine the originality of the paper. This software is not intended to replace or substitute for the faculty member's judgement regarding detection of plagiarism.

University Policy on Use of Email

Email is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence; therefore, you are responsible for reading your e-mail for university and course-related information and announcements. You are responsible to keep the university informed about changes to your e-mail address. You should check your email daily to stay current with university-related communications, some of which may be time-critical. You can find UT's policies and instructions for updating your email address at

<http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.php>

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement at the Services for Students with Disabilities: phone: 512-471-6259, video phone: 512-232-2937, or online through their website:

<http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd>

Course Schedule:

The following schedule will be revised as we go along. Any changes will be announced in class and via Canvas. Please complete the readings for the date listed.

Week 1: Introduction

1/19 Introduction. What is philosophy and why is it worth studying?

- No reading

1/21 Arguments: believing for reasons; organizing those reasons into arguments; induction vs deduction; soundness and validity; common fallacies

- No reading

Metaphysics

Week 2: Is there a god?

1/26 Cosmological Argument, Teleological Argument

- Aquinas: ‘The Five Ways’ (focus on the *Second* Way)
- Clarke: ‘The Cosmological Argument’
- Paley: ‘Natural Theology’ p. 9-14

1/28 Teleological Argument (cont’d), Ontological Argument

- Paley: ‘Natural Theology’ p. 21-24 (stop at “I. In order to exclude...”)
- Anselm: ‘Proslogion’ sections 2, 3, 4, 15, and the reply from Guanilo

Week 3: Is there a god?

2/2 Pascal’s Wager

- Pascal: ‘Pensees’ (selection)

2/4 Problem of Evil

- Mackie: ‘Evil and Omnipotence’
- optional: Swinburn: ‘Why God Allows Evil’

Week 4: Free Will

2/9 Introduction: the problem of free will

- Kane Ch. 1 sections 4-6

2/11 Compatibilism

- Kane Ch. 2

Week 5: Free Will (cont’d)

2/16 Incompatibilism

- Kane Ch. 3

2/18 Libertarianism

- Kane Ch.4

Epistemology

Week 6: Free Will, Analysis of Knowledge

2/23 Free will and moral responsibility

- Kane Ch. 8
- Frankfurt: ‘Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility’

2/25 Knowledge = Justified True Belief

- Plato: ‘Theatedus’ (selection)

First Paper due 2/28

Week 7: Analysis of Knowledge, Cartesian Skepticism

3/1 Knowledge \neq Justified True Belief

- Gettier: ‘Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?’

3/3 External World Skepticism: Three Arguments for Skepticism

- Descartes: ‘First Meditation’
- Ungraded homework assignment: go watch ‘The Matrix’, but don’t bother trying to take Keanu Reeves seriously as an actor.

Week 8: Cartesian Skepticism

3/8 External World Skepticism: First Steps; the Cogito

- Descartes: ‘Second Meditation’

3/10 External World Skepticism: Descartes’s Theory of Ideas, Rationalism

- Descartes: first four paragraphs of Meditation 3, all of Meditation 4

Spring Break 3/14 – 3/18

Week 9: External World Skepticism

3/22 External World Skepticism: Completing the Anti-Skeptical Project

- Descartes: ‘Sixth Meditation’ (selection)

3/24 Hume’s theory of ideas, Empiricism

- Hume: ‘Enquiry II, III’

Week 10: Skepticism about Induction

3/29 Hume’s Skeptical Argument

- Hume: ‘Enquiry IV’

3/31 Hume’s ‘Skeptical Solution’

- Hume: ‘Enquiry V’, ‘Enquiry VII’

Second Paper Due 4/3

Week 11: Hume on Testimony, Minds Playing Tricks

4/5 Hume on Testimony and Miracles

- Hume: 'Enquiry X'

4/7 Minds Playing Tricks: illusion and implicit bias

- Saul: 'Skepticism and Implicit Bias'

Ethics

Week 12: Origins; Subjectivism and Relativism

4/12 Where does morality come from?

- Plato: 'Euthyphro' (selection)

4/14 Subjectivism and Relativism

- Rachels: 'Subjectivism in Ethics' (selection)
- Rachels: 'The Challenge of Cultural Relativism' (selection)

Week 13: Ethical Theories

4/19 Utilitarianism

- Mill: 'Utilitarianism' (selection)

4/21 Deontology

- Rachels: 'Are There Absolute Moral Rules?'

Week 14: Ethical Issues

4/26 The Scope of Moral Obligation

- Singer: 'The Trolley Problem'

4/28 Trolley Problems

- Thomson: 'The Trolley Problem'

Week 15: Political Issues

5/3 Justice

- Rawls: 'A Theory of Justice' (selection)

5/5 Justice

- Nozick: 'Justice and Entitlement'

Term Paper Due 5/5