THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER

Course Syllabus

Summer 2023

PHIL 1301: Introduction to Philosophy
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Required Textbooks:

Reading materials are provided for free (OER) in Canvas.

Catalog Description:

A survey of the major areas of traditional and modern philosophy: philosophies of knowledge, ethics, logic, aesthetics, and metaphysics.

Course Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to…
1. articulate the basic terms, methods, and questions of philosophy.
2. explain the importance of philosophy.
3. explain the job description and responsibilities of a philosopher.
4. identify key figures in the history of epistemology.
5. discuss the connection between certainty and knowledge.
6. explain the tenets of empiricism.
7. compare and contrast Eastern and Western theories of reality.
8. compare and contrast Eastern and Western theories of the self.
9. articulate and critique arguments for the existence of God.
10. discuss whether human nature is self-oriented or other-oriented.
11. describe the nature of true happiness.
12. explain the nature of human virtue.
13. discuss the idea of a social contract.
14. explain the basis for property rights.
15. explain and evaluate theories of justice.

Grading Scale Percents:

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

Grading:

Initiator Posts (5 @ 100 points each):   400 points (lowest dropped)
Response Post Assignments (5 @ 10 pts each): 40 points (lowest dropped)
Reading Quizzes (5 @ 10 points each):   50 points
TOTAL: 490 points

Assessment:

Discussion Board Assignment: You'll make a minimum of six contributions to the discussion board in each module: 1 initiator post + 5 response posts = 6 total posts (minimum). These posts will be spread out over three days, for example: 1 initiator post on Friday night, 2 response posts on Saturday, and 3 response posts on Sunday. In other words, you must post on three separate days while the board is open.

> INITIATOR POSTS: You'll write one initiator post per module. An initiator post is one that starts a thread based on the discussion prompt on the discussion board. A good post will offer a clear point of view and make connections to the readings, demonstrating your understanding of the reading material.
>
> The post must be at least 300 words. There's no maximum word count, but keep in mind that grades are not based on quantity of words but on demonstrated comprehension and critical thinking. The grading rubric below shows exactly what is expected.
>
> If you only use course material to quote from, quotation marks and parenthetical citations are enough, for example: Plato says, "yada, yada" (Plato, online). If students use even one outside source – like the excellent Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy – a reference list for *all* sources must be included at the end of the post and must follow Chicago Manual of Style (CMS). See here for CMS examples, and see below for how proper citations affect the grade. I expect multiple references in your post to course readings.
>
> You must post first in order to view other posts. The edit function will be disabled. If you want to edit after posting, you may reply in the thread with corrections or request that I delete the post. There must be a very good reason for deletion. For grading purposes, I consider your first post to be the initiator post even if it is blank or incomplete.
>
> Late initiator posts can be turned in for a lower grade before the board officially closes. A late penalty of half a letter grade per day applies in each case unless accompanied by a valid excuse (e.g. a doctor's note that indicates a serious illness).

DISCUSSION BOARD RUBRIC (INITIATOR POSTS)	
0-25 points	Explanations of philosophical ideas are clear and accurate, and points of view are well-defended.
0-25 points	Multiple connections made to readings from the module.
0-25 points	Conveys respect for other points of view even if it takes a contrary position.
0-25 points	Grammar is polished, and citation style conforms to Chicago Manual of Style.

Additional points will be deducted for late initiator posts. No late initiator or response posts are accepted after the board closes.

RESPONSE POSTS: In addition to initiator posts, you'll write at least five response posts for each module (for a total of 6 weekly contributions: 1 initiator post + 5 response posts = 6). A response post is one that replies to a classmate's post and continues the conversation. One that ends the conversation or just says "I agree" in so many words does not qualify as a response. Good posts carry on the conversation in an interesting and relevant way and draw other students into the discussion. The minimum requirements for receiving credit for a response post are the following:

1. The post is 50 words.

2. The post is relevant to the thread.

3. The last sentence is a question.

Posts under 50 words don't count toward the required number of response posts. If you happen to post a few that are under 50 words, just make sure to post a few extra posts that are 50 words.

If some of your posts don't end in a question, a deduction of **1 point** will be applied to the response post grade.

The penalty for not spacing out your posts over three days will be applied to the response post grade as a **3 point** deduction.

Late response posts will not be accepted. Once the board closes, there are no further opportunities to complete the assignment, so it's advisable to post early to avoid unforeseen events such as last-minute technical problems. Encountering technical issues is not a valid excuse for late work unless the issues are the university's fault.

The discussion board is the focus of this class, the main learning tool (notice the percentage of the grade). I will be active on the boards and hope to be involved in some rich conversations. Be sure to return regularly to the threads to reply to questions and comments, especially in your own thread. Learn how to search for posts, including mine, by using the search function on the board. When I reply to a post, I often take a contrary position as devil's advocate. My response to your posts should be interpreted as "constructive" and an opportunity to strengthen your argument. It doesn't mean that I don't like you or that I have a different viewpoint from yours. In fact, it is nearly impossible to figure out my personal beliefs from my posts. If I express a point of view, I do so for teaching purposes, to help you think more carefully about your own position and to extend the conversation. By the way, it is possible to get an A in this class and disagree with my personal beliefs. It happens quite regularly.

Cases of plagiarism earn an automatic zero and a possible F in the course. Plagiarized posts may be sent to UT Tyler Judicial Affairs to receive additional consequences. In short, do your own work, and be careful to give credit to the original author when you quote or paraphrase.

Quizzes: Reading quizzes are included in each module and cover the readings in the module. The topic of each quiz can be found on the quiz page. The quizzes may contain objective (e.g. T/F) or short-answer question. The quizzes are "open book" but timed. You must not receive help from the Internet or someone else while you are taking the quiz.

Tentative Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

Module 1: Philosophy in and of Itself

Overview: This module explores the purpose and tools of philosophy and illustrates the practice of philosophy in the life of Socrates.

Learning objectives: upon completing this module, students will be able to…

1. articulate the basic terms, methods and questions of philosophy;
2. explain the importance of philosophy;
3. and explain the job description and responsibilities of a philosopher.

Module 2: Epistemology

Overview: This module explores important questions and issues related to knowledge and knowledge acquisition, including questions related to religious belief.

Learning objectives: upon completing this module, students will be able to…

1. identify key figures in the history of epistemology,
2. discuss the connection between certainty and knowledge,
3. and explain the tenets of empiricism.

Module 3: Metaphysics

Overview: This module explores questions related to reality and the philosophy of religion.

Learning objectives: upon completing this module, students will be able to…

1. compare and contrast Eastern and Western theories of reality,
2. compare and contrast Eastern and Western theories of the self,
3. and articulate and critique arguments for the existence of God.

Module 4: Ethics

Overview: This module explores ideas of moral goodness.

Learning objectives: upon completing this module, students will be able to…

1. discuss whether human nature is self-oriented or other-oriented,
2. describe the nature of true happiness,
3. and explain the nature of human virtue.

Module 5: Political Philosophy

Overview: This module explores questions of justice and political organization.

Learning objectives: upon completing this module, students will be able to…

1. discuss the idea of a social contract,
2. explain the basis for property rights,
3. and explain and evaluate theories of justice.

Course Policies:

Late work policy: Assignments must be submitted by the deadline. A penalty of half a letter grade per day up to two letter grades will be assessed for late papers. This penalty will be waived only under special circumstances (e.g. a serious illness accompanied by a doctor's note). Late discussion board posts are not accepted after the board closes.

Communication policy: The best way to communicate with the instructor is through UT Tyler e-mail (gbock@uttyler.edu) or in Canvas. Students can expect replies within 48 hours, excluding weekends and holidays. Students who do not receive a reply within this timeframe should attempt to contact the instructor again. The instructor communicates with the class via

Canvas emails and announcements. It is important that students check their email and allow push notifications for class announcements.

Class conduct policy: The subject matter of this class can make some people hot under the collar. This said, all comments and behavior must be classroom appropriate. What does "classroom appropriate" mean? It does *not* mean that students cannot express unpopular opinions. It means practicing reasoning and logical argumentation. It means being civil and listening with respect. Insults, snide comments, name-calling, cutting someone off, derogatory tones, sarcasm, ridicule, cussing, vulgarity, personal attacks, racial slurs, misogynistic remarks, etc. will not be allowed. If you are unsure about what counts as disrespectful, consult the instructor or the Golden Rule. The instructor will act as the final word on what is or is not classroom appropriate. Violators may be ejected from the class.

Cell phone policy (face-to-face sections): Mobile devices can be used in the classroom if it is related to what is going on in class. If you have an electronic textbook or plan to take notes on your device, please let me know early in the semester. They are permissible as long as they don't distract you or your classmates from the lesson.

Arriving late or leaving early policy (face-to-face sections): Arriving on time can sometimes be challenging, but it is better to be late than never. However, late arrivals and early departures can be disruptive to others in the classroom. For this reason, please don't make a habit of it.

Extra credit policy: Extra credit is available in the class but only on discussion boards and only when they're open. Extra points can be earned by posting extra response posts that satisfy the basic requirements of response posts (see the requirements above). After you've posted the minimum number of qualifying response posts (5), each extra post (up to five more) will receive one point. By the way, five points of extra credit is equivalent to 50% of one reading quiz.

"It is what it is" final grade policy: 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 made a mistake. Grades are not bumped up unless the student is within .5% of the next letter grade. For example, an 89.5% is an A. An 89.4% is a B. No extra credit opportunities will be given during finals week. The conditions for an "incomplete" are stated in the university handbook: "(a) the student has been making satisfactory progress in the course; (b) the student is unable to complete all course work or final exam due to unusual circumstances that are beyond personal control and are acceptable to the instructor; and (c) the student presents these reasons prior to the time that the final grade roster is due." The terms and deadline for satisfying an "incomplete" will be set by the instructor.

UT TYLER HONOR CODE

I embrace honor and integrity.
Therefore, I choose not to lie, cheat or steal, nor to accept the actions of those who do.