

Phil 178M: Intro to Philosophy

Term: Winter 2023

Instructor: Michael Ball-Blakely

Email: mballblakely@utep.edu

Class Meeting: Tu/Th 8:00 - 9:20

Office Hours: Thursday 1:00-3:00

Class Location: Union Building 109

Office Location: Worrell Hall 301

Teaching Assistants:

Mohammad “Rub” Rahman: mrrahman@miners.utep.edu

Emma Keppler: ekkeppler@miners.utep.edu

Course Description:

This course is centered around five questions that might have crossed your mind. First, what should I believe? Do we have responsibility for our beliefs? Are there some beliefs—or types of beliefs—that we can be blamed for holding? Second, what do I know? And, relatedly, what does it mean for us to know something? Here we will analyze some classic theories of knowledge as well as more recent discussions of how our social identities can shape our access to knowledge.

Third, who am I? This will begin with articles that investigate the nature of personal identity—what makes me “me” and how does this same “me” continue over time despite the many changes I undergo? We will then transition to questions of social identity, looking at the ways in which our social positionality shapes us and, ultimately, the ways in which our agency and identity is dependent on relationships with others. Fourth, am I free? Here we will consider questions about free will and the relationship between determinism and freedom before transitioning to issues of moral responsibility. Here we might want to know: if I am unfree, if my actions are determined, or if I cannot control the effects of my actions in the world (if they are based on luck), then can I be held responsible for what I do? And fifth, what should I do? We end, finally, with what you might think are the most pressing questions—those concerning our moral duties. We will briefly look at some major theories before applying them in the case of our responsibility for global poverty. However, as should become clear, many of our answers to these questions will depend on the theories and discussions unearthed through our first four questions!

Course Objectives

The goal is for you to leave this course with an understanding of some of the key questions, texts, and ideas from the history of philosophy. However, rather than treating these works as dead dogma, we will be looking into how they fit with more modern attempts at answering these questions—especially those that foreground our lived identities and experiences. You will also gain experience in carefully reading complex works of philosophy and will work on how to respectfully dissect and critically engage with arguments.

Course Requirements and Grading:

Quizzes: The day before each class (except for the first and last weeks) will have quizzes posted to Blackboard. These will be timed and must be completed by 5pm—there will be no make-up quizzes. These will cover details from the reading for the next day's class. **Due by 5pm each Mon. and Wed. 25%**

Discussion Board: You will each be responsible for making one Blackboard post and replying to a post from another student once per week (except the first week). **10%**

Short Paper. 2-3 (double-spaced) paper on the a topic of your choice from the first two sections of the course (What Should I Believe? & What Do I know?). **Due 2/29. 25%.**

Midterm Exam: We will have an in-class exam covering material from 1/16 – 3/5. This will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. **3/21. 20%**

Final Exam: We will have a final exam covering the material from 3/7 – 4/21. This will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. **TBD. 20%**

Grading Scale: Final grades are calculated using the UTEP grading scale: A = 4.0 B = 3.0 C = 2.0 D = 1.0 F = 0.0

Required Texts: None. All readings will be available on Canvas.

Reading List

The tentative reading schedule is listed below. If we have to modify the schedule—due to adverse weather, illness, or if we just need to spend more time with a reading—I will give notice and modify the writing topics to accommodate the new reading list. Once the semester begins, any changes to the assignments or reading list will be to your benefit—they will never increase your workload.

Communication: I will try to respond to each weekday email within 24 hours. Put the course title in the subject line and include your full name in the body. Weekend emails might not receive replies until Monday morning. I will also post the occasional Blackboard update, so be sure to keep an eye on those. Finally, please consider attending office hours!

Date	Topic	Reading
1/16	What Should I Believe? <u>No class, online lecture</u>	Immanuel Kant – What is Enlightenment?
1/18	What Should I Believe?	William Clifford – The Ethics of Belief
1/23	What Should I Believe?	William James – The Will to Believe
1/25	What Should I Believe?	Rima Basu – The Wrongs of Racist Beliefs
1/30	What Do I Know?	René Descartes – Meditations
2/1	What Do I Know?	Plato – The Theaetetus 1-43
2/6	What Do I Know?	Plato – The Theaetetus 43-69 & Edmund Gettier – Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?
2/8	What Do I Know?	Elizabeth Anderson – Feminist Epistemology
2/13	What Do I Know?	Bat-Ami Bar On – Marginality and Epistemic Privilege
2/15	Who Am I?	Thomas Hobbes – The Ship of Theseus & Derek Parfit – Personal Identity pgs. 3-10
2/20	Who Am I?	Derek Parfit – Personal Identity pgs. 10-27
2/22	Who Am I?	Thomas Nagel – What is it Like to Be a Bat?
2/27	Who Am I?	Gloria Anzaldua – Selections from Borderlands/La Frontera
2/29	Who Am I?	W.E.B. Du Bois – The Souls of Black Folk
3/5	Who Am I?	Sara Goering, Tim Brown, and Eran Klein – Neurotechnology Ethics and Relational Agency
3/7	Am I Free?	Steven Cahn – Freedom or Determinism
3/12	Spring Break	
3/14	Spring Break	
3/19	Am I Free?	Susan Wolf – Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility
3/21	Midterm	No Reading
3/26	Am I Free?	Harry Frankfurt – Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility
3/28	Am I Free?	P.F. Strawson – Freedom and Resentment
4/2	Am I Free?	Susan Wolf – The Importance of Free Will
4/4	Am I Free?	Thomas Nagel – Moral Luck
4/9	What Should I Do?	Immanuel Kant – Selections
4/11	What Should I Do?	John Stuart Mill – Selections
4/16	What Should I Do?	Iris Marion Young – Five Faces of Oppression
4/18	What Should I Do?	Peter Singer – Famine, Affluence, and Morality
4/23	What Should I Do?	Onora O'Neill – Kantian Approaches to Famine Problems
4/25	What Should I Do?	Paolo Gilabert – The Duty to Eradicate Global Poverty: Positive or Negative?
4/30	What Should I Do?	Eduardo Galeano – Selections from Open Veins of Latin America
5/2	Final Lecture	Catch-up/Re-cap

Course Policies

Extensions: Extensions should be negotiated with your TA and will be given at their discretion. No extensions will be granted within 4 hours of a when an assignment is due. With the end-of-term grading crunch, no extensions will be possible for the final paper.

Late penalties: All late assignments (without a written extension) will be penalized at 5% every 12 hours with the exception of the final paper, which will not be accepted more than 6 hours after the deadline.

Missed Class: Participation is a major part of a successful philosophy course. Please attend class whenever possible—your grade will benefit, you will gain much more from the course, and it will provide a better learning environment for your peers. You do not need to contact me if you are going to miss a lecture. See your TAs policies if you need to miss discussion sections.

Technology in class: Feel free to use whatever note-taking devices you find most conducive to learning. However, do be aware that laptops can be a distraction both to you and those around you. If you choose to use one for taking notes, please keep all non-academic tabs closed in class sessions.

Academic accommodations: Please make sure to get academic accommodation letters in as early as possible. We are committed to making sure that every student has equal educational opportunities, so please let us know if anything is posing a barrier to your academic success.

Changes to the syllabus: The syllabus—in particular, the reading list and assignments—is subject to change. However, there will not be any changes that increase your workload. They will be limited to equally or less burdensome replacement readings, removing readings, and equally or less burdensome assignments. Any changes will be announced on Canvas and in class.

Academic Misconduct: See the Stanford Honor Code for information. The TAs and I will take academic misconduct very seriously. If you have any questions or concerns about what this entails, please feel free to reach out.

Participation and Preparation: Philosophy courses require that students come prepared and ready to discuss the material. This is even true of large lecture hall courses! This class will be a collaborative effort, one where each of us will benefit greatly from the knowledge, lived experiences, expertise, and insights of one another.

- Read each required text at least once (ideally twice) prior to class. Look for main themes, how it advances our knowledge, and how one might critically engage with the text. Read critically but sympathetically. Your goal is not to reject what the author says out of hand, nor is it to accept it without question. Treat them like an

interlocutor who might have much to teach you, but who is also fallible. approaching the issue with limited knowledge and perhaps a limited perspective.

- Try to identify the thesis, how it fits with our course readings, what evidence the author offers, what the implications for the view might be, whether it requires a radical shift in our values, and whether and why a reasonable person might disagree.
- Treat your fellow classmates in the same way. Regardless of their philosophical background, each of your classmates will have insights and understandings that can be of use to you and to your peers. Be respectful. Critically engage with their claims, but in the spirit of a healthy dialogue rather than a debate or argument.
 - Any student that disrespects their fellow classmates will be asked to leave.
- Aim to participate as much as your comfort level permits—in fact, try testing this comfort level. Recognize that just as your classmates have much to offer, and that their perspective and background can add to your own, so too can you bring to the discussion something unique and valuable.
 - Remember, though, not to monopolize the discussion. Make sure that each member of the seminar has a chance to engage equally. If you find yourself talking more than others, pause and reflect. Ask why you are engaging more, and why they are engaging less. Ask yourself if you can engage in a way that gives them the space to participate more. And, perhaps, pause and take a few breaths before answering or asking a question, giving others a chance to talk.
 - I recognize that not everybody is equally comfortable participating in person. If so, there are a variety of opportunities available to you:
 - Post on the Blackboard discussion forum.
 - Speak with me before or after the class.
 - Send me an email with your questions, thoughts, or criticisms.
 - Come to office hours and speak privately.

Technology

Requirements: Each student needs access to Blackboard where I will post readings, the syllabus, and occasional announcements. Please let me know if you have access issues.

Classroom Use: While I believe that students learn best without electronic devices, I recognize that some students learn best—or are most comfortable—with a computer or tablet. And so while I suggest that you come only with a pen, paper, and copies of the text, I am perfectly fine with you using other devices.

- However, please leave cellphones in your pockets or backpacks.
- Do not use your electronic devices for anything other than class-related activities. It can distract your classmates and will diminish your attention and learning.

Accommodations: The University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations and auxiliary services to students, staff, faculty, job applicants, applicants for admissions, and other beneficiaries of University programs, services and activities with documented disabilities in order to provide them with equal opportunities to participate in programs, services, and activities in compliance with sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008. Reasonable accommodations will be made unless it is determined that doing so would cause undue hardship on the University. Students requesting an accommodation based on a disability must register with the UTEP Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS). Contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services at 915-747- 5148, or email them at cass@utep.edu, or apply for accommodations online via the CASS portal.

Illness and Covid: Illness, injury, and other life traumas happen. While they are regrettable, they cannot be avoided. Please let me know if you are unable to make a deadline or otherwise complete a project on time and we will find accommodations.

Academic Dishonesty: Academic dishonesty is prohibited and is considered a violation of the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures. It includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Cheating may involve copying from or providing information to another student, possessing unauthorized materials during a test, or falsifying research data on laboratory reports. Plagiarism occurs when someone intentionally or knowingly represents the words or ideas of another as ones' own. Collusion involves collaborating with another person to commit any academically dishonest act. Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. All suspected violations of academic integrity at The University of Texas at El Paso must be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR) for possible disciplinary action. To learn more, please visit HOOP: Student Conduct and Discipline.

Title IX and Mandatory Reporting: Sexual misconduct (including sexual harassment, sexual assault, and any other nonconsensual behavior of a sexual nature) and sex discrimination violate University policies. Students experiencing such behavior may obtain support from the Counseling and Psychological Services [(915) 747-5302] and Student Health and Wellness Center [(915) 747-5624]. Title IX violations should be reported. For more information, contact the Dean of Students Office [(915) 747-5648], the Title IX Office [(915) 747-8358], or UTEP Police Department [(915) 747-5611].

Disclosure to University faculty or instructors of sexual misconduct, domestic violence, dating violence, or sex discrimination occurring on campus, in a University-sponsored program, or involving a campus visitor or University student or employee (whether current or former) *is not confidential* under Title IX. Faculty and instructors must forward such reports, including names and circumstances, to the University's Title IX officer.

Technology and Academic Resources

Help Desk (Library, Rm. 300, helpdesk@utep.edu, (915) 747-4357 (HELP), utep.edu/technologysupport/): Students experiencing technological challenges (email, Blackboard, software) can submit a work ticket to the UTEP Helpdesk for help. Contact the Helpdesk via phone, email, chat, website, or in person if on campus.

UTEP Library (ask@utep.libanswers.com, (915) 747-5643, utep.edu/library/): Access a wide range of resources, including online, full-text access to thousands of journals and eBooks plus reference service and librarian assistance for enrolled students.

University Writing Center (UWC) (Library, Main Floor, uwctutors@utep.edu, (915) 747-5112, utep.edu/uwc/): Submit papers here for assistance with writing style and formatting, ask a tutor for help and explore other writing resources.

History Tutoring Center (HTC) (Liberal Arts Building, Rm. 320, history@utep.edu, (915) 747-5508): Receive assistance with writing history papers, get help from a tutor and explore other history resources.

Individual Resources

Military Student Success Center (Mike Loya Academic Services Bldg., Rm. 130, mssc@utep.edu, (915) 747-5342, utep.edu/student-affairs/mssc/): Assists personnel in any branch of service to reach their educational goals.

Center for Accommodations and Support Services (Union East, Rm. 106, cass@utep.edu, (915) 747-5148, utep.edu/student-affairs/cass/): Assists students with ADA-related accommodations for coursework, housing, and internships.

Counseling and Psychological Services (Union West, Rm. 202, caps@utep.edu, (915) 747-5302, utep.edu/student-affairs/counsel/): Provides a variety of counseling services including individual, couples, and group sessions as well as career and disability assessments.

Student Health and Wellness Center (Union East, Ste. 100, studenthealth@utep.edu, (915) 747-5624, utep.edu/chs/shc/): Addresses health care needs of all UTEP students.

Dean of Students Office (Union West, Rm. 102, DOS@utep.edu, (915) 747-5648, utep.edu/student-affairs/dean-of-students-office/): Creates a culture of care for students by providing exemplary programs and services designed to enhance success.

Division of Student Affairs (Union East, Rm. 301, studentaffairs@utep.edu, (915) 747-5076, utep.edu/student-affairs/): Supports student success inside and outside the classroom.

Office of Student Fellowships and Awards (utep.edu/student-affairs/student-fellowships-awards/index.html)

Title IX Office (Kelly Hall, Rm. 312, TitleIX@utep.edu, (915) 747-8358, utep.edu/titleix/):
Protects students, employees, applicants for admission and employment, and other persons
from all forms of sex discrimination including sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, and
acts of sexual violence.