

PHIL 1301
Introduction to Philosophy
The University of Texas at Tyler
Course Syllabus
Spring Semester 2020

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I. Required Readings:

- Jonathan Barnes, *Aristotle: a Very Short Introduction*.
- Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method & Meditations on First Philosophy*.
- Plato, *Five Dialogues*.
- Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Dionysiac Worldview." [I will supply this in PDF format.]
- Brief, supplemental handouts and texts, as assigned (if assigned).¹

II. Course Description:

The course description from the official university catalog is: "A survey of the major areas of traditional and modern philosophy: philosophies of knowledge, ethics, logic, aesthetics, and metaphysics."

It is inevitable, however, that within this general description, additional emphases and nuances will be supplied as a result of the particular convictions held by the instructor of the course. In the present case, I intend to impress upon students the inevitability of perspective, predisposition, and what might be called "tilt" or "slant." One my particular "slants" is the importance of historical awareness for philosophy. To that end, I hope to lead students in a journey of self-discovery in which they come to see that *every assumption they have, itself has a history*. This history can be identified (to some extent), questioned, and evaluated.

III. Course Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. articulate a basic understanding of specific questions of philosophy and their importance;
2. recognize strong and weak arguments;
3. identify philosophical themes in contemporary / popular culture;
4. identify, historically situate, and critique several assumptions which seem "natural" to you;
5. describe how philosophical thinking is relevant to your everyday life;
6. explain the significance of the life and death of Socrates;
7. say something profound and compelling about Plato's epistemology and theory of the Forms;
8. say something profound and compelling about Aristotle's theory of the good life;
9. identify, question, and evaluate specific assumptions they have together with their histories.

IV. Grading Scale Percentages:

A=90-100%; B=80-89%; C=70-79%; D=60-69%; F=less than 60%

¹ NB. When it comes to required reading, I take the "less is more approach." I am confident that you will find that I assign less reading than average for an intro to philosophy course. Therefore, you have no excuse not to get the reading done before the date assigned.

V. Grading:

Paper:	100 points.
Final Exam	100 points.
Participation: ²	100 points.
Total:	300 points.

VI. Assessment:

A. *Mid-semester Paper.* For this paper students will select a pericope or section of text, included in the required reading for the course, and discuss it philosophically. The pericope can be any number of pages; there is no lower or upper limit on the number of pages included. It could be a section or a chapter within the Aristotle book; it could be the entirety of the Nietzsche essay (which is relatively short).

By “discuss it philosophically,” I mean that at least the following must be achieved in the paper: 1) identification of the pericope addressed; 2) interpretation and / or summary of it; 3) an articulation of what it is about the particular section of text that interests you; 4) a statement of agreement or disagreement or some combination thereof, or the adoption of some other stance with respect to the text (such as interrogation, or pointing out an inconsistency, or drawing out an implication); 5) give reasons for 4) and justify or argue for that position.

Papers must be at least 7 ½ pages long (double-spaced; 12 point font; Times New Roman; 1 inch margins), or at least 2250 words. Plagiarism will automatically receive a failing grade of zero.

The paper must be submitted on Canvas. I do not accept papers submitted on email or Google Drive. If a student has problems submitting in on Canvas, then I will accept a physical copy of the paper, submitted to me at the beginning of the class on the date on which it is due.

In addition, in the first third of the semester (roughly) the student will submit an “essay exercise” which will count as the equivalent of a quiz grade (see footnote 4 below). This exercise is designed to help you prepare to write the paper. Due date TBD. I will ask for the following as a part of this exercise.

- A one-sentence thesis statement.
- An outline.
- An abstract (no more than 200 words).

² This portion includes the students’ quizzes (including the “essay exercise”) and class participation (including attendance).

• Rubric for papers.

90-100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong argument or case made for philosophical connections. • Excellent philosophical analysis and understanding demonstrated. • Very creative. • Many references to the texts used in the course. • Excellent grammar, structure, and style. • Excellent citations and bibliography.
80-89%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good argument or case made for philosophical connections. • Good philosophical analysis and understanding demonstrated. • Somewhat creative. • Some references to the texts used in the course. • Good grammar, structure, and style. • Good citations and bibliography.
70-79%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argument is weak or brief. • Philosophical analysis barely scratches the surface. • Not very creative. • Only one or two connections made with the course texts. • Poor grammar, structure, and style. • Weak citations and bibliography.
60-69%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major weaknesses or shortcomings in argument. • Possibly did not meet the minimum word count. • May not have made any connections with the course texts. • Little to no philosophical analysis. • May have struggled with citations and bibliography.
0-59%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seriously flawed--probably did not follow instructions. • Plagiarism (intentional or unintentional) merits a 0%

B. *Final Exam.* The exam is worth 100 points and will be a blend of types of questions, consisting of three sections.

- Section 1 will require three one-paragraph answers.
- Section 2 will require three one-sentence answers.
- Section 3 will require three fill-in-the-blank or “circle the correct option” answers.

C. *Participation.*³ Students will be graded on the quality and quantity of in-class participation. In class students should be contributing to a positive classroom environment and engaged with the topic. This means that students should pay attention, ask questions, and offer their own opinions on a daily basis, which should, in the process, demonstrate that the student has read and thought about the material before coming to class (this is partly an I-have-demonstrated-that-I-have-done-the-reading grade). Students who sleep, text, or just chat with their neighbors about other things will be penalized. Students who sit quietly, contributing nothing to discussions, will also be penalized. Disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated, but this does not preclude disagreement. Disagreement must be civil. See classroom conduct notes in the addendum below.

Note: If you never speak in class, you will probably not make an A in this class!

³ I am indebted to Professor Gregory Bock for help with this entire syllabus, but especially for this section of it.

In addition to the general class participation grade, based on the rubrics below, students can expect 3 in-class quizzes, the dates of which will be unannounced.⁴ (These are “pop-quizzes.”) I do not plan on allowing students to “make up” a missed quiz due to an unexcused absence. The quiz component of your class participation grade is about half (46%), and the non-quiz component of your class participation grade is about half (56%).

- Rubric for (the non-quiz component of) class participation.

90-100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class contributions are informed by an excellent grasp of the reading. • The student's opinion is well-reasoned and supported. • Contributions are made in every in-class meeting. • Makes connections with other readings in the course. • Willingness to disagree with fellow students respectfully. • Conveys open-mindedness to the opinion of others.
80-89%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class contributions are informed by a good grasp of the reading. • The student's opinion is adequately reasoned and supported. • Contributions are made at least once a week. • May not make connections to other readings in the course. • Fear of disagreement with other students. • Lack of open-mindedness to the opinions of others.
70-79%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of the reading may be undemonstrated deficient in some way. • The student's opinion may not be supported well. • Critical thinking may not be demonstrated. • Contributions to class discussion made less than once per week. • Disagreement expressed in a hostile way. • Complete absence of open-mindedness to the opinion of others.
60-69%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students who simply remain silent in class earn a 60%. • Verbal communication fails to demonstrate grasp of the reading. • Critical thinking completely absent. • Student may be disruptive, regularly late to class. • Student may be distracting others by (e.g.) surfing the internet. • Student may talk too much about unrelated things or work on other tasks.
0%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No participation.

VII. Reading Schedule (in chronological order).

Unit 1. Plato, *Five Dialogues* (selected dialogues).

Unit 2. Barnes, *Aristotle: a Very Short Introduction* (selected chapters).

Unit 3. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (entire).

Unit 4. Nietzsche, “The Dionysiac Worldview” (entire).

⁴ There will be three quizzes (I will drop your lowest quiz grade), plus one “essay exercise” which will count as the equivalent of one quiz grade.

VIII. Dates.

- Mid-semester Paper: due at the beginning of class on Wednesday, March 11.
- Final Exam. This date is set not by the professor, but by the University. Hence, it is your responsibility to check the university website. Typically this date is “nailed down” about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way through the semester.

IX. Course Ground Rules.

- Attendance Policy.* Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class. Students are allowed two unexcused absences. I reserve the right to penalize the student 5 points per day against the participation grade, for any unexcused absence above and beyond two.
- Late Work.* Papers must be uploaded to Canvas by the deadline. Late papers are penalized half a letter grade per day.
- Communication with the instructor.* The best way to communicate with the instructor outside of class is through email or during office hours. Students can expect replies within 48 hours excluding weekdays and holidays.
- Class conduct.* See the rubrics for class participation. Although by its very nature philosophy can “make people hot under the collar,” the opportunities for personal growth in this class are boundless. Remember the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”
- Final Grades.* Grades are final once the final grade percentage has been posted in Canvas at the end of the semester. No changes will be made unless the instructor has erred. Grades are not bumped up unless the student is within 0.5% of the next letter grade. The granting of “incomplete” status is at the instructor’s discretion, and must be made at least one week before the last day of class. No “incomplete” will be granted to any student with an average below a “C” at the time of request.
- Additional student expectations.*
 - Students will check email regularly.
 - Students will email the instructor with questions.
 - Students will not wait until the end of the semester to discuss lower than expected grades on assignments; instead, students will take the initiative early in the semester to meet with the instructor to discuss ways of improving.
 - Students will meet with the instructor during office hours or by appointment if extra help is needed on assignments.
 - Students will complete assignments on time.
 - Students will participate in class discussions in a civil and respectful way.
 - Students will not cheat on tests.
 - Students will not plagiarize. (If you have any doubt about what counts as plagiarism, ask!)
 - Students will declare that they have read and understood this syllabus by including a statement of this effect in a self-introduction post that will be posted to the discussion board “Meet Your Classmates” during the first week of class.

IX. Important, Miscellaneous Information.

- Disability Statement.* If you have a disability, including a learning disability, for which you request accommodation, please contact Ida MacDonald in the Disability Support Services office so that the appropriate arrangements may be made. In accordance with federal law, students requesting accommodation must provide documentation of his or her disability to the Disability Support Services Counselor. For more information, call or visit the Student Services Center located in the University Center, Room 282. 903.566.7079.

- B. *Social Security Statement.* It is the policy of The University of Texas at Tyler to protect the confidential nature of social security numbers. The University has changed its computer programming so that all students have an identification number.