

Introduction to Philosophy

Phil 20101

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Office and Hours: T 3:30pm-6:30pm or by appointment, Malloy 401

Course Description

The aim of this course is to introduce you to the discipline of philosophy. Right about here, I'd bet, is where you're expecting a basic definition of the subject, no? Well, no soup for you! As you'll soon learn, philosophers are excellent at disagreeing about things, and one thing to disagree about is the nature of philosophy. Is philosophy a way of life, a theory, both? Is its purpose to achieve knowledge of the first principles of existence, to discern the limits of human knowledge, to establish the foundations of the sciences? To attempt to answer these questions is just to do some philosophy, so rather than hand out a definition up front, we'll just jump right in.

We will begin by reading a number of ancient authors who not only ask questions, but also give constructive answers to those questions. They will answer questions about what it means to exist, to be alive, and to live well; later on, certain Christian philosophers from the late antique and medieval period will preserve and extend these answers, continuing to build on ancient foundations. In the modern period, however, formidable challenges will be issued to these answers that aim to undermine them in certain respects. Do the critiques of these ancient and medieval ideas work? As we will see, this question is not so easy to answer. It's not as easy to answer, anyway, as whether modern physics has overturned theories that posit the electromagnetic aether or phlogiston. What is the nature of philosophy such that some of these questions resist answers that everyone can agree upon, leaving some of us still wondering today who has things right? This question itself is a philosophical question, and one well worth pondering.

In the process of our study, we'll encounter some of the topics you might expect to find covered in a philosophy course—e.g. Am I only my body, or do I have a soul?, Does God exist?, Can anything be known for certain?—but you'll also encounter some questions you might not expect to find—e.g. What exactly is change and how is it possible?, Where do we get the idea of causation and what sorts of causes are there, if any?, What does it mean to say that something happened by chance?, Are miracles possible? The English word "philosophy" is from the Greek word "φιλοσοφία"—“the love of wisdom.” At the very least I hope to make you feel a little bit of that love—to develop a taste for thinking carefully, for questioning things that have always seemed obvious to you, and for imagining different worlds. Even the world that you inhabit—perhaps—is stranger and more wonderful than you have yet conceived.

Required Texts

Plato: Complete Works. Edited, with Introduction and Notes, by John M. Cooper, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.: Indianapolis, 1997.

The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation, Volume One. Edited by Jonathan Barnes, Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1995.

St. Augustine, The Confessions, trans. Maria Boulding OSB, Ed. J. E. Rotelle OSA, New City Press, 2012.

Aquinas (A Beginner's Guide) by Edward Feser, One World Publications, 2009.

René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Ed. John Cottingham, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2002.

David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Ed. Eric Steinberg, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.: Indianapolis, 2011.

The Portable Nietzsche, Ed. and trans Walter Kaufmann, Penguin Books: New York, 1982

Various other materials will be handed out via email—indicated below with a *

Assignments and Academic Policies

Assignments: there will be three paper assignments over the course of the semester, either 2½ or 5 pages in length (I'll specify at the time). The papers are weighted equally (at 25% each). Papers are graded for substance (understanding the prompt, answering the prompt, producing good arguments, etc.), as well as for the quality of writing (grammar, usage, organization, style, etc.). For the sake of fairness, do not exceed the length limit. You should not need to make use of outside sources. Papers are due at the beginning of class, in hard copy, on the Wednesday of the week that they are due. **Late papers will be penalized.**

Participation: participation accounts for 25% of your grade. Attendance is an essential part of participation! Only university required absences will be excused—i.e. those described in this policy: <http://studenthandbook.nd.edu/academic/absence/> A good participation score is in store for anyone who attends class and shows a sustained pattern of thoughtful contribution and questioning *in class*, especially if that contribution demonstrates that you have read the assigned material diligently. Assignments in philosophy often do not require much reading, but they always require careful reading. I will often assign you very little material (i.e. less than 20 pages); show me that you have read that small amount of material carefully and you will do well. I may sometimes (perhaps even frequently) ask the class to come to lecture with a question or two about the reading written down. Revealing these questions to the class and your thoughts about possible answers to them will go toward your participation grade and will be graded on a credit/no credit basis.

“The Chain”: You are shackled to taking a philosophy course at Notre Dame, so it is fitting that in that course there should be something called “the Chain”! Luckily for you, this chain is not only harmless, but helpful. The Chain is a string of emails that I'll send you throughout the semester (chained together so as not to gum up your inbox—hence the name). Each email in The Chain will have three parts—1) the Afterthought: a brief summary of the latest reading, which

should be very handy when it comes time to review ideas before writing a paper, 2) the Forethought: a few guiding comments or questions for the next reading, and 3) a Funny Thought: a place for me to post philosophical memes, videos, articles, and, in all likelihood, pictures of my cat, Alice. If there are readings to be handed out, they will be attached to The Chain. Reading/viewing the Chain is entirely optional, but reading the attached assignments is not optional. If you find yourself struggling with the readings, consider at least reading the Forethought. Additionally, asking questions about the readings by replying to the Chain will increase your participation score.

Summary: Papers count for 75% of your grade, participation 25%. **Rubric:** A: 93%, A-: 90%, B+: 87%, B: 83%, B-: 80%, C+: 77%, C: 73%, C-: 70%, D+: 67%, D: 63%, D-: 60%

Disabilities: The university's policies regarding disabilities can be found at: <https://dulac.nd.edu/academic/disabilities/> Information concerning Sara Bea Disability Services can be found at: <http://sarabeadisabilityservices.nd.edu/>

Academic Integrity: Don't Cheat! This includes plagiarism of any variety, including having others do your work for you or merely syntactically or terminologically altering the work of others (e.g. plugging in a few different words into a paragraph written by someone else). Any instances of cheating discovered will be dealt with swiftly according to university policy.

Laptop and Mobile Device Policy: Laptops and Mobile devices should not be used during class. The results are in: scientific studies show that screens mean less glean. Science giveth the iPhone X Plus and science taketh it away!

Schedule:

“Every more thorough thinker, every more earnest artist still regenerates himself in the eternal youth of the Greeks.” — Søren Kierkegaard

Week 1: Intro; Plato's *Apology*: The Trial of Socrates

Class 1 (1/17) Introduction

Class 2 (1/19) Plato: *Apology*

Week 2: Plato's *Crito*; *Meno*

Class 3 (1/24) Plato: *Crito*

Class 4 (1/26) Plato: *Meno*

Week 3: Plato's *Gorgias*: The Nature of Rhetoric; A Colt's Objection

Class 5 (1/31) Plato: *Gorgias*, 447a-481b

Class 6 (2/2) Plato: *Gorgias*, 481b-499b

Week 4: *Gorgias* Cont. and Aristotle's *Categories*: Callicles' Objection; The Categories of Being

Class 7 (1/7) Plato: *Gorgias*, 499b-527e

Class 8 (2/9) Aristotle: *Categories* Chapters 1-8

Week 5: Aristotle's *Physics*: Criticism of Predecessors; Motion Explained, G. E. M. Anscombe on Causality

Class 9 (2/14) Aristotle; *Physics* Book 1, Chapters 1-4, G.E.M Anscombe: "Causality and Determination" *

Class 10 (2/16) Aristotle; *Physics* Book 1, Chapters 5-9

Week 6: *Physics* Cont.: Nature and the Four Causes; Chance and Teleology

Class 11 (2/21) Aristotle; *Physics* Book 2, Chapters 1-3

Class 12 (2/23) Aristotle; *Physics* Book 2, Chapters 4-9

First Paper Due (2/23)

Week 7: Aristotle's *De Anima*: The Predecessors' Accounts of Soul; Aristotle's Account

Class 13 (2/28) Aristotle: *De Anima* Book 1

Class 14 (3/2) Aristotle: *De Anima* Book 2, Chapters 1-6

Week 8: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: Happiness is an Activity; Virtue is a Mean

Class 15 (3/7) Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 1 *

Class 16 (3/9) Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 2 *

Spring Break

Week 9: St. Augustine's *Confessions*: A Saint's Beginnings; Seeking Truth

Class 17 (3/21) St. Augustine: *Confessions* Books 1-2

Class 18 (3/23) St. Augustine: *Confessions* Books 3-5

Week 10: *Confessions* Cont. and St. Anselm's *Proslogion*: Platonism & Conversion; The Ontological Proof of God's Existence

Class 19 (3/28) St. Augustine: *Confessions* Books 6-8

Class 20 (3/30) St. Anselm: *Proslogion*

Week 11: St. Thomas's *The 5 Ways* and Descartes's *Meditations*: Aristotelian proofs of God's Existence; Radical Doubt

Class 21 (4/4) St. Thomas/Feser: Aquinas: *Summa Theologiae* Q.2/Feser: comm. on way 1 and 2

Class 22 (4/6) Descartes: *Meditations* 1-2

Second Paper Due (4/6)

"I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last" — René Descartes

Week 12: *Meditations* Cont.: The Existence of God; Escape from Radical Doubt

Class 23 (4/11) Descartes: *Meditations* 3-4

Class 24 (4/13) Descartes: *Meditations* 5-6

Week 13: Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Nature*: The Origin of Ideas, Skeptical Doubts; Skeptical Solution and the Idea of Necessary Connection

Class 25(4/18) Hume: *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Sections 2-4

Class 26 (4/20) Hume: *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Sections 5&7
Easter Break

Week 14: *Enquiry* Cont. and Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols: Against Miracles; The Problem of Socrates, Jacqueline Scott on Decadence*

Class 27 (4/25) Hume: *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Section 10

Class 28 (4/27) Nietzsche: Selections from *Twilight of the Idols*, Jacqueline Scott: *Nietzsche and Decadence: the Revaluation of Morality*

Week 15: Questions in Applied Ethics: Mary Warren, Judith Jarvis Thomson, and John Noonan on Abortion

Class 29 (5/2) Mary Warren: "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," Judith Jarvis Thomson: "A Defense of Abortion," John Noonan: "Deciding Who is Human"

Third Paper Due (Date of Final)