

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

INSTRUCTOR: SAMUEL A. TAYLOR

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WEBSITE: WWW.SAMUEL-A-TAYLOR.COM

COURSE: PHIL-0201-01

CREDIT HOURS: 3

PREREQUISITES: NONE

SEMESTER: FALL 2018

MEETING TIME: 11PM-12PM

CLASSROOM: 70-121 JOHN A. KENNEY HALL

COURSE DESCRIPTION: “An introductory survey of the subject areas, methods, vocabulary, and historical development of philosophy. The objective of the course is to provide an elementary knowledge of philosophy in general.” - *from Tuskegee’s 2017-2018 Bulletin* (<http://catalog.tuskegee.edu>)

This course will use contemporary and historical texts to introduce you to the general methods and topics in philosophy such as argumentative standards; issues of perception, knowledge, and skepticism; the relationship between mind and matter; issues of free will, foreknowledge, and determinism; attempted proofs of God's existence; and the nature of morality.

TEXTS: There are two required texts for this course:

1. John Perry’s *A Dialogue on Good, Evil, and the Existence of God* (Hackett, 1999). ISBN: 087220460X.
2. Alfred Mele’s *A Dialogue on Free Will and Science* (Oxford University Press, 2013). ISBN: 019932929X.
3. Any other required readings will be provided online at my personal website www.samuel-a-taylor.com until my domain name with Tuskegee is created. A page for this course can be found under the ‘teaching’ section of my website. Once I have a Tuskegee account created, I will activate our course on Blackboard and upload any additional readings for you to access there.

Students interested in looking at additional reading are advised to start by looking at either the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (www.iep.utmn.edu) or the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (www.plato.stanford.edu) – the former is usually better for introductory students. *DO NOT* consult sources such as Wikipedia, blogs, online forums (e.g. reddit), or the dictionary for philosophical insight. These sources have not been vetted; their quality varies *widely* and they are *overall* unreliable. I will sometimes provide you with some additional online resources discussing the relevant material that I have vetted for accuracy.

INSTRUCTOR E-MAIL AND CONTACT INFORMATION: The best way to contact me is to drop by my office hours. Do, however, feel free to call or email me if the matter is urgent. Note, however, that I only check my email during normal business hours (M-F 8am-5pm, excluding holidays). I have provided my cell phone number on this syllabus. Please do feel free to call or text this number with the following two caveats: (i) this method of contact is *only* for course related purposes, and (ii) do not call/text before 9am, after 7pm, or during holidays.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT AND STUDENT EXPECTATIONS:

- *E-mail and class website:* Check your e-mail and the class website at least once a day. The class website will be hosted at the teaching section of my personal website www.samuel-a-taylor.com until I have access to Blackboard.
- *Come prepared:* Come to class prepared to discuss the topic for the day. This involves **bringing your textbooks**, bringing materials for taking notes, and doing the assigned readings **before** class. Philosophy is a dialogical activity; you should always be ready to engage in discussion about the topics with your teachers, classmates, and the authors of the readings.
- *Careful reading:* Philosophical writing can be dense and difficult to understand. Read *carefully*. Actively engage with the text by underlining and highlighting important passages, writing summaries and questions in the margins, copying crucial definitions and distinctions,

brainstorming examples illustrating the most important ideas, and attempting to reconstruct any arguments you find. A good grasp of the material requires reading selections multiple times.

- *Technology in class:* Using technology in ways *unrelated to the course* is prohibited. I *recommend* that you do not use a laptop even for taking notes, unless there are special circumstances. Research suggests that taking notes with paper and pencil helps students to better process, retain, and understand the information they receive in class.
- *Etiquette:* We will be discussing some controversial topics to which many of you might have a strong emotional connection and over which reasonable people will disagree. Take care to articulate your views and arguments in ways that are respectful to your fellow students. Be especially careful when posting to any online discussion forums I may provide.

COURSE GOALS AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

The American Philosophical Association, in its official statement on outcomes assessment, contends that: “The basic aim of education in philosophy is not and should not be primarily to impart information. Rather it is to help students learn to understand various kinds of deeply difficult intellectual problems, to interpret texts regarding these problems, to analyze and criticize the arguments found in them, and to express themselves in ways that clarify and carry forward reflection upon them.” *Originally published in The Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association 69:2, pp. 94-9.*

PHILOSOPHY PROGRAM-LEVEL STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

SLO 1 ANALYTIC/CRITICAL THINKING

- Students will be able to distinguish fallacious from non-fallacious reasoning.
- Students will be able to think systematically through arguments.
- Students will be able to understand abstract concepts.

SLO 2 ANALYTIC READING

- Students will be able to extract arguments from primary texts.
- Students will be able to contextualize texts relative to one another.

SLO 3 ANALYTIC COMMUNICATING

- Students will be able to offer critical discussion that goes beyond mere reporting.
- Students will be able to sustain a focused and coherent intellectual narrative.
- Students will be able to offer objective interpretations of texts.

SLO4 PHILOSOPHICAL KNOWLEDGE

- Students will demonstrate knowledge of the history of philosophy.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of contemporary metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

By studying these philosophical topics students will gain a wide range of knowledge and skills whose value extends well beyond the classroom. Given that you put in the required time and effort, by the end of this course you will be able to:

1. Describe processes for evaluating arguments by deductive and non-deductive standards (SLO1).
2. Evaluate simple ordinary language arguments for validity, soundness, strength, and cogency (SLO1/SLO2).
3. Interpret, paraphrase, and explain passages of philosophical prose and argumentation (SLO1/SLO2/SLO3).
4. Reconstruct arguments found in the text into premise/conclusion format (SLO1/SLO2/SLO3).

5. Construct cases for use with the counterexample method, and utilize different strategies for responding to supposed counterexamples (SLO1/SLO3).
6. Articulate the fundamentals of various philosophical theories and topics such as Divine Command Theory, The Problem, Libertarian Free Will, Compatibilism, Determinism, Skepticism, Empiricism, Rationalism, Mind-Body Dualism, and Physicalism (SLO4).
7. Appreciate and appraise the strength and weaknesses of competing philosophical theories (SLO1/SLO2/SLO3/SLO4).
8. Apply philosophical discussions to contemporary scientific, social, and political issues (SLO3/SLO4).
9. Construct your own arguments challenging or defending philosophical positions (SLO1/SLO3).
10. Appreciate weaknesses and anticipate objections to your own arguments (SLO1/SLO3).

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING: Your performance will be evaluated and grade calculated via three exams, six of seven quizzes, participation assignments, and one short paper. More detail about these (along with a detailed grade breakdown) can be found below.

GRADING SCALE:

Letter Grade	A	B	C	D	F
Percentage	100%-90%	89.99%-80%	79.99%-70%	69.99%-60%	59.99%-0%

GRADING BREAKDOWN:

ASSIGNMENT	PERCENT OF FINAL GRADE	TOTAL
Participation	7%	7%
Quizzes	15%	22%
Exam 1	20%	42%
Exam 2	20%	62%
Exam 3	20%	82%
Course Paper	18%	100%

PARTICIPATION: Throughout the course there will be between 8-15 **UNANNOUNCED** in-class activities which will cumulatively determine 7% of your final grade. These may include group work, reflection exercises, practice quizzes, worksheets, etc. Each exercise will be graded on a 2-point scale. The purpose of these exercises is solely to ensure that you actively engage and reflect on course material. As such, if you *put in a good-faith effort* and complete the relevant assignment in class then you will receive the full 2 points for that individual assignment. If you are present but do not complete or only haphazardly complete the activity then you will receive 1 point for that individual assignment. If you do not even attempt to do the in-class activity then you will receive 0 points for that individual assignment. **Your lowest two scores on in-class activities will be dropped at the end of the semester before I calculate your final grade.**

QUIZZES: Throughout the course there will be seven quizzes. Your **highest six quiz scores** will cumulatively determine 15% of your final grade. The dates of these quizzes will be announced at least one week in advance both in class and on the course website. Quizzes will be given in class until I have access to blackboard, at which time the quizzes will then be posted to blackboard to be completed online before the due date announced in class and on the course website. These quizzes will consist solely of true-false and multiple choice questions about material covered in the readings and in class.

EXAMS 1-3: There will be three in-class exams throughout the course. Each individual exam will determine 20% of your final grade. So, all three exams will cumulatively determine 60% of your final grade. These exams will consist of a mixture of true-false, multiple-choice, fill-in the blank, short answer, and *one* essay question on the material covered in class and in the readings. **Exams are NOT cumulative.**

COURSE PAPER: The course paper will determine 18% of your grade. This will be a short 3 page (double-spaced) argumentative paper where you will present and explain a philosophical issue, take a clear position on that issue (presented in the form of a thesis statement), construct an argument for your position, and respond to at least one potential objection to your position. The paper assignment will be broken down into the following smaller sub-assignments leading up to the final paper:

1. Topic proposal & approval: (3 pts)
2. Thesis Statement Draft and Argument Reconstruction Outline (12 pts)
3. Final Draft (100pts)

These four elements will combine to make the full-paper grade (120pts) which then determines 18% of your final grade. A more detailed paper prompt and evaluation criteria will be distributed in-class and on the course website later in the semester.

GRADING PROCEDURES:

- Note that I am using weighted grading. As such, your final grade is NOT calculated by simply adding up the points from your various assignments across all categories and then dividing by the total number of points. If at any point in the semester you are at all confused about how to calculate your current grade in the class using these weighted percentages, please feel free to stop by my office and we can go over it together.
- Once I have access to blackboard, I expect to have grades for in-class activities, quizzes, and exams posted online within one week of their due dates. If a quiz or exam is given before I have access to blackboard then I will aim to pass back the assignment in-class within one week. If you have not received your grade (either online or in-class) then you are welcome to have this work graded in person during my office hours.
- Papers may take up to two weeks after their due date to have grades returned.
- Any graduating senior who receives an unsatisfactory midterm alert (i.e. a D or F midterm alert), or receives a D or F on an exam is required to have a meeting with me (either during office hours or by appointment) where we will create a plan for addressing the situation.
- Any cheating of any kind on any assignment (activity, quiz, exam, or paper) will result in the student receiving a '0' for that assignment.
- "The grade 'I' (Incomplete) is given when work in the course has been substantially completed but the student has missed an examination or has failed to perform some other requirement of a course because of illness, emergencies and other justifiable circumstances. The student or his designee must initiate the request before the instructor records the final grade and documentation of the circumstances must be presented to the instructor to be considered for the 'I' grade. The 'I' grade is not given unless the student has satisfied the minimum attendance requirements set by the instructor and is otherwise doing 'D' work or better in the course. Administrators cannot be involved in assigned the 'I' grade." - - *from Tuskegee's 2017-2018 online "academic regulations and procedures for undergraduates"* (<http://catalog.tuskegee.edu/content.php?catoid=1&navoid=17>)
- Once final grades have been submitted, I only have the authority to change grades in the case of a mistake made on my own part (e.g. accidentally recording the wrong grade, a

calculation error, etc.). Students who wish to have their grade changed for any other reason (e.g. personal reasons) must follow the guidelines for appeals of academic decisions.

- **There is NO extra credit for this course.**

LATE WORK AND MAKE-UP POLICY:

- Missed quizzes or exams, *excused or unexcused*, must be made up within two weeks (10 business days) from when the quiz or exam occurred. Failure to complete a make-up quiz or exam within this timeframe will result in an automatic '0' for the assignment. *Unexcused* missed quizzes or exams will suffer a 3% grade penalty for EACH additional business day that passes prior to their completion.
- Any part of the paper assignment (topic proposal, thesis statement, final draft) that is not received within two weeks of the due date will be given an automatic '0'. *Unexcused* late papers will suffer a 3% grade penalty for EACH additional 24-hour period that passes prior to my receiving the paper.
- Late in-class activities will NOT be accepted. I will only allow a student to make up an in-class activity if they have an excused absence **with documentation**. Even in the case of an excused absence, if you do not make-up the activity within two weeks then it will automatically be given a '0'.

ATTENDANCE: I will take attendance every day, but attendance factors into your grade both directly and indirectly. First, it directly affects your grade via the unannounced in-class activities as mentioned above. NOTE: leaving early for a university holiday or break is *NOT* an excused absence. Schedule your rides and flights accordingly. Second, Philosophy is hard and you are not likely to do well on the various assignments if you do not attend regularly.

NOTES ABOUT THE SCHEDULE: The order of the readings and the exam dates are **tentative**. Some readings may be cut entirely. Specific reading assignments will be given in-class and on the course website each Friday. The actual exam dates will be announced in-class and on the course website. Readings marked with a "*" will be provided on the course website.

Unit 1

- *Introduction to Philosophy and Argumentative Standards
 - *Selections from Al Ghazali "Moderation in Belief"
 - *Selections from Paley "Natural Theology"
 - John Perry's "A Dialogue on Good, Evil, and the Existence of God"
 - *Anderson's "If God is Dead, is Everything Permitted?"
- Exam 1 (9/24/2018)*

Unit 2

- *Selections from Mill's "Utilitarianism"
 - *Thomson "Turning the Trolley"
 - Mele "A Dialogue on Free Will and Science"
- Exam 2 (10/22/2018)*

Unit 3

- *Descartes' 1st and 2nd Meditation
 - *Brie Gertler "In Defense of Mind-Body Dualism"
 - *Patricia Churchland "Substance Dualism"
 - *Turing "Computing Machines and Intelligence"
 - *Searle "Minds, Brains and Programs"
- Exam 3 (Final Exam Time)*

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

This course is designed and delivered in accordance with all the relevant official policies of Tuskegee University. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with the policies outlined in the Student Handbook.

CLASS ATTENDANCE

A student who enrolls for a course is expected to attend the class beginning with the first day of class... a student who does not attend the class for the first two consecutive class meetings in accordance with the date listed on the University Calendar may... be administratively dropped from the class (excerpted from the 2014 Student Handbook, p. 13).

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Honesty in academics, as well as in other matters, is expected of everyone at Tuskegee University... Individuals are not expected to cheat or be dishonest, not to create the appearance of being dishonest, and not to contribute to or condone the dishonesty of others. Dishonesty, such as cheating, [and] plagiarism... will not be tolerated. The penalty could include failure in the course and possible dismissal or suspension from the University (excerpted from the 2011 Academic Regulations and Procedures for Undergraduates Handbook, p. 26).

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA) 504 ACCOMMODATIONS PROGRAM

The 504 Accommodations Program is in place to provide and/or assist students in acquiring the necessary resources and accommodations needed as verified through proper documentation. The Accommodations Counselor serves as a liaison between the student and faculty member to ensure that students with disabilities are afforded equal opportunities to demonstrate their academic skills and potential through reasonable and beneficial accommodations (excerpted from the 2014 Student Handbook, p. 21).

POLICY STATEMENT ON DISCRIMINATION & HARASSMENT INCLUDING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

It is the policy of Tuskegee University to provide an educational and employment environment free from all forms of intimidation, hostility, offensive behavior and discrimination, including sexual harassment... The conduct herein described is contrary to University policy and may be illegal under both State and federal laws... A student who believes that he or she has been discriminated against or harassed should report the conduct to the chairperson of the department to which the instructor is assigned; and, if the chairperson is the aggrieved party, to the dean of the college in which he or she is enrolled, following the organizational line of subordinate and supervisory authority (excerpted from the 2014 Student Handbook, p. 32-3).