

PHIL 1000H – INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY (HONORS)

University of Georgia
Fall Semester 2009
Tues/Thurs, 3:30-4:45

* The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

The point of philosophy is to start with something so simple as not to seem worth stating, and to end with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it.

-- Bertrand Russell

Instructor: Dr. Bryan Baird

Office: 23 Peabody Hall

Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 2:00–3:00 (and by appointment)

Office Phone: 2-2823 (Philosophy Department Office—leave a message for me)

Email: bnbaird@uga.edu

Required Texts:

Robert C. Solomon, *Introducing Philosophy: A Text with Integrated Readings*, 9th ed.

Suggested Source Material:

[Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)

[Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)

Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Main Library, 1st floor. *Main Ref B51 .R68 1998*

Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Main Library, 1st floor. *Main Ref B41 .E5 1972*

Course Description:

What is philosophy? There is no simple answer to the question of the nature of philosophy, something that itself is subject to philosophical disagreement. Because philosophy as a discipline covers so much ground, it is likely that a person can obtain a clear idea of what philosophy is only by reading it, thinking about it, talking about it, and studying it. So, by the end of this course, rather than at its beginning, you should have a pretty clear idea of what philosophy is. Nonetheless, more can be said about the nature of philosophy in a preliminary way by considering its **methodology** and **content**.

Philosophical method. A method is a systematic procedure used to satisfy or achieve some end. So, in order to talk about methods of doing philosophy, we need to talk about the aim or goal of philosophy. A twentieth-century American philosopher has this to say about the aim of philosophy: “The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term.” Put more concisely, the aim of philosophy is to understand how everything hangs together. What this “everything” amounts to will be discussed when we deal with the content of philosophy, but one thing we can say at this point about the aim of philosophy is that **it seeks to satisfy a wonder and curiosity about ourselves and the world around us**. The achievement of this goal involves formulating questions to be answered or problems to be solved.

What methods have philosophers used to satisfy their curiosity, to answer the questions or solve the problems that are posed? These methods are neither exhaustive nor exclusive of one another, but they offer a good idea of the ways in which philosophers have gone about doing philosophy. One approach is the **construction of a worldview**, a comprehensive, integrated, and systematic framework that provides answers and solutions to philosophical

questions and problems. Another philosophical approach is the **clarification and analysis** of particular questions and problems. Philosophers are constantly clarifying not only the questions and problems themselves, but also what constitutes the right kind of answer or solution to them and the concepts and issues contained in them. A third philosophical approach is **dialectic**, a sort of critical back-and-forth in which positions are presented, critiqued, and revised. Although this method can be carried by an individual, it most clearly marks the social nature of doing philosophy in which such dialectic takes place in the philosophical community at large. Unlike science, philosophy is speculation controlled not by experiments but by criticism.

The method of dialectic points to a final approach to doing philosophy, perhaps the most common and pervasive of the methods mentioned thus far: **argumentation**. Philosophy is a *rational* pursuit of knowledge, an attempt to gain knowledge of ourselves and the world around us through the use of reason. In doing so, philosophers construct, analyze, and evaluate arguments—a set of statements in which reasons are given to defend a claim, such as a proposed answer to a question or solution to a problem. Philosophy is a discipline centered around making and responding to arguments—giving reasons for positions held and critically evaluating those reasons and positions. Philosophy is not primarily a passive, fact-gathering discipline but one where an active, imaginative, critical spirit is at home. Be careful. “Being critical” in this sense is not synonymous with being mean or tearing someone down. Such an attitude has more to do with unhealthy (and usually unfounded) arrogance than with philosophical inquiry and, for my part, has no place in philosophy. (Although, to be sure, there are arrogant philosophers!) Rather, being critical in the philosophical sense has to do with the ability to adequately understand a position and the reasons for it and to make reasonable judgments as to their worth. Whether or not you choose to adopt or cultivate such a (positive) critical spirit, by the end of the semester you will at least see it at work in many different ways.

Content of Philosophy. To say that philosophy is the study of everything is not a very helpful way of clarifying the discipline. The questions and problems that philosophers study could be classified into the following headings: metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology. **Metaphysics** is the study of the nature, structure, and origin of reality, of what exists; it asks such questions as: What is real? What exists? What is it like? **Epistemology** is the study of the nature and limits of human knowledge; it asks such questions as: What counts as knowledge? How can we be justified that our beliefs are true? **Axiology** is the study of the fundamental nature of values, especially those pertaining to ethical or social relations between persons and between persons and non-human parts of the world (e.g., animals, the environment, etc.). Included in this category are the more specific fields of **ethics**, **aesthetics**, and **political philosophy**. In addition to these broad categories, there are a host of secondary areas of philosophy that have as their subject matter conceptual or theoretical problems that arise in some nonphilosophical disciplines, the “philosophy of”s: philosophy of science, of psychology, of mind, of language, of art, etc.

With the above as a backdrop, this course is designed to introduce you to some key issues in different areas of philosophical study, to the works of philosophers themselves, and to ways in which philosophers interact with one another’s work. By looking at a wide range of philosophical topics, you will gain a good sense (and, hopefully, an appreciation) of what philosophy is about and the seemingly boundless ways in which it can be pursued. The topics we might cover include questions for and against the existence of God, knowledge of the external world (whether it can reliably be had), justice and the civil realm, free will vs. determinism, the mind-body problem, personal identity, ethics, artificial intelligence, and consciousness. As you can see, philosophy covers a whole bunch of stuff...and more besides.

By reading a wide selection of philosophical works, both past and present, you will wrestle with what philosophers everywhere wrestle with and learn how to think philosophically. Reading philosophers is typically a difficult endeavor for anyone, even other philosophers. What will make it particularly difficult for you is that their writings assume a wealth of background information that (most of) you do not possess. For the most part, the more of this background information you gain, the easier it will be to contextualize, and, as a result, to better understand, the readings. (I say “for the most part”—sometimes there is just too much information to handle. This, unfortunately, comes with the territory.) I have provided a list of

easily accessible reference works that will help you with this (see “Suggested Source Material” above).

By seeing the ways in which philosophers interact, you will learn how to think more critically and deeply about the positions that others present. We will get very familiar with how philosophers respond to the positions of other philosophers. We will see the ways in which they engage themselves in the critical spirit so central to philosophy. This will give you a clue as to how to philosophize on your own.

Course Objectives:

- (1) To introduce you to several topics and issues in philosophy and how philosophers, both past and present, have approached them;
- (2) To test your knowledge and understanding of the material assigned and discussed;
- (3) To give you opportunities to raise questions about, as well as to defend and critically examine, the assigned material and reactions to it through class discussions;
- (4) To give you opportunities to communicate clearly your well-developed judgments about the material through writing; and
- (5) To encourage critical and philosophical thinking.

Course Requirements:

Attendance and Participation. In this course, it is important that you be engaged as a member of the community of those “doing philosophy.” This not only means reading and thinking about philosophy on your own, but also discussing and thinking about philosophy with your instructor and your classmates. That it is important does not mean that it will always be enlightening, entertaining, or exciting—but, then, you have a lot of control over whether it will be!

Although attendance will not affect your grade, your in-class participation will; and insofar as in-class participation presupposes class attendance...can you finish the line of reasoning? I thought so. It is to your advantage that you attend class and be an active participant in both leading and following discussions. During each class, I will randomly call on you to engage in a discussion of the day’s assigned reading, of a question posed at the end of the previous class that I wanted you to think about, of a topic or issue that we are going over, etc. If it is clear to me that you haven’t read or thought about the assignment, or that you are unable to engage in a discussion about it or about what we are going over, I will deduct one point from your grade for the next exam. If you show me that you have done or can do these things, I will add one point to your grade for the next exam (for a maximum grade of 100).

Essay Exams (80%). There will be two in-class exams and one final exam. Each exam will cover material since the previous exam. In writing your essays, you should not simply repeat what someone says about the topic of the essay; it is important that you include the *reasons why* the claim is made or the position is held. When asked for your own reasoned judgment on a topic, it will not be sufficient to simply state your position; you must *give reasons in support of* your position.

In constructing your essay, you should divide the essay into clear paragraphs that deal with particular aspects of the essay topic and that work together to form a coherent essay. Do not simply regurgitate in stream of consciousness fashion what you have shoved into your head the night before the exam! There should be a clear line of development in your essay.

The use of proper grammar, style, and spelling are *essential* in writing a first-class essay. Mistakes in these areas *will lower your exam grade*. You should always strive for excellence in your writing! Poor writing skills lead to poor communication, and the point of these essays is for you to communicate to me that you are learning something in this course!

Make-up exams will be given only for the most pressing reasons, such as a serious illness, death in the immediate family, or an official University-sanctioned absence. You should discuss the possibility of missing an exam as soon as you find out about a conflict. If I approve of a make-up exam, you will have one week from the date that the exam is given to complete the make-up exam.

Paper (20%). You will write a paper on a topic of your choosing to be turned in near the end of the semester. The objectives of the paper are for you to wrestle with a specific topic or issue from the course in more detail than in class, to familiarize yourself with the philosophical primary literature, and to engage in disciplinary research. See “Paper Assignment” on eLC for details.

Important Dates to Remember:

September 22	Exam 1
October 22	Midterm Withdrawal Deadline (last day to drop the course with a WP)
October 27	Exam 2
???	Completed Peer Review Forms due
???	Paper due
December 3	Peer Review Cover Letter due
December 8	**No Class** (Friday class schedule)
December 15	Final Exam – 3:30-6:30 pm – 105 Peabody Hall

Grading: The grades you receive will reflect how you do with regard to any or all of three axes (depending on what I ask for): understanding of the material, presentation of the material, and philosophical analysis and evaluation of the material. (By “philosophical analysis” I am referring to the task of picking out the position and the reasons given for it in a given reading. By “philosophical evaluation” I am referring to the task of providing a reasoned judgment on the strength(s) and/or weakness(es) of the position.) The following is what I will have in mind (and in hand) when grading your work:

- A** – Your work demonstrates an **excellent** understanding of the material and presents the material clearly, accurately, and intelligibly. You have engaged in good philosophical analysis and critique of the material. (90-100)
- B** – Your work demonstrates a **good** understanding of the material and presents it accurately and intelligibly. Your work shows that you are learning how to engage in philosophical analysis and evaluation and shows progress in this area. (80-89)
- C** – Your work demonstrates an **average** understanding of the material and shows some problems presenting it accurately and fully. Your work indicates that you are struggling with grasping it, though you show effort in engaging in philosophical analysis and evaluation. (70-79)
- D** – Your work demonstrates **poor** understanding of the material. Although you are able to present some aspects of the material and are showing evidence of struggling with it, you are having significant difficulties with the material. You fail to engage in philosophical evaluation of the material but show some attempt to do so. (60-69)
- F** – Your work demonstrates very little understanding of the material and fails to present the material clearly and accurately. You fail to engage in philosophical evaluation of the material in any meaningful way. (< 59)

Your final *number* grade for the course will be determined by averaging together the grades according to the proportions set out in the Course Requirements. For final *letter* grades submitted to the university, I will be using the plus-minus system according to the following grade scale.

Plus-Minus Letter Grade Scale

A	93.5 >	C+	76.5 - 79.4
A-	89.5 - 93.4	C	73.5 - 76.4
B+	86.5 - 89.4	C-	69.5 - 72.4
B	82.5 - 86.4	D	59.5 - 69.4
B-	79.5 - 83.4	F	< 59.4

Ethical Considerations: This course involves an ethical dimension in (at least) two ways.

First, you must abide by the [Academic Honesty Policy](#) of the university. All academic work must meet the standards contained in "A Culture of Honesty." All students are responsible to inform themselves about those standards before performing any academic work. Specifically, you have agreed to abide by the Student Honor Code, which states: "**I will be academically honest in all of my academic work and will not tolerate academic dishonesty of others.**" Take the time to familiarize yourself with the consequences of violating the Academic Honesty Policy, and take note of the following definitions of the underlined terms:

- "**Academic Honesty**" means performing all academic work without plagiarism, cheating, lying, tampering, stealing, giving or receiving unauthorized assistance from any other person, or using any source of information that is not common knowledge without properly acknowledging the source.
- "**Academic Work**" means any act performed in connection with work required to be submitted, being prepared to be submitted, or actually submitted for academic advancement in connection with courses and programs offered by the University. Academic work includes, but is not limited to, dissertations, theses, examinations, exercises, quizzes, term papers, required drafts of assignments, required attendance, reports, performances, presentations, artwork, laboratory work, and scientific experiments. [partial definition]
- "**Academic Dishonesty**" means performing, attempting to perform, or assisting any other person in performing any academic work that does not meet this standard of academic honesty.

Second, this course is set within an academic environment, and I expect you to behave accordingly in the classroom. Remaining in this course counts as an implicit agreement to these and other general terms of academic etiquette. Although these are not offenses of academic honesty, I take them seriously and encourage you to do so, as well. At least part of what this means for you is that I will not tolerate cell phone ringing, extended or distracting private conversations, crossword puzzles or other games, napping, coming to class late, etc. These activities are distracting both to me and to those around you, and they are just plain rude.

That this course is set within an academic environment also means that you treat your instructors and your classmates with charity, respect, and open-mindedness, even (and especially!) when you are in disagreement.