

## PHIL 1301 - 008 | Introduction to Philosophy

Fall 2024

Dr. Harris B. Bechtol

CRN: 10218

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Class Time: MW 2:00-3:15 PM; Location MADLA 206

Office Hours: MTW: 3:30 - 5:30 PM; Th: 10:00-11:30 AM

Office Location: CAB 326

Email: hbechtol@tamusa.edu

Phone: 832-779-7520 (Google Number)

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Introduction To Philosophy. 3 Hours.

This course meets the standards for the “Language, Philosophy, and Culture” category of courses under the core curriculum. TSI Restrictions: Reading and Writing

### COURSE INTRODUCTION

Hi, this is Dr. Harris Bechtol, but people often call me Dr. B. I am really excited to be teaching you this semester as part of the new Humanities Initiative at TAMUSA centered on the theme of Culture, Water, and Life *en La Frontera*! This course is part of a Learning Community (LC) linked with your First Year Seminar (UNIV 1301-018) with Dr. Davida Smyth. Some of the readings and assignments in our class will be integrated with the work you do in your FYS. We have a really exciting class to experience together based on my over 10 years of study of and research in the history of philosophy. This course will prove to be important not only for your overall education but especially for your own personal journey in coming to know yourself and your place in the world. This course is designed as an introduction to the history of philosophy through the specific theme of “Everything Is Water.” Specifically, we will be tracing the following questions throughout the course: How are we able to invent something new? How do we make change happen? How can we make the impossible become not just possible but actual? To arrive at many answers to these questions, we will be taking seriously two main ideas: (1) the geographical site and metaphor of *la frontera*/the borderland and (2) the element and metaphor of water. Through the metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, aesthetic, and political implications of these ideas, we will understand the world and ourselves anew insofar as, like water, we not only conform to the way things are but also harbor the possibility for newness, change, and invention. We will understand ourselves as holding a power to imagine new possibilities, both destructive and constructive, for the world. We will look at representative texts across the history of philosophy from the ancient Greek philosophers Thales and Heraclitus, the Chinese wisdom of Laozi in the *Daodejing*, the ancient aesthetics of the Aztecs in Peru, up to the Mexican-American philosopher Gloria Anzaldúa. In conjunction with the FYS course, our course will culminate in a group essay on how you think about life *en La Frontera* and how you think we should treat the land, resources, and others in this space in light of what you learned in the

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course. For this learning process to be effective, the course will consist of careful reading (on average 30 pages per week), listening to lectures, openness to learning, respectful discussion, and critical writing.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands | La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Fifth Edition. San Francisco, CA: aunt lute books, 1999. ISBN-13 978-1951874025

Laozi, *Daodejing*. Translated by Edmund Ryden. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN-13 978-0199208555

Packback Account (see below for more information)

Other Readings on Blackboard

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Students will reproduce the philosophical practice of self-reflection based on their readings.
2. Students will be able to list major philosophers and themes in the history of philosophy.
3. Students will describe many ways to understand the significance of the borderland for thinking through and effecting change in the world.
4. Students will interpret difficult philosophical texts and apply these skills in writing about these texts.

## COURSE WORK

The basis for your grade is as follows:

(1) Reading Quizzes	20% (2 points each)
(2) Packback Questions	30% (3 points each)
(3) <u>Two Essays</u>	<u>50% (25% each)</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

1. Attendance/Reading Quizzes: Considering that we are reading philosophy, coming to class for lectures and discussion is paramount because often times the reading is difficult to understand. Often only through participation in class (i.e. listening, taking notes, asking questions, and talking during discussion) do the texts begin to make sense. **As an incentive to help you remember to come to class, take notes, and engage with the material, we will have an in class reading quiz at the end of every week throughout the semester. I will keep a running tally of your quiz points. You will have about 15 quizzes in order to earn this 20% of your total quiz grade. The maximum amount of points for quizzes will be 20 points. If you miss a quiz, I will only allow you to make up the quiz due to medical issues.** If you miss class, your responsibility is to acquire any information and notes that you may have missed. Get these from your peers. Once you have acquired notes from class, I would be happy to discuss any questions that you may have about the information covered on that day.

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2. Assignments: You will be writing a good amount this semester in our course because doing philosophy requires not only discussing with others but being able to articulate your ideas and thoughts in writing. You should approach all writing in this course as a tool for engaging with the material. I will be using your writing to assess your level of learning. For any writing assignment, make-up work or extensions must be pre-approved. Extensions are only granted for *extenuating* circumstances. **Late assignments will not be accepted except with university excused absences or in rare cases at the instructor's discretion.**

a. PACKBACK QUESTIONS

The Packback Questions platform ([www.packback.co](http://www.packback.co)) will be used for online discussion about class topics. Packback Questions is an online community where you can be curious with your responses and questions about how what we are studying relates to your life and world.

I have one primary goal for using Packback for our course: to help deepen your understanding of the material by getting you to connect the philosophical ideas that we are exploring with your own personal life. A major objective for our course, as listed above under “Course Objectives,” is to get you to practice the philosophical art of self-reflection. So all of your activity on Packback will be geared toward this objective.

Your participation on Packback will count toward about thirty percent of your final grade. In order to receive your points, you will have 8 Packback assignments (see the schedule below for tentative due dates). For *each* assignment you must write:

- 1 post of your own with a minimum Curiosity Score of 50 in which you are asking an open ended question about the topic that I assign for each post.
- 2 responses to people in our class with a minimum Curiosity Score of 50 for *each* of your responses.

All posts must be relevant to our class subject matter. And all posts must follow the netiquette guidelines for our course. You will receive 1 point for your post and 1 point for each of your responses *as long as* your posts meet the Curiosity Score minimum *and* are pertinent to the prompt for that post. You will only receive half credit if you do not meet the Curiosity Score minimum. For each due date, your posts and responses will be due by Friday at 11:59 PM on the date that they are due unless stated otherwise in class or in an email. If you miss the deadline, you will not get any points for that assignment.

The Curiosity Score is based on criteria on Packback, and with each post you will receive real-time coaching on the right hand side of your screen on what you can do to raise your curiosity score.

How to Register for Packback and Submit Assignments:

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You will need to pay for Packback on the Packback website. It costs \$39 plus tax. If you need assistance in paying for this, reach out to [help@packback.co](mailto:help@packback.co) asking in them for assistance with paying. An email invitation should be sent to you from [help@packback.co](mailto:help@packback.co) prompting you to finish registration. If you don't receive an email (be sure to check your spam), you may register by following the instructions below:

- Create an account by navigating to <https://app.packback.co> and clicking “Sign up for an Account.” **Only use your tamusa email address for your account log in.**  
Note: If you already have an account on Packback you can log in with your credentials.
- Then enter our class community's lookup key into the “Looking to join a community you don't see here?” section in Packback at the bottom of the homepage. **Community Lookup Key:**  
5ZN-WGC-UE3S
- Follow the instructions on your screen to finish your registration.

Once you have an account on Packback, go to the “Packback Information” navigation link on our Blackboard page, and click the link on this page that says “Packback — Click Here to Begin.” **You must enter Packback in this way in order for your grades to link with Blackboard.**

If you have ANY questions or concerns regarding Packback throughout our semester, please contact the customer support team at [help@packback.co](mailto:help@packback.co)!

Scheduled Posts for Packback (see schedule below for due dates):

- PB 1: What question about water, would you like to explore this semester?
- PB 2: What question would you like to ask the author of the essay “How to Read Philosophy?” regarding what he recommends and writes in his essay?
- PB 3: What question would you ask Thales in connection with your own life?
- PB 4: What question would you ask Heraclitus about the fire, the river, or the harmony of opposites in relation to our world today?
- PB 5: What question about the dao and its relation to water would you ask Laozi?
- PB 6: What question would you raise in relation to Andean aesthetics concerning the relation of earth and water?
- PB 7: If you got to sit down with Anzaldúa, what question would you ask her regarding her experience and your own with *la frontera*?
- PB 8: What final question would you ask regarding the meaning of water in relation to yourself in light of all that we studied this semester?

## b. ESSAYS

With regard to the essays, you may submit a draft ahead of the due date so that you can revise your work based on my comments before submitting your paper on the due date. These drafts

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must be emailed directly to me. **Any comments I give you on a draft are *not* for you to copy and paste into your papers. Doing so will be treated as plagiarism.** All essays must be typed with 12-point font, Times New Roman, double spaced and 1-inch margins all around. Give yourself enough time to proofread and edit your papers. Format should conform to a consistent style guideline. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

All essays will be turned in to TurnItIn through Blackboard.

Prompts and rubrics for the two essays will be announced as we get closer to the midterm and final. The final essay will be an essay written in your groups that are formed in your FYS course.

**GRADING**

Your final grade will be determined based on the above requirements. Late assignments will not be accepted unless I tell you otherwise. Grade equivalents are as follows:

A 89.5-100    B 79.5-89.4    C 69.5-79.4    D 59.5-69.4    F 59.4-0

**TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE**

<b>Weeks</b>	<b>Sections, Themes, and Readings</b>	<b>Writing Assignment Due Dates</b>
Weeks 1-2	I. Course Introduction Section -Introductions -Syllabus -"How to Read Philosophy" (Blackboard)	Packback 1 Due 8/30 PB 2 Due 9/13
Weeks 3-6	II. Ancient Greek Philosophy -Thales Fragments (Blackboard) -Heraclitus Fragments (Blackboard) -DFW, "This Is Water" (Blackboard) - Maybe	PB 3 Due 9/20 PB 4 Due 10/4
Weeks 7-8	III. Ancient Chinese Philosophy -Laozi, <i>Daodejing</i> (Blackboard)	PB 5 Due 10/18

Weeks 9-10	IV. Peruvian Aesthetics -Cummins and Mannheim, “The River Around Us, the Stream Within Us” (Blackboard) -Reading from Rivera, <i>Andean Aesthetics</i> (Blackboard) - Maybe	PB6 Due 11/1
Weeks 11-13	V. Philosophy in/From <i>La Frontera</i> -Anzaldúa, <i>Borderlands, Light in the Dark</i> , Interview (Blackboard) -Milstein, <i>Rebellious Mourning</i> (Blackboard)	PB 7 Due 11/22
Weeks 14-15	VI. Ethical Theories and Group Essays -Readings TBD -Sandusky, “Dust of the Desert” (Blackboard) - Maybe	PB 8 Due 12/6
Week 16	<b>FINAL ESSAY DUE TBD</b>	

### CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE AND NETIQUETTE

A college philosophy class is a serious undertaking. Each one of you deserves a classroom environment that is most conducive for your learning. So make sure to use the restroom before class so that you minimize the disruptions of people leaving in the middle of class and attend the entire class each day. Additionally, cell phones must be turned off or turned to silent **and put away during class**. Come talk to me if this is an issue. The use of computers for taking notes is **not** allowed unless you have a DSS exception for the use of your computer for taking notes. You may drink an appropriate beverage in class, and if you need to eat something in class, choose something that is not disruptive. Do not begin preparing to leave class before the end of the class session. I will be keeping my eye on the clock.

As more and more of life is moved online and education is consistently moving more online, each of you will be consistently required in your professional lives to attend meetings online and participate in online discussion groups. I imagine, too, that many projects will be completed in your own profession through online collaborations. All of this virtual time online needs to be taken seriously, carefully, and responsibly. Hence, the idea of netiquette: our etiquette for the (inter)net. In an effort to help begin preparing everyone for how to participate responsibly and be present in an online setting, we will be establishing some “Community Rules” together for our use of Packback. Log in to Blackboard, head to the Discussion Boards page, and post your

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thoughts based on the directions for the “Community Rules” discussion board. Your participation in this discussion board will count as 2 points of bonus points towards your grade. I have started the conversation online for us as part of the discussion board instructions.

## ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT POLICY

Students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio are expected to adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Academic Dishonesty for which a student is subject to penalty includes cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, multiple submissions, misrepresentation of academic records, facilitating academic dishonesty, unfair advantage, and ethical misconduct. This includes holding other students to the same standards and reporting any incidents of alleged violation of the honesty policy to the instructor involved or, if necessary, to the appropriate academic department head. All students are responsible for being familiar with the Academic Dishonesty Policy, which may be found in the Texas A&M University-San Antonio Student Handbook. University policy prescribes serious consequences for acts of academic misconduct including, but not limited to, a grade of ‘F’ on the particular paper or assignment or a failing grade in the course. Also, a referral may be issued to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities where the sanctions can vary up to possible expulsion from the University. Considering the potential consequences of academic misconduct, it is obviously in students’ best interests to avoid even the appearance of such behavior. If you are ever unclear whether a specific act might constitute academic misconduct, please contact your instructor for an assessment of the situation. All student term papers and other written assignments are subject to analysis by anti-plagiarism software.

## AI STATEMENT FOR COURSE

Intellectual honesty is vital to an academic community and for my fair evaluation of your work. All work submitted in this course must be your own, completed in accordance with the University’s academic regulations. The use of ChaptGPT and other AI composition software should, as a result, be avoided to assure your own intellectual honesty. If you desire to this kind of software, do not use it for generating your paper or your ideas. Once you have your paper written, you can use it to help edit what you have already written.

## DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES

Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to providing equitable access to students with disabilities through reasonable accommodation in accordance with The Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you have a disability that may require accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services (DSS) for the coordination of services. Disability Support Services (DSS) is currently offering phone and virtual appointments as well as in-person meetings as necessary, by appointment only. To schedule a phone, virtual or in-person appointment, call DSS at 210-784-1335 or email us at [dss@tamusa.edu](mailto:dss@tamusa.edu).

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## COUNSELING RESOURCES

If you or someone you know is experiencing life stressors, emotional difficulties, or mental health concerns at Texas A&M University – San Antonio, please contact the Office of Student Counseling & Wellness Services (SC&WS) located in Modular C, Room 166 (Rear entrance) or call 210-784-1331 between the hours of 8:00AM and 5:00PM. All mental health services provided by SC&WS are free, confidential (as the law allows), and are not part of a student's academic or university record. SC&WS provides brief individual, couples, and group therapy, crisis intervention, consultation, case management, and prevention services. For more information, please visit [www.tamusa.edu/studentcounseling](http://www.tamusa.edu/studentcounseling). Any students interested in scheduling an appointment should call (210) 784-1331 Monday through Friday, 8:00AM – 5:00PM. After hours, please contact UPD at 911 or text “HOME” to 741-741 24/7/365 to connect with a trained crisis counselor. The National Suicide Prevention hotline also offers a 24/7/365 hotline at 1-800-273-8255.

## COURSE EVALUATIONS

At the end of the semester, you will have the opportunity to complete an evaluation of the course and my teaching. This will be available online through Blackboard. I will inform you as to when you will be able to fill this out.