

Topics in Philosophy

Philosophy 101B
Spring 2018
Carnegie 201
TR 1:30-2:45

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Office: Carnegie 203C
Office Hours: TWR 3:30-4:30
And by appointment

Course Description

The course will be centered on a few key questions: what, if anything, matters and why does it matter? How do we figure out what matters? And how, if at all, might the answers to those questions affect how we ought to live? In attempting to answer these questions we will read a number of foundational texts in the history of philosophy as well as some contemporary works. In working through these questions we will also implicitly be working out an answer to an additional question, namely, by what method ought we to answer these questions, and of what use, if any, is philosophy?

Breakdown of Grade

Scale

Participation	10%	A 93+	C+ 77-80
Quizzes	20%	A- 90-93	C 73-77
Short papers (x3)	30%	B+ 87-90	C- 70-73
Long paper	30%	B 83-87	D 60-70
Presentation	10%	B- 80-83	F <60

Required Texts

Plato, *Five Dialogues* (Hackett), *Laches and Charmides* (Hackett)
Descartes, *Selected Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge)

Note: You must have the assigned books, and you must bring them to class on the days we are discussing them. When the readings are distributed as PDFs you must have a hardcopy with you when we discuss the reading in class.

Papers

Writing assignments must be submitted to me by email as Word documents. Because short papers are assigned on readings ahead of our in-class discussion of them they cannot be turned in late. However, there will be many opportunities to write short papers. You must write one of the first two, but are then free to pick from whichever of the others best meets your preferences. You may rewrite your first short paper as many times as you like. Your grade on it will be the grade you receive on your last revision. Rewrites may be turned in at any time but are due by the end of the last regular class day of the semester.

Expectations

Honesty: I encourage you to study the University honor code (sewanee.edu/academics/about/the-honor-code). Ignorance of the rules is not a legitimate excuse for violations. The library has information and resources concerning plagiarism here: library.sewanee.edu/plagiarism. If you are *ever* in doubt as to whether something is problematic you are highly encouraged to ask me.

Attendance: Philosophy is a fundamentally social enterprise, both because you are tasked with evaluating things *other* people say and write, and because *you* are in turn tasked with articulating your views to others in a way that is clear and compelling. Neither of these things can be done in isolation. Hence, class attendance is essential. You may have up to two unexcused absences with no questions asked. Failure to attend beyond that will substantially affect how you do on the class participation measure. For an absence to be excused you must clear it with me in advance. Exceptions will be made only in extraordinary circumstances. Being sick is not extraordinary. You may, in the case of an excused absence, take the reading quiz in advance.

Participation: Good participation does not mean talking constantly. In fact, talking constantly is a bad idea. The metric is *good* participation: thoughtful comments or questions that reflect engagement with the material. It is important that you at least *sometimes* engage in the class, but I also recognize that some people are more comfortable doing so than others—if you were particularly struck by something that came up in class you can also email me comments/questions/reflections afterward, which I consider to be a kind of participation.

Technology: You may not use any technology in class, save in the case of accommodations, which must be cleared in advance.

Respect: It is important that, even while passionately disagreeing with one another, you remain respectful of your classmates.

Due diligence: You are responsible for knowing the contents of this syllabus and for abiding by the rules in it.

Official ADA Statement

The University of the South is committed to fostering respect for the diversity of the University community and the individual rights of each member of that community. In this spirit, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the University seeks to provide students with disabilities with the reasonable accommodations needed to ensure equal access to the programs and activities of the University. Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments is requested to speak with Student Accessibility Services and the instructor, as early in the semester as possible. If you have already requested accommodations, it is your responsibility to present your instructor with a copy of your academic accommodations letter from Student Accessibility Services which is located in the University Wellness Center (931.598.1270). *Accommodations will not be provided without this documentation, and accommodations cannot be applied retroactively.* Additional information about accommodations can be found at <http://www.sewanee.edu/student-life/university-wellness-center/student-accessibility-services/>. If you have questions about physical accessibility, please inform your instructor so that we can ensure an accessible, safe, and effective environment.

Learning Goals

This course satisfies the University requirement for learning objective 3, “Seeking Meaning: Wisdom, Truth, and Inquiry”

“The quest to answer fundamental questions of human existence has always been central to living the examined life. Through this learning objective, students examine how people in diverse times and places have addressed basic human questions about the meaning of life, the source of moral value, the nature of reality and possibility of transcendence, and to what or whom persons owe their ultimate allegiance. Courses that explore texts and traditions dedicated to philosophic questions and ethical inquiry, or that examine religious belief and practice as a pervasive expression of human culture, encourage students to develop a deeper understanding of what it means to be human.”

This course is also designated *writing intensive*.

Course Schedule

Unit 1: Thinking and Writing Philosophically

Jan 16	Tuesday	Introduction
Jan 18	Thursday	Short Paper Opportunity William Deresiewicz, “The Disadvantages of an Elite Education” Jackson Lears, “The Liberal Arts vs. Neoliberalism”
Jan 23	Tuesday	Short Paper Opportunity Plato, <i>Laches</i> (through 190d)
Jan 25	Thursday	Plato, <i>Laches</i> (finish)
Jan 30	Tuesday	Logic, Argument, Objections: The Method of Philosophy (handout + exercises)
Feb 1	Thursday	Workshop: Writing Philosophy Papers

Unit 2: Truth and Value

Feb 6	Tuesday	Short Paper Opportunity Plato, <i>Apology</i>
Feb 8	Thursday	Mary Midgley, “On Trying Out One’s New Sword” Alasdair MacIntyre, “Moral Pluralism Without Moral Relativism”
Feb 13	Tuesday	Descartes, <i>Meditations on the First Philosophy</i> , Meditation 1
Feb 15	Thursday	Short Paper Opportunity Descartes, Meditation 2
Feb 20	Tuesday	Descartes, Meditation 3
Feb 22	Thursday	No Class
Feb 27	Tuesday	Descartes, Meditation 4
Mar 1	Thursday	Descartes, Meditation 5

Mar 6	Tuesday	Short Paper Opportunity Descartes, Meditation 6
Mar 8	Thursday	Short Paper Opportunity Elizabeth of Bohemia, Correspondence with Descartes (selections)
Mar 13	Tuesday	Elizabeth Anscombe, “The First Person”

Spring Break

Unit 3: Ethics, Agency, and Freedom

Mar 27	Tuesday	CS Lewis, “The Cardinal Difficulty of Naturalism” Reread Descartes, Meditation 1
Mar 29	Thursday	Thomas Nagel, “Free Will” in <i>What Does It All Mean?</i> Peter van Inwagen, “How to Think About the Problem of Free Will”
Apr 3	Tuesday	Laura Buchak, “Free Acts and Chance: Why the Rollback Argument Fails”
Apr 5	Thursday	Daniel Dennett, <i>Elbow Room</i> , excerpts
Apr 10	Tuesday	Derk Pereboom, “Why We Have No Free Will and Can Live Without It”
Apr 12	Thursday	Thomas Nagel, “Moral Luck”
Apr 17	Tuesday	Thomas Nagel, “Subjective and Objective”
Apr 19	Thursday	Presentations
Apr 24	Tuesday	Presentations
Apr 26	Thursday	Presentations
May 1	Tuesday	Francesca Murphy, “Freedom Within the Disciplines”

Long papers due Wednesday, May 2nd

*Note that the syllabus is subject to change. You will always be given notice if readings will be added or subtracted or if there will be any change in due dates or assignments.