

**Course:** PHIL 1301 Introduction to Philosophy

**Instructor:** Christian Culak (“Dr. Culak” or “Christian”)

**Office & Hours:** Zoom, by appointment only

**Email:** [cculak@tamusa.edu](mailto:cculak@tamusa.edu)

**Course location:** Blackboard

**Course meeting times:** Asynchronous; Exam review sessions

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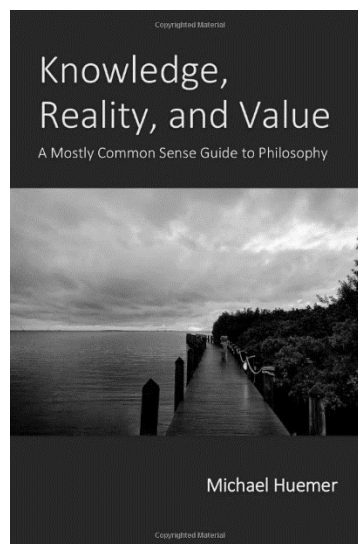
### What’s this course about?

This course introduces philosophy with arguments for views in epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics. We’ll begin with tips for reading philosophy and a crash course in logic. From there, we’ll study epistemology: Can we *know* there’s a world beyond our minds? Isn’t commonsense knowledge? What is *knowledge*, anyway? Afterwards, we’ll study metaphysics: Does God exist? What constitutes personal identity? Do we have free will? What is *free will*, anyway? And last, we’ll study ethics: Can actions be right or wrong? If yes, what makes them so? And do we have moral duties to others, even animals? For extra fun, we’ll end with whether time travel is possible.

### What can I expect to get out of this course?

There are three main objectives. By the end of this course, you should be able to: (1) identify and construct arguments; (2) demonstrate a general understanding of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics; and (3) integrate valid reasoning and philosophical concepts into your own life.

**Required text:** *Knowledge, Reality, and Value*, by Michael Huemer. ISBN: 979-8-72-900702-8



### What do I need for class?

You will need Blackboard access for critical notes, exams, and some assigned readings.

You will need Zoom access for exam review sessions.

**What if I have a question?**

Visit the “Questions and Answers” forum under the Discussions module.

Or email me ([cculak@tamusa.edu](mailto:cculak@tamusa.edu)). I respond within 24 hours—usually *much* sooner.

**What factors into my overall grade?**

Critical Notes	40%
Exam I	15%
Exam II	15%
Exam III	15%
Paper	15%

**What do these consist of?**Critical Notes

- Every ‘Application Day’ (see schedule) you will express your thoughts in an open-note writing assignment called a ‘Critical Note’. Content and directions for each one vary throughout the semester, but all of them will ask you to address what was discussed in that same class meeting. See the *Critical Note Grading Rubric* on Blackboard.

**Critical Notes can be made up *only if* discussed no later than 24 hours after the due date.**

- The ‘Life Happens’ policy: To accommodate unexpected issues throughout the semester, your **three** lowest Critical Note grades will automatically drop at the end of the semester. This can increase your Critical Note average by ignoring your three lowest scores. If you receive perfect scores, you will maintain a perfect average. This **cannot** lower your average.

Exams

- There are three 20-question, open-note, multiple-choice exams due on Blackboard by 11:59pm on their respective dates. No exam is comprehensive. Exam I only covers material from weeks 1-4; Exam II, weeks 6-9; and Exam III, weeks 12-15.

**Extensions can be given *only if* discussed no later than 24 hours after the due date.**

Paper

- We’ll end the semester with a paper designed to utilize the philosophical skills you acquired. You can write on any topic we discussed throughout the semester. Both a guide and a rubric are available on Blackboard.

**\*\*\*Every assignment may be completed early, but they must be completed by their respective deadlines\*\*\***

**Grading scale**

A	B	C	D	F
100-90	89-80	79-70	69-60	59-0

**Course schedule**

Below is the schedule. It lists each topic (*KRV* refers to the required text) and assignment (bolded). Readings are due before class. The schedule may change at any time. It stays updated on Blackboard.

WEEK	DESCRIPTION	READINGS / ASSESSMENT DUE
1	Introduction & Syllabus	<i>How to Read Philosophy (Blackboard)</i>
	Theory: Reading Philosophy & Arguments	<i>Ch. 2 (KRV 10-14)</i>
2	Theory: Argument Forms & Fallacies	<i>Ch. 2 (KRV 16-17, 20-24)</i> <i>Ch. 4 (KRV 46-53)</i>
	Application: Argument Forms & Fallacies	<b>Critical Note #1</b> <b>Due Sept. 8<sup>th</sup> by 11:59pm</b>
3	Introduction to Epistemology Theory: External World Skepticism	<i>Ch. 6 (KRV 80-98)</i>
	Application: Epistemic Standards	<b>Critical Note #2</b> <b>Due Sept. 15<sup>th</sup> by 11:59pm</b>
4	Theory: Knowledge and the Gettier Problem	<i>Ch. 8 (KRV 114-126)</i> <i>Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?</i> <i>(Blackboard)</i>
	Application: Is TAK Correct?	<b>Critical Note #3</b> <b>Due Sept. 22<sup>nd</sup> by 11:59pm</b>
5	Exam I Review Session	Zoom: 2pm on Sept. 22 <sup>nd</sup>
	<b>Exam I</b>	<b>Due Sept. 28<sup>th</sup> by 11:59pm</b>
6	Introduction to Metaphysics Theory: Arguments for Theism	<i>Ch. 9 (KRV 134-159)</i>
	Application: Evaluating Arguments for Theism	<b>Critical Note #4</b> <b>Due Oct. 1<sup>st</sup> by 11:59pm</b>
7	Theory: Arguments for Atheism	<i>Ch. 10 (KRV 160-172, 176)</i>
	Application: Evaluating Arguments for Atheism	<b>Critical Note #5</b> <b>Due Oct. 8<sup>th</sup> by 11:59pm</b>
8	Theory: Free Will	<i>Ch. 11 (KRV 180-195)</i>
	Application: Do We Have Free Will?	<b>Critical Note #6</b> <b>Due Oct. 15<sup>th</sup> by 11:59pm</b>
9	Theory: Personal Identity	<i>Ch. 12 (KRV 196-205, 207-211)</i>
	Application: How Do We Exist?	<b>Critical Note #7</b> <b>Due Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup> by 11:59pm</b>
10	Exam II Review Session	Zoom: 2pm on Oct. 27 <sup>th</sup>
	<b>Exam II</b>	<b>Due Oct. 29<sup>th</sup> by 11:59pm</b>
11	Theory: Introduction to Ethics & Metaethics	<i>Ch. 13 (KRV 213-239)</i>
	Application: Is Morality Objective?	<b>Critical Note #8</b>

		<b>Due Nov. 5<sup>th</sup> by 11:59pm</b>
<b>12</b>	Theory: Utilitarianism	<i>Ch. 14 (KRV 240-256)</i>
	Application: Only Consequences Matter?	<b>Critical Note #9</b> <b>Due Nov. 12<sup>th</sup> by 11:59pm</b>
<b>13</b>	Theory: Deontology	<i>Ch. 15 (KRV 257-269)</i>
	Application: What Else Matters?	<b>Critical Note #10</b> <b>Due Nov. 19<sup>th</sup> by 11:59pm</b>
<b>14</b>	Theory: Duties to Others & Animals	<i>Ch. 16 (KRV 270-279)</i> <i>Ch. 17 (KRV 283-297)</i>
	Application: Moral Duties to Others? Animals?	<b>Critical Note #11</b> <b>Due Dec. 1<sup>st</sup> by 11:59pm</b>
<b>15</b>	Theory: Is Time Travel Possible?	<i>Paradoxes of Time Travel (Blackboard)</i>
	Exam III Review Session	Zoom: 2pm on Dec. 3 <sup>rd</sup>
<b>16</b>	<b>Exam III Paper</b>	<b>Both due on Blackboard Dec. 12<sup>th</sup> by 11:59pm</b>

**Policies**

## Course Etiquette

- By questioning and scrutinizing various philosophical views, it is important to remember that the object of discussion is an idea, not the person or group expressing or representing the idea. No view is safe from criticism no matter whether it is religious, anti-religious, widely accepted, widely rejected, politically progressive, or politically conservative. You should show your classmates respect regardless of whether you agree with them. Our purpose is to better understand philosophical views and how to carefully reason.

## On Generative AI

- The purpose of our writing assignments is to practice articulating your own thoughts and applying the skills and concepts you acquire from the course. This can't be done using generative AI. So, generative AI is not permitted. And any use of generative AI will be treated as academic dishonesty (see below) since it deceitfully presents a piece of work as entirely your own that is not entirely your own.

## On Academic Dishonesty

- Students are expected to exhibit a high level of honesty and integrity in their pursuit of higher education. Students engaging in an act that violates the standards of academic integrity will find themselves facing academic and/or disciplinary sanctions. Academic misconduct is any act, or attempt, which gives an unfair advantage to the student. Additionally, any behavior specifically prohibited by a faculty member in the course syllabus or class discussion may be considered as academic misconduct. For more information on academic misconduct policies and procedures please review the [Student Code of Conduct](#).
- 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.

## On Accommodations

- The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are federal anti-discrimination statutes that provide comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Title II of the ADAAA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act require that students with disabilities be guaranteed equal access to the learning environment through the provision of reasonable and appropriate accommodation of their disability. If you have a diagnosed disability that may require an accommodation, please contact Disability Support Services (DSS) for the

coordination of services. The phone number for DSS is (210) 784-1335 and email is [dsupport@tamusa.edu](mailto:dsupport@tamusa.edu).

- The Academic Learning Center provides free course-based tutoring to all currently enrolled students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Students wishing to work with a tutor can make appointments through the Brainfuse online tutoring platform. Brainfuse can be accessed in the *Tools* section of Blackboard. You can contact the Academic Learning Center by emailing [tutoring@tamusa.edu](mailto:tutoring@tamusa.edu), calling (210) 784-1307, or visiting the Central Academic Building, room 202.
- The Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center supports graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges as well as faculty and staff. Tutors work with students to develop reading skills, prepare oral presentations, and plan, draft, and revise their written assignments. Our language tutors support students enrolled in Spanish courses and students composing in Spanish for any assignment. Our digital studio tutors support students working on digital projects such as eportfolios, class presentations, or other digital multimedia projects. Students can schedule appointments through JagWire under the Student Services tab. Click on “Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center” to make your appointment. The Center offers face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous digital appointments. More information about what services we offer, how to make an appointment, and how to access your appointment can be found on our website at <https://bit.ly/WLDCCenter>.

#### On Mental Health

- As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with your academic performance and/or negatively impact your daily functioning. If you are experiencing emotional difficulties or mental health concerns, support is available to you through the Student Counseling Center (SCC). To schedule an appointment call 210-784-1331 or visit Modular C, Room 166 (Rear entrance). **Crisis support is available 24/7 by calling the SCC at 210-784-1331 (after-hours select option ‘2’).** For more information and self-help resources, please visit [www.tamusa.edu/studentcounseling](http://www.tamusa.edu/studentcounseling)

#### On Financial Aid and Academic Standing

- According to the following federal regulation, 34 CFR 668.21: U.S. Department of Education (DoE) Title IV regulation, a student can only receive Title IV funds based on Title IV eligibility criteria which include class attendance. If Title IV funds are disbursed to ineligible students (including students who fail to begin attendance), the institution must return these funds to the U.S. DoE within 30 days of becoming aware that the student will not or has not begun attendance. Faculty will provide the Office of Financial Aid with an electronic notification if a student has not attended the first week of class. Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend the first week of class will have their aid terminated and returned to the DoE. Please note that any student who stops attending at any time during the semester may also need to return a portion of their federal aid.
- The Six-Drop Rule: Students are subject to the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 1231 passed by the Texas Legislature in 2007. SB 1231 limits students to a maximum of six (6) non-

punitive course drops (i.e., courses a student chooses to drop) during their undergraduate careers. A non-punitive drop does not affect the student's GPA. However, course drops that exceed the maximum allowed by SB 1231 will be treated as "F" grades and will impact the student's GPA.

#### On Physical Health & Safety in the Classroom

- If you are feeling unwell, feverish, or are coughing or sneezing, **do not** come to class. Simply email me ASAP and I will ensure you are accommodated to continue with the course remotely (i.e., from home), with no penalty whatsoever, while you recover. This policy not only places priority on your well-being but also serves to minimize the risk of your classmates falling ill.