

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 201 (3 hrs), Manchester University, Fall 2019

TR 9:30-10:45 a.m., Academic Center 238

Instructor: Dr. Steve Naragon, Office: Academic Center 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-F19/Welcome.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 2016); (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.

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 here — 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 existence that is distinctly human.

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. describe the general 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 Forums. There are five 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 Canvas.

Tuesday One-Page Essays. These brief essays (300-400 words) should be written only after you have studied and reflected upon the readings for the day. See the rubric on the web syllabus. The lowest grade from this group will be dropped.

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

Grading. The set of three exams is worth 50%; the set of discussion forums is worth 25%; and the set of Tuesday essays is worth 25%. 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. All cell phones must be turned off and put away (see me if you have an exceptional need) . Thank you.

Laptops. I have yet to meet the student who took good notes on a laptop. Apart from that, various studies have shown that handwritten notes are much more conducive to learning, remembering, and synthesizing new information. Unless you have a documented disability that requires the use of a laptop or tablet, prepare to take notes the old fashioned way, with paper and pencil.

Cheating and Plagiarism. See the “Course Requirements” page of the web syllabus.

Title IX reporting requirements / Student disability and reasonable accommodation statement / Medical emergency evacuation schedule: See the “Course Requirements” page of the web syllabus.

SCHEDULE OF DISCUSSION AND READINGS

What should I believe?

Thu, Aug 29

(1) What is Philosophy? (N, §§1-3)

Tue, Sep 3

(2) Analyzing Arguments (N, §4-)

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

Thu, Sep 5

(3) Extended Arguments (N, §5)

- Russell, “The Value of Philosophy” (1912)

Tue, Sep 10

(4) Deductive Logic (N, §6)

Thu, Sep 12

(5) Inductive Logic (N, §7)

Tue, Sep 17

(6) The Ethics of Belief

- Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief” (1877)

Thu, Sep 19

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

- Plato, *Apology*
- Sartre, “The Wall” (1939)

Tue, Sep 24

(8) The Benefits of Philosophy (N, §10)

- Plato, *Meno*

Thu, Sep 26

Camp Mack Catch-up day

Tue, Oct 1 **Exam #1**

What should I do?

Thu, Oct 3

(9) Why Be Moral? (N, §40)

- Plato, “Ring of Gyges”
- Singer, “The Prisoner’s Dilemma” (1981)

Tue, Oct 8 – Fall Break

Thu, Oct 10

(10) From Moral Intuition to Moral Theory (N, §41)

Tue, Oct 15

(11) Ethical Subjectivism (N, §42)

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

Thu, Oct 17

(12) Aristotle’s Virtue Ethic (N, §45)

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

Tue, Oct 22

(13) Mill’s Utilitarianism (N, §46)

- Mill, *Utilitarianism* (1863)
- LeGuin, “Walk Away From Omelas” (1973)

Thu, Oct 24

(14) Kant’s Deontology (N, §§47)

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

What am I?

Tue, Oct 29

(15) Minds, Brains, Selves (N, §§24-26)

- Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (1637)
- Dennett, “Where Am I?” (1978)

Thu, Oct 31

(16) Minds and Machines (N, §27)

- Bisson, “They’re Made out of Meat” (1991)
- Law, “Could a Machine Think?” (2003)

Tue, Nov 5 **Exam #2**

What can I know?

Thu, Nov 7

(17) Doubting our Beliefs (N, §§13-15)

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

Tue, Nov 12 – No Class

Thu, Nov 4

(18) Cartesian Dualism (N, §§16-18)

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

Tue, Nov 19

(19) Locke’s Empiricism (N, §§19-20)

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

Is there a God?

Thu, Nov 21

(20) Believing in God (N, §§31-32)

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

Tue, Nov 26

(21) Faith and Reason (N, §33)

- Rousseau, “Creed of the Priest of Savoy” (1762)

Thu, Nov 28 – Thanksgiving

Tue, Nov 3

(22) The Argument from Design (N, §36)

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

Thu, Dec 5

(23) The Problem of Evil (N, §37)

- Dostoyevsky, *Brothers Karamazov* (1880)

Finals Week **Exam #3**