



René Magritte. *The Human Condition*. 1935

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

SEMESTER:

Summer (2019)

COURSE: PHIL 1301-004 (CRN: 34202)

TIME AND LOCATION:

Blackboard Online

INSTRUCTOR:

Aleksandar ("Aleks") Pjevalica

INSTRUCTOR'S EMAIL:

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This course will serve as an introduction to Western philosophy, from its fertile roots in Ancient Greece, to its current bloom throughout the world. Although contemporary philosophy is a technical academic discipline composed of distinct subfields, we can capture its historical spirit by broadly defining it as *the activity of rationally investigating and questioning the fundamental beliefs and actions that guide the course of our everyday lives with the aim of leading better lives*. As a result, philosophers are in a unique position to explore the most basic, and arguably the most important, questions facing human existence. Let's take a glance at some of the major subfields in contemporary academic philosophy:

- i) *Epistemology* is the study of knowledge: What is knowledge? What are its limits? Is knowledge even possible? And if so, what makes it possible? What kinds of things can we know? What is the difference between believing something and knowing it? How can we justify our beliefs?
- ii) *Philosophy of Mind* is the study of the fundamental nature of the mind: What is the mind? How is it related to the brain? Can nonhuman animals think? Can computers think? What is consciousness? What is self-consciousness? What is the relationship between our thoughts and our actions?
- iii) *Metaphysics* is the study of the fundamental nature of reality and its constituents: What kinds of things exist? What are those kinds of things like? What is the relationship between an object (e.g. a flower) and its properties (e.g. its color)? What is time? What is space? What does it mean to say that some event A *caused* some other event B? Does God exist? What is an individual? What makes an individual the *same* individual over time? Does free will exist?

iv) *Value Theory* is the general study of value. Subfields within value theory include:

Ethics: What is a good human life? How should one behave towards others? Is it ever morally justifiable to harm another person? Do humans have moral obligations to nonhuman animals? Are moral rules relative to a culture or are they absolute?

Political Philosophy: What is justice? What is the best way to organize society? What is the relationship between the individual and her society? Is civil disobedience ever justified? What does “freedom” mean? What is the relationship between individual liberty and the law?

Aesthetics: What is beauty? What kinds of things are beautiful? Is beauty relative (“in the eye of the beholder”) or is it absolute? What is art? What makes something a good work of art?

By the end of this course, we should 1) have a working understanding of the major figures in the history of philosophy, including Plato, Descartes, Leibniz, Hume, and Russell, 2) understand some of the main problems and methods that define the areas of epistemology, the philosophy of mind, metaphysics and value theory, and 3) have learned to think philosophically about our own lives.

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (8th Edition)

Edited by Perry, Bratman & Fischer, Oxford University Press, 2019.

[Additional student resources for this textbook are available at: www.oup.com/us/perry. On this website you will find practice quizzes for each of the readings in the textbook.]

2. Additional readings posted on Blackboard under “Readings”.

3. PowerPoint lecture slides are available on Blackboard. You may download and print these to use for taking notes during lectures.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1) **Participation (15%)**: Students will be required to participate in a Discussion Board throughout the semester. In order to achieve maximum points for participation, you will be required to post a minimum of three questions per week on the readings and/or lecture, and a minimum of three responses per week to questions raised by other students. Complete guidelines for this requirement are available on Blackboard under “Discussion Board”. The goal of this requirement is to encourage collaborative learning. By asking questions and answering each other’s questions, students will have the opportunity to help each other understand the material and, as a result, be better prepared for the weekly exams.

2) **Weekly Blackboard Exams (70%)**: There will be seven Blackboard exams, one for each week of the course. Each exam will be available on Friday and due on Sunday. Each exam will consist of multiple-choice questions on topics that we have discussed that week. In order to prepare for these exams, you must get in the habit of reading and re-reading the assigned texts carefully and take the practice quizzes on the readings that are available on the Oxford University Press website (see Required Texts above for the links). Note: The exams may cover the assigned reading material and/or class lecture. Each exam will be given on Blackboard and will have a time limit. Here is the exam schedule:

Exam #1 (10%): Available May 17. Due May 19 by 11:59pm (MDT). Covers material from Week 1.

Exam #2 (10%): Available May 24. Due May 26 by 11:59pm (MDT). Covers material from Week 2.

Exam #3 (10%): Available May 31. Due June 2 by 11:59pm (MDT). Covers material from Week 3.

Exam #4 (10%): Available June 7. Due June 9 by 11:59pm (MDT). Covers material from Week 4.

Exam #5 (10%): Available June 14. Due June 16 by 11:59pm (MDT). Covers material from Week 5.

Exam #6 (10%): Available June 21. Due June 23 by 11:59pm (MDT). Covers material from Week 6.

Exam #7 (10%): Available June 28. Due June 30 by 11:59pm (MDT). Covers material from Week 7.

Note: Late exams will not be accepted.

3) **Essay Assignment (15%)**: You will write a 1250-1500 word essay on a topic selected from a list of topics. Essay topics and instructions will be available on Blackboard on May 31. The essay will be due by June 30.

COURSE POLICIES

Online Classroom Conduct Code: Any successful learning experience requires mutual respect between students and between the instructor and their students. Both instructor and students should not be subjected to any student's behavior that is in any way disruptive, rude or disrespectful. A student should not feel intimidated or demeaned by their fellow students. Should a student behave in a disrespectful or disruptive way, the instructor will remove the offending student from the course, and the offending student will be subject to disciplinary action on the part of the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution.

Academic Honesty/Plagiarism: Students who engage in scholastic dishonesty will be subject to disciplinary action as stated in the UTEP policy: <http://www.utep.edu/dos/acadintg.htm>.

Note: The Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution will adjudicate all plagiarism cases.

Email: All class email correspondences will be conducted exclusively through the email address that you have listed with the university.

Blackboard: We will be using the Blackboard shell for our class throughout the semester. If you have not done so already, you should familiarize yourself with accessing Blackboard. I will be using Blackboard to post course materials, including the syllabus and quizzes.

Disability Accommodation: UTEP seeks to provide reasonable accommodations for all qualified individuals with disabilities, including learning disabilities. This university will adhere to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations as required affording equal educational opportunity. It is the student's responsibility to register with The Center for Accommodations and Support Services within the first two weeks of classes and inform the faculty member to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS)
Union East Building Room 106
Phone: (915) 747-5148
Voice Fax: (915) 747-8712
Email: cass@utep.edu

SCHEDULE [NOTE: All of the readings below are in our textbook unless indicated otherwise.]

Week 1 (May 13-17) ♦ Introduction: What is Philosophy?

- *Introduction and Logical Toolkit*
- *Apology* by Plato
- *The Value of Philosophy* by Bertrand Russell
- *Plato's Allegory of the Cave* by Plato

Week 2 (May 20-24) ♦ Epistemology: What is Knowledge?

- *Meditations on First Philosophy* by René Descartes
- *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* by David Hume
- *Theaetetus* by Plato [Reading on Blackboard]
- *Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?* by Edmund L. Gettier [Reading on Blackboard]
- *Is the Sex of the Knower Epistemologically Significant?* by Lorraine Code [Reading on Blackboard]

Week 3 (May 27-31) ♦ Philosophy of Mind: What is the Mind?

- *Descartes's Myth* by Gilbert Ryle
- *The Nature of Mind* by David M. Armstrong
- *Intentional Systems* by Daniel Dennett [Reading on Blackboard]
- *Minds, Brains, and Programs* by John Searle

Week 4 (June 3-7) ♦ Philosophy of Mind: What is Consciousness?

- *What Is It Like to Be a Bat?* by Thomas Nagel [Reading on Blackboard]
- *What Mary Didn't Know* by Frank Jackson
- *Are Mental States Irreducible to Neurobiological States?* by Patricia Churchland [Reading on Blackboard]
- *Numbers and Other Immaterial Objects* by Gideon Rosen [Reading on Blackboard]

Week 5 (June 10-14) ♦ Metaphysics: Does God Exist?

- *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Section X by David Hume [Reading on Blackboard]
- *The Ontological Argument* by St. Anselm
- *The Existence of God* by St. Aquinas
- *Natural Theology* by William Paley
- *The Wager* by Blaise Pascal
- *God, Evil and the Best of All Possible Worlds* by Gottfried Leibniz
- *For the Love of Reason* by Louise M. Antony

Week 6 (June 17-21) ♦ Metaphysics: What is the Self?

- *The Self and the Future* by Bernard Williams
- *Where Am I?* by Daniel Dennett
- *Personal Identity* by Derek Parfit

Week 7 (June 24-28) ♦ Metaphysics and Value Theory: Do We Have Free Will?

- *The Powers of Rational Beings: Freedom of the Will* by Peter van Inwagen
- *Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility* by Harry Frankfurt
- *Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility* by Susan Wolf
- *The Meaning of Human Existence* by Richard Taylor
- *The Meanings of Lives* by Susan Wolf