

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 201 (3 hrs), Manchester University, Fall 2015 — TR 11:00-12:15 (sect. B) & 12:30-1:45 (sect. A)

Instructor: Dr. Steve Naragon, Office: ACEN 233 (Phone — *office*: 982-5041; *home*: 982-6033)

Office Hours: Any hour that I'm in my office. And if you see me on the sidewalk, or in the library, or in a café — that's also a good time to talk. And you can always send me an email at ssnaragon@manchester.edu

Web Syllabus: <http://users.manchester.edu/Facstaff/SSNaragon/Online/201-F15Welcome.html>

————— **You will need to consult the web syllabus for every class session.** —————

Required Texts: (1) Naragon, *"A Book is a Machine to Help One Think": An Introduction to Philosophy* (Fall 2015); (2) Plato, *Five Dialogues*, 2nd ed. (Hackett); (3) René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Hackett).

General Education Goals. This course satisfies the Core 4PH (philosophy) requirement, whose goals for the student are:

1. to discuss the approaches that philosophers take to fundamental human questions, and
2. to acquire the vocabulary and skills necessary to engage in philosophical inquiry, especially through developing your ability to understand and evaluate arguments.

These goals are furthered by (a) your careful reading of the texts, (b) classroom and small group discussion, and (c) writing and responding to Discussion Forum posts on a number of central topics in philosophy. The goals are further elaborated, in the context of this course, under the "Course Objectives":

Course Objectives. Philosophy is a discipline in the **humanities**, and so our goals here are rather different from those in the natural and social sciences — although the findings of these other areas of inquiry are often of great importance in philosophy.

Philosophy is concerned less with the accumulation of facts, than with the education of the individual. My primary goal — and the goal of the humanities in general — is to help each individual increase their level of self-understanding. This is not a small matter, and it lies at the heart of any human existence that is worth living.

So here's the deal: Over the course of a semester of hard work, occasional confusion, and more hard work, you will be able to ...

1. demonstrate a basic understanding of the areas of Western philosophy and some of its perennial concerns;
2. demonstrate a basic command of, and be able to discuss, logical reasoning and conceptual analysis;
3. critically evaluate arguments and beliefs — in particular, you will be able to think more critically about your own assumptions and beliefs;
4. discuss with more depth, and with greater appreciation of different perspectives, some of the most pressing questions confronting each of us as human beings, such as: Is there an objective difference between right and wrong, and true and false? If there is, can we come to know it? How might we best get on with each other? Are there better and worse ways for organizing our communal existence? Can we prove or disprove the existence of God? Is knowledge of the divine possible? What is it to be human?
5. develop your skills in writing clear, concise, precise, and engaging prose.

After this semester, most of you will never again be asked to explain Descartes's argument against skepticism or Kant's moral theory, but each of you will be required to live your life, and this you can do with a certain level of intelligence, self-awareness, understanding, and compassion — or not. You can aim to live a life filled with wonder and beauty and seeking truth — or not. What shape such a life takes is up to you, but philosophy can provide you with some useful tools for shaping it.

You will be asked in this course to learn and understand various concepts and theories and arguments. In doing this, you will also develop your ability to think critically and creatively about the world around you, and about the role you see yourself playing in it.

Course Requirements

Attendance. If you do not plan to attend class and participate constructively, then you should withdraw from this class. A course on philosophy is by its nature aimed at self-examination and discussion; consequently, doing well in this class requires being there and caring. Missing class does not directly affect your grade, although students with poor attendance typically do quite poorly in the class. On the average, students missing more than two classes during the semester receive grades below the class average.

Exams. There will be three non-cumulative exams over the readings and lectures. [**Makeup:** see the web syllabus.]

Discussion Forum. There are seven discussion forums, each of which will require **one post** and **two comments** from you. The posts have a 500 word minimum, and comments a 100 word minimum (see the rubric on the web). These will be completed on D2L.

Quizzes. There will be a quiz nearly every day at the beginning of class on the readings for that day and material discussed the previous class day. These exercises help keep both of us informed of your grasp of the material. [**Makeup:** see the web syllabus]

Extra credit Journals. See the web syllabus for opportunities to explore additional texts, films, videos, podcasts, etc.

Title IX reporting requirements / Student disability and reasonable accommodation statement / Medical emergency evacuation schedule: See the web syllabus.

Grading. The set of three exams is worth 51% (17% each); the set of discussion forums is worth 40%; and the set of quizzes is worth 9%. I use the following letter grade conversion scale: A (94-100), A- (90-93), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D+ (67-69), D (63-66), D- (60-62), F (0-59).

Cell Phones. Don't bring these to class, if possible. If you do bring a cell phone, it needs to be turned off and put away, preferably at the bottom of a very deep pocket or book bag. Thank you.



Cheating and Plagiarism. Just don't do it. You don't want to be that kind of person! It would be better to fail this course than to fail at being your better self. If you are not sure what plagiarism is, see me or consult the web syllabus for details.



SCHEDULE OF DISCUSSION AND READINGS

Logic and Belief

Thu, Aug 27

(1) **What is Philosophy?** (N, §§1-3)

Tue, Sep 1

(2) **Analyzing Arguments** (N, §§4-5)

- Plato, "Allegory of the Cave"
- Postman, "Darkness and the Light" (1995)

Thu, Sep 3

(3) **Deductive Logic** (N, §6)

- Russell, "The Value of Philosophy" (1912)

Tue, Sep 8

(4) **Inductive Logic** (N, §7)

Thu, Sep 10

(5) **On Belief**

- Peirce, "Fixation of Belief" (1877)
- Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief" (1877)

Socrates and Plato

Tue, Sep 15

(6) **The Role of the Philosopher** (N, §§8-9)

- Plato, *Apology*
- Sartre, "The Wall" (1939)

Thu, Sep 17

(7) **The Benefits of Philosophy** (N, §10)

- Plato, *Meno*

Tue, Sep 22

(8) **The Nature of Definitions** (N, §11)

- Plato, *Euthyphro*

Thu, Sep 24

(9) **The Citizen and the State** (N, §12)

- Plato, *Crito*
- King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963)

Tue, Sep 29

Exam #1

Ethics

Thu, Oct 1

(10) **Why Be Moral?** (N, §44)

- Plato, "Ring of Gyges"
- Singer, "The Prisoner's Dilemma" (1981)
- Angier, "Why We're So Nice" (2002)

Tue, Oct 6

(11) **From Moral Intuition to Moral Theory** (N, §45)

- Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885)

Thu, Oct 8

(12) **Ethical Subjectivism** (N, §46)

- Prinz, "Morality is a Culturally Conditioned Response" (2011)

--- Fall Break ---

Thu, Oct 15

(13) **Aristotle's Virtue Ethic** (N, §49)

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bks. 1-2

Tue, Oct 20

(14) **Mill's Utilitarianism** (N, §50-51)

- Mill, *Utilitarianism* (1863)
- Le Guin, "Walk Away From Ome-las" (1973)

Thu, Oct 22

(15) **Kant's Deontology** (N, §§52-54)

- Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785)

Epistemology

Tue, Oct 27

(16) **What Can I Know?** (N, §§13-15)

- Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, "First Meditation" (1641)

Thu, Oct 29

(17) **Cartesian Dualism** (N, §§16-18)

- Descartes, "Second Meditation"
- Borges, "The Circular Ruins" (1940)

Tue, Nov 3

(18) **Locke's Empiricism** (N, §§19-20)

- Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690)

Thu, Nov 5

Exam #2

The Metaphysics of Being Human

Tue, Nov 10

(19) **Minds, Brains, Selves** (N, §§24-26)

- Law, "Could a Machine Think?" (2003)
- Bisson, "They're Made out of Meat" (1991)
- YouTube videos (web syllabus)

Thu, Nov 12

(20) **Minds and Machines** (N, §27)

- Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (1637)
- Searle, "The Myth of the Computer" (1982)

Philosophy of Religion

Tue, Nov 17

(21) **Believing in God** (N, §§35-36)

- Smullyan, "Conversation with God" (1977)
- Einstein, "Religion and Science" (1930)

Thu, Nov 19

(22) **Faith and Reason** (N, §37)

- Rousseau, "Creed of the Priest of Savoy" (1762)

Tue, Nov 24

(23) **The Argument from Design** (N, §40)

- Paley, *Natural Theology* (1802) (sel)
- Begley, "Science finds Religion" (1998)

--- Thanksgiving Break ---

Tue, Dec 1

(24) **The Problem of Evil** (N, §41)

- Dostoyevsky, *Brothers Karamazov* (1880)

Thu, Dec 3

(25) **Pascal's Wager** (N, §§42-43)

- Pascal, "The Wager" (1662)

Finals Week

Exam #3