

PHI 2010 Syllabus Spring 2017

Instructor Contact

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- Office Hours: online
- E-mail: Please contact me through the course messaging system.

Course Description

What is philosophy? It is similar to science in that each is a rational pursuit of truth. But philosophy differs from science in two crucial ways. First, it addresses different questions. While scientists ask, for example, what the various causes of cancer are, philosophers ask what it is, in the first place, for one thing to cause another. While scientists seek to discover the fundamental building blocks of matter, philosophers seek to discover what it is, in the first place, for something to be material (as opposed, say, to being psychological). Philosophers, in brief, ask questions about the notions that are fundamental to our conception of ourselves and of the world. The second way in which philosophy differs from science is that scientists answer the questions they ask by means of the scientific method. This involves making observations, forming hypotheses, and testing those hypotheses through further observation. Philosophers, on the other, reflect on the very foundations of science and common sense. It is this “armchair” approach that makes some believe it to be impossible for one philosophical position to be more reasonable than another because it is all “just semantics”. I hope the course will persuade you that philosophy does address matters of substance and that it is possible to make genuine philosophical progress.

We will explore a number of traditional philosophical issues concerning the nature of knowledge, free will, consciousness, morality, and God. This is not a course in which you are expected simply to memorize and regurgitate information. The course is mainly about ideas, and our aim will be to think carefully and critically about the topics mentioned and, more generally, to develop a framework for thinking about the arc, pursuits, and priorities of the rest of our lives. We will question our preconceptions vigorously and work together to establish a communal atmosphere that will make the course both challenging and fun.

Ultimately, it is up to you to decide whether studying philosophy is truly valuable. In my view, it is—and I am very excited to be working with you this semester.

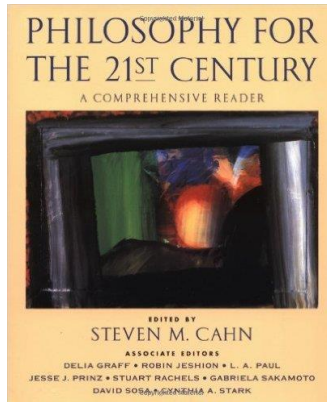
Course Objectives

A major aim of this course is for you to develop your ability to read, write, and think. If you are successful in the course, you will see improvement with respect to the following skills:

- Comprehending complex written material
- Putting difficult material in your own words clearly and succinctly
- Evaluating philosophical arguments
- Advancing good philosophical arguments yourself

Required Text

Steven M. Cahn, ed. *Philosophy for the 21st Century*. Oxford University Press (2003). ISBN-10: 0195147928



Additional readings will be available in Canvas in Files.

Course Requirements

There are three types of assignments in the course:

- Weekly Reading Quizzes
- Weekly Small-group Discussions
- Term Paper

Course Scheduling

Every week has the same schedule:

- **Friday is a reading day. Start reading on Friday. You cannot possibly digest all of the material if you wait until Monday.** Also, in the course Modules, you will find an overview of each reading. These will help you keep perspective as you read the selections, which are quite difficult, so take the overviews seriously and be sure to refer to them as you read.
- **Reading quizzes are always due on Monday by 11:59 PM. They are open-book quizzes, but it is very important that you not try to complete the quizzes as you are reading a selection for the first time.** That approach is anxiety inducing and you will not have time to do well.
- Small group discussions have two parts. **The first part is always due on Tuesday by 11:59 PM, and the second part is always due on Thursday by 11:59 PM.** Don't expect to be able to complete Part 2 (which is commentary on your group mates' Part 1) as soon as you post Part 1 on Tuesday, as your group mates have until the deadline to complete Part 1. **Usually you will have to wait until Wednesday to complete Part 2.**

The first week is an exception to the regular schedule. There is a syllabus quiz due on Friday, by 11:59 PM. There is assigned reading for Friday to prepare you for Week 2. Week 2 will follow the scheduling outlined above and the assignments that week will be based on the readings assigned during the first week.

The term paper will be due at the end of the semester. There will be a pre-writing exercise to help you get started. Your task will be to develop a criticism of an argument found in one of the reading selections. The paper will be 500 words in length. I do use Turnitin to check for plagiarism.

There is a "Weekly Assignment Schedule" file under Files. It would be a good idea to print this and keep it in a place that will make it serve a reminder. Be especially careful about forgetting to complete Part 2 of the small-group discussions. You are also advised to print the "Reading Tips and Quiz Advice" for regular review.

Missed Assignments/Make-Ups

Missing a deadline is not something that can be taken lightly because of fairness and assignment security. **You should consider it very unlikely that you will be able to make up a missed assignment.** I can allow such make-up work only if your circumstances are truly extraordinary and you provide proper documentation in a reasonable amount of time. Excusable failures to meet deadlines include documented medical emergencies, deaths in the family, and some university sponsored activities. Telling me that you were sick or having a roommate write a note will not count as documentation. A conflict with prior travel plans, etc. or other personal commitments does not constitute an excuse. **All due dates are specified in Eastern Time, so if you are not in this time zone it your responsibility to compensate for the time difference.**

Since this is an online course, you need to have a well-functioning computer and decent internet. The weekly quizzes cannot be retaken if you have an electronic issue in the middle of one and as a result cannot complete the quiz. This rarely happens, but because of the possibility, **your two lowest quizzes will be dropped.** If you find yourself having connection problems, it is best to take care of it right away instead of dropping two grades and hoping it doesn't happen again.

It is the student's responsibility look to **verify that an attempt to submit a small-group discussion post was successful.** You should be able to see your comments once you submit them.

Attendance and Participation

There is no class to attend, since this is an online course. However, punctuality, participation, and civility still apply. I strongly encourage you to be a full participant in the class discussions. Don't worry about getting something wrong. If something is unclear to you, it is probably unclear to several other people, and your input may well help us focus in on the difficulty. Voicing your opinion, putting an idea on the table for examination, or just asking a question can

be very helpful in a class discussion. Always remember to be civil towards people who have different beliefs from yours.

Small-group discussions are integral to this course. Your group mates' completion of these assignments depends on your timely submission of your individual post. Moreover, if you submit something on time but your submission lacks substance, you give your group mates little to work with, which affects their ability to do good work. **For this reason, any small-group discussion submission that is either late or lacks substance will receive no credit. Every discussion has two parts, and lateness or no substance with respect to either part earns you a 0 for that part. There is no partial credit for discussion submissions for which you submit something late or insubstantial. At least two replies to your group mates are required for Part 2, and if you submit only one reply or one of your replies lacks substance you will receive a 0 for Part 2. Please note that if you don't submit Part 1 you will not have access to the discussion in order to complete Part 2, which means a 0 for both parts. If you fail to submit Part 1 on time you can submit it late (for no credit) so that you can complete Part 2.**

You are expected to have a meaningful (i.e., sincere and contentful) dialogue with the members of your small group in response to a prompt. Expressions of agreement, disagreement, or praise are insufficient. You are not commenting on writing style and effectiveness or the psychological impact a post had on you. You are not assessing your group mates' performance on the assignment. Focus on philosophical content. Examples of insubstantial posts are:

- Great post! Your example really cleared up the reading for me!
- I like your post, but it would have been better if you had provided an example.

- Your post is really similar to mine -- I guess we think alike!
- You followed all the instructions. Great job!

The problem with these examples is not their length but their lack of philosophical content. Reply to your group mates with around four to five sentences. Even three can work. But **make them about the philosophical issues.**

Sometimes your group mates will reveal a failure to understand something important or make a leap that is not clearly justified. To point this out would be to engage them on a matter of substance. Also, a group mate's example might not really show what he or she thinks it does. To point this out with an explanation (and perhaps modify the example to make it work better) would be to engage your group mate on a matter of substance. **The most frequent reason for not getting credit for Part 2 is that the replies assess the person's writing or performance on the assignment rather than contributing philosophical content to the discussion.**

Keep in mind that your goal is to be helpful!

Grade Determination

There are 100 possible percentage points for the course. This percentage will be displayed in the course grade book throughout semester as you complete the assignments. The grade scale is as follows:

Letter Grade	Points
A	90 – 100%
B+	87 – 89%
B	80 – 86%
C+	77 – 79%
C	70 – 76%
D+	67 – 69%
D	60 – 66%
F	59% and below

The grade scale is subject to change at the instructor's discretion, depending on the final grade distribution. A change in the grade scale would only increase grades -- no grades would be reduced. Any .5 will round up. Please do not contact the instructor at the end of the semester to ask whether you could be "bumped up" to a higher grade because you came so close or because you really need the grade. To do so is to ask someone to do something unethical.

There are four types of assignments for you to complete. Each category of assignment is worth a percentage of your final grade:

Assignment Group	Percentage of Grade
Weekly Reading Quizzes	30%
Small-group Discussions	35%
Term Paper	35%

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism and cheating of any kind on an examination, quiz, or assignment will result at least in an "F" for that assignment (and may, depending on the severity of the case, lead to an "F" for the entire course) and may be subject to appropriate referral to the [Office of Student Conduct](#) for further action. See the [UCF Golden Rule](#) for further information. I will assume for this course that you will adhere to the academic creed of this University and will maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. In other words, don't cheat by giving answers to others or taking them from anyone else. I will also adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity, so please do not ask me to change (or expect me to change) your grade illegitimately or to bend or break rules for one person that will not apply to everyone.

Plagiarism includes copying and submitting as your own a passage from a text, the work of a fellow student; handing in a paper prepared by another as your own; using sources for writing your paper and not citing them in the paper. Plagiarism does cover materials found on web-sites.

Note that it is possible to plagiarize even if you cite your sources, if, e.g., the wording is too close to the cited text.

If, in writing a paper, you have any questions about what counts as plagiarism or how to avoid plagiarism, please discuss the paper with me before turning it in.

Diversity and Inclusion

This class is an educational safe zone. It welcomes and respects the viewpoints of students of all sexual orientations and gender identities as well as all races, ethnicities, religions and abilities. All members of the learning community are expected to treat each other with respect and dignity.

Students with Disabilities

The University of Central Florida is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. This syllabus is available in alternate formats upon request. Students with disabilities who need accommodations in this course must contact the professor at the beginning of the semester to discuss needed accommodations. No accommodations will be provided until the student has met with the professor to request accommodations. Students who need accommodations must be registered with [Student Disability Services](#), Ferrell Commons, 7F, Room 185, phone (407) 823-2371, TTY/TDD only phone (407) 823-2116, before requesting accommodations from the professor.

Important Notice for Financial Aid Recipients

As of Fall 2014, all faculty members are required to document students' academic activity at the beginning of each course. In order to document that you began this course, please complete the academic activity below. Failure to do so will result in a delay in the disbursement of your financial aid.

Activity: Complete the Syllabus Quiz.

Copyright

This course may contain copyright protected materials such as audio or video clips, images, text materials, etc. These items are being used with regard to the Fair Use doctrine in order to enhance the learning environment. Please do not copy, duplicate, download or distribute these items. The use of these materials is strictly reserved for this online classroom environment and your use only. All copyright materials are credited to the copyright holder.

Third-Party Software and FERPA

During this course you might have the opportunity to use public online services and/or software applications sometimes called third-party software such as a blog or wiki. While some of these could be required assignments, you need **not** make any personally identifying information on a public site. Do not post or provide any private information about yourself or your classmates.

Where appropriate you may use a pseudonym or nickname. Some written assignments posted publicly may require personal reflection/comments, but the assignments will not require you to disclose any personally identity-sensitive information. If you have any concerns about this, please contact your instructor.

Topics and Readings

Our pace will depend to some extent on how quickly you grasp the material. As a result, it is not easy to predict when a given reading will be assigned. Therefore, the readings will be assigned as we go, and we may not get to every selection listed. Some of the selections are not in your textbook and will be available in Webcourses. Those are marked below with an (e).

1. Knowledge and Skepticism

- Miranda Fricker: Epistemic Injustice and the Role of Virtue in the Politics of Knowing (e)
- G.E. Moore: Proof of an External world
- David Lewis: Elusive knowledge
- Jonathan Vogel: Cartesian Skepticism and Inference to the best explanation (e)

2. Free Will

- Harry Frankfurt: Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility
- A.J. Ayer: Freedom and Necessity
- Roderick M. Chisholm: Human Freedom and the Self

3. Ethics and Justice

- John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism
- Immanuel Kant: Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals
- Cornel West: On Affirmative Action
- Peter Singer: All Animals are Equal

4. The Existence of God

- Saint Anselm: The Ontological Argument
- Gaunilo: On Behalf of the Fool
- J.L. Mackie: Critique of the Cosmological Argument
- William Paley: The Argument from Design

5. Mind and Matter

- John Searle: Can Computers Think?
- Frank Jackson: Epiphenomenal Qualia
- Paul Churchland: Jackson's Knowledge Argument
- Daniel Dennett: Consciousness Explained