

PRINCIPLES OF PHILOSOPHY Syllabus

PHIL 2050 FALL 2009 MWF 2:00-2:50 ADM 312

Dr. Seth Holtzman

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hours: M 3-5; T 3-5; W 3-5; TH 11-12 and 3-5; F 3-4; & by appointment
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Course summary:

This course is an introduction to the discipline of philosophy required for RELP majors with a Theology & Philosophy concentration; it is more advanced than PHIL 1050, Philosophy and Culture. We will explore the fundamental principles in philosophy: those framework principles that define what philosophy is and how it proceeds, as well as substantive principles that philosophy establishes. We will study these principles explicitly but also implicitly through examining some philosophical problems in the culture.

Our questions include these: What is philosophy and how does it arise? Is philosophy important or even inevitable? What is the relationship between philosophy and the culture? Does one need to know about philosophy and need to be able to think philosophically? What are philosophical problems, and what are some examples? How does one think philosophically? What sort of philosophical knowledge is possible?

We will examine several examples of philosophical problems or issues: the nature of physical objects, of causation, of value, of selfhood/personhood, and of God. We will note the systematic nature of philosophical problems/issues and the systematic nature of philosophy.

Unlike other disciplines, the fundamental principles that constitute philosophy or that are the focus of philosophy are themselves in need of philosophical explanation and justification. Contra the sciences, for example, there is no framework-neutral set of agreed-on methodological or substantive principles in philosophy. That helps make philosophy a difficult and rather odd discipline. There is, however, a broad tradition in philosophy, lasting 2500 years to the present, in which there is rough agreement about philosophy, and we will attend mostly to this tradition. But we will note the sea-change in modern thought that has led so many recent and contemporary philosophers to reject that long tradition.

Class format will be mostly lecture and some discussion.

<u>Expected learning outcome</u> <i>what a successful student should demonstrate:</i>	<u>Means of Assessment</u> <i>by successful completion of:</i>
Be aware the culture has philosophical assumptions and beliefs	Short essays, midterm, final
Be aware we pick up philosophical commitments in our culture	Short essays, midterm, final
Understand that philosophical issues and problems arise from our ordinary beliefs and philosophical beliefs	Short essays, midterm, papers, final
Understand the need for disciplined philosophical thought	Short essays, papers, exams
Understand philosophy as an a priori discipline	Short essays, exams, papers
Understand how to think philosophically	Short essays, exams, papers
Understand basic philosophical principles	Short essays, exams, papers
Understand some philosophical problems affecting modernity	Short essays, exams, papers

Requirements and grading:

1) Attendance is required; you cannot learn the course on your own. In class I will sometimes elicit your grasp of the readings, lecture, and course. Your participation through questions and discussion is important, too. You need to be present, mentally active and prepared. Class participation can raise your final grade by up to 1/3 of a grade.

2) Occasional short essays on the readings, usually one page. These help you to wrestle with the readings, typically before we cover those readings, and help me gauge how much you understand. You may work on readings with classmates; but for written assignments, separate and come to your own thoughts before doing any writing. I will drop your lowest essay grade. Late essays are not accepted; a missed one counts as "F". Together, they will count **10% of your grade**.

3) A take-home midterm exam, tentatively handed out on Monday, Oct. 12th and due Friday, Oct. 16th, testing your grasp of the course readings, issues and problems. If you miss the exam, you must contact me immediately. If you know you'll miss it, contact me beforehand ASAP. I do not guarantee you a make-up exam. **20% of your grade**.

4) A 3-page paper on an assigned topic, tentatively assigned Friday, Oct. 23rd and due Friday, Oct. 30th. Late papers receive a lowered grade. **20% of your grade**.

5) A 5-page paper on any topic relevant to the course. Due Friday, Dec. 4th. Late papers receive a lowered grade. **25% of your grade**.

6) The mostly essay final exam will test your overall grasp of the course, not your memory of specific facts. We will discuss options for the final a week or two in advance. Blue book required; write in pen. Date: *Friday, Dec 11, 8:00-11:00am*. **25% of your grade**.

Criteria employed in evaluating written work:

Responsiveness to the Assignment

Writing should fulfill the purpose of the assignment directly and completely.

Content

Writing should reflect an understanding of the subject. It should make good use of the relevant concepts, distinctions, positions, and reasons included in course readings or brought out in lecture or discussion. It should be organized so ideas are arranged logically and clearly. Main points should be backed by substantial and relevant details. Your work should be backed by good reasons. Your claims and reasons should be consistent with each other. Anticipate & respond to any reasonable objections.

Execution

Writing should use precise words and well-constructed sentences that clearly represent the writer's reasoning. It should adhere to conventions of grammar, capitalization, spelling, and usage. Writing style should be appropriate to the academy. Your work should be clearly written, its claims precise, its structure clear, with an explicit overall direction. It should be intelligible to an interested student.

Citations and Documentation

Writers must clearly differentiate their own material from source material. When writers use material that is not their own or not common knowledge, they must document the source of the information using a standardized (i.e., either MLA or APA) method.

Other requirements: on time, typed, paginated, tidy (stapled or bound), standard margins and fonts, and dark print. Failure to meet these requirements will hurt your assignment grades. Your paper (not your short essays) should have a cover page with your name, course name/number, date, my name, and a title.

Grading:

"A" Superior mastery	A+ 97-100	A 93-96	A- 90-92
"B" Good mastery	B+ 87-89	B 83-86	B- 80-82
"C" Satisfactory achievement	C+ 77-79	C 73-76	C- 70-72
"D" Less than satisfactory achievement	D+ 67-69	D 63-66	D- 60-62
"F" Unsatisfactory achievement			

A+ is not a possible final course grade. Grades can and should measure achievement only.

Text:

- 1) Doing Philosophy: An Introduction Through Thought Experiments, 4th ed, Schick & Vaughn
- 2) handouts

Reading and taking notes:

I expect you to do all readings; to do well in the course, you will need to. Some of the material is easy and accessible on your first attempt. Other assignments are quite taxing and will probably require multiple readings. I suggest the following strategy for any difficult reading: read it once quickly simply to get the gist; then read it carefully for details, not worrying about the overall picture; then read it normally, fitting the details into the overall picture.

Lectures at times track the readings but also range far afield. Come to class having done the readings. You are responsible for them all; the final exam will be frightening if you have not grasped them. Since lectures cover material not in the readings, this is another reason to attend each class.

Most students take very sketchy notes. Perhaps they think that they cannot both take notes and listen; perhaps they do not know the value of taking notes. Learn to write while you listen; it not only can be done, it enhances your grasp of what is being said. Take as many notes as you can, without losing too much of what is said. You cannot get by with writing down only key terms and definitions. Your notes are an invaluable resource for understanding the course and for the final.

Absences and violations:

To keep attendance--and to learn names--I will start a seating chart on the 2nd or 3rd class. Choose a permanent seat; see me to change it. I will use the chart to take attendance promptly at the start of class. If late, you might be counted absent; if late enough, you do count as absent. Avoid tardiness; if you are often late (without good reason), I will choose to count you absent. Sleeping in class and other forms of mental absence count as an absence. When absent, you are responsible for assignments and notes. Get notes from a classmate. If you still have questions, contact me.

No absences are excused. After 3 penalty-free absences, which you needn't explain to me, further absences lower your final grade: 4-5 total absences = -1/3 grade; 6-8 total = -2/3 grade; 9-10 total = -1 grade. Missing the class immediately before or after a vacation counts double. Over 10 absences for other than an emergency is automatic grounds for an "F" (or an "I" in some cases), regardless of your grades.

Respect the people and ideas in our class. I don't care if you bring a drink or sport a hat or wear rags. I care that you pay attention to me and to others (so, no cell phones or activated pagers/beepers/watches), that you are on time and ready to work, that you bring a positive attitude to class even if you are struggling, and that you contribute positively to class.

Cheating, working with others to complete individual assignments (unless this is allowed), and falsifying an emergency to skip class or an assignment, all violate the Honor Code. So does plagiarism, employing a writer's ideas (and words) without giving the writer due credit. See me for help about borrowing someone's ideas or words for your use.

Schedule of Topics :

- 1) Problems with philosophy in the culture
- 2) Philosophical problems in the culture
 - Necessary commitments
 - Contingent vs. necessary truth-claims
 - Status, discovery, verification/falsification
 - Kinds of necessity
 - Metaphysics and epistemology
 - Conceivability and possibility
 - Sponion example
 - Experience, language, and world
 - Categorial commitments
 - Property example: a priori concept
 - Metaphysical & epistemological presuppositions govern if x is even a meaningful possibility.
 - Logically fundamental presuppositions
 - Basic ways that reality is constituted or structured: categories
 - Premodern worldview vs. modern worldview
- 3) Semantic and epistemic powers
 - Appearance (seeming) and reality
 - Levels of semantic presence
 - Ways of forming thoughts and of forming concepts
 - Theory of knowledge
 - Dispositional vs. episodic
 - Objective vs. subjective:
 - content of thought has a status in world independent of our taking it to be so
 - vs. evaluative sense of objective vs. subjective
 - Knowledge implies truth
 - Which semantic powers are epistemic?
- 3) Phil problems in the culture
 - A) Physical objects
 - Plato, Aristotle, Descartes' Meditation 1, Hume's skepticism, Kant's reconstruction
 - B) Causation
 - Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, Kant's reconstruction
 - C) Value
 - Plato, Aristotle, Great Chain of Being, Hume's skepticism, Adams on value objectivity
 - D) Selfhood/personhood
 - Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, Existentialist, Kant or Adams
 - E) God
 - Plato, Aristotle, classical arguments, Descartes, Ayer, Tillich, Adams