

PHIL 151-001 Introduction to Philosophy
Syllabus – keep handy for reference

Spring 2022

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Office hours: MTR 11-12, or by appointment

Texts:

Fundamentals of Philosophy, 8e, by Stewart, Blocker, and Petrik (Prentice-Hall)

Overview and objectives:

This course is designed to introduce you to some of the fundamental methods and problems of philosophy, and some possible solutions to those problems. In many cases it will seem as though there is more than one solution to these problems. Please don't take that to mean that there is no such thing as right and wrong. The point is that you must learn to come up with the right answer yourself. When we see two or more competing answers it means that we must develop criteria for, and skill at, determining which is most coherent. Philosophy literally means the love of wisdom, and it has also been described as the science of wonder. Philosophy is an unusual discipline in that part of its subject matter is itself. More concretely, though, we can say that philosophy concerns itself with *fundamentals*: about reality, knowledge, morals, justice, and art. (See Part 1 of your textbook.) The objectives of the course are twofold: (a) that you gain a familiarity with some of the key questions, methods, and thinkers in the field, and (b) that you come to develop a sense of yourself as a participant in the grand dialogue of philosophy.

Requirements:

First, you are required to do all the assigned readings prior to class, so as to be able to comment on them if called on, and to ask intelligent questions about things you didn't understand or things that merit further discussion. Besides the readings in your textbook, there will be additional readings posted on-line, or made available via class handouts. There may also be films assigned for viewing at home.

Second, you are required to attend the class. A large portion of the learning that will go on is a function of the unique real-time dynamic of a college class. The word "attend" here connotes "attentiveness," not merely presence. Hopefully you will find the class sufficiently exciting that you will prefer not missing it, and will come prepared and alert. In any case, absences in excess of three will result in reduction in your grade, as will disruptive behavior or excessive lateness. If you do have to miss class, it is your responsibility to get the notes, and any announcements or additional assignments, from a classmate.

Third, there will be two midterm exams weighted 30% each and a comprehensive final exam weighted 40%, subject to the adjustments noted above.

Fourth, try to observe some of the ground rules of civilized society: Anything with an off switch should be off (as should, ideally, hats), eat and drink quietly and discreetly, don't read the newspaper or do homework for another class, don't go to sleep. You are not to

use your phone, laptop, or tablet during class. Disruptive behavior will result in your being asked to leave. Conversely, constructive participation will be rewarded. Please be attentive to the distinction between *criticizing an idea* and *personal attacks*. Disagreement is productive, angry fighting is not.

Outline (subject to change):

Following partly the organization of the textbook, I have broken the course into six units. The first unit is about what philosophy is, how it works, and why it is important.

The second unit is concerned with an inquiry into what is *real*.

The third unit is about how it is we can know, and what knowledge is.

The fourth unit deals with the existence of God (or gods).

The fifth unit is concerned with questions of right action and virtues of character, and also the more fundamental question of why we should be moral in the first place.

The sixth unit, as time allows, will consider the applications of these concepts to art and to politics.

Tentatively, I'd like to proceed thus:

Jan 20 - general intro to course/syllabus (via zoom; in-person instruction begins 1/24)

Jan 25-27 – Part 1 of textbook

Feb 1-3 – Part 1 continued (with some consideration of Part 2), Part 3

Feb 8-10 – Part 3, begin Part 4

Feb 15-17 – T: Part 4 Th: conclude Part 4; review

Feb 22-24 - T: First Midterm Exam Th: review; begin Part 6

Mar 1-3 – Part 6

Mar 15-17 – Part 5

Mar 22-24 - Part 5

Mar 29-31 – T: review Th: Second Midterm Exam

Apr 5-7 – T: review Th: Part 7

Apr 12-14 – Part 7

Apr 19-21 - Part 8

Apr 26-28 – T: Part 8 Th: review

May 5th, 8:00 am - Final Exam

Other notes:

*Check the corresponding Blackboard site regularly.

*If you're finding the subject matter interesting, consider getting involved with the BSU Philosophy Club, which is student-run and meets regularly. They publish a journal as well. You might also consider the advantages of Philosophy as a major. It offers excellent preparation for a variety of careers, especially law, public policy, and management.

*The department maintains a web site, which contains links to useful resources, fun philosophical diversions, and information about coming events of potential interest. Go to <https://studentbridgew.sharepoint.com/sites/Philosophy> and have a look around!