

PHIL 1301 - 04C | Introduction to Philosophy

Fall 2026

Dr. Harris B. Bechtol

CRN: 10218

Class Time: MW 12:30-1:45; Location: Business Library Hall 152A

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

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Introduction To Philosophy. 3 Hours.

This course provides an introduction to the examination of major philosophical issues such as the existence of God, freedom and determinism, the relation between the mind and the body, moral rights and obligations, and the nature and limits of human knowledge. The focus will be these important issues and what classical and contemporary philosophers have said about them. This course meets the standards for the “Language, Philosophy, and Culture” category of courses under the core curriculum. TSI Restriction(s): 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 “*Las Fronteras: Where Our Stories Meet.*” This course is part of a Learning Community (LC) linked with your First Year Seminar with Mrs. Yaribel Caraveo. 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 15 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 Western philosophy with specific interest in the themes of life, death, and learning to live. What can mortality, finitude, and the universal law that each of us will die teach us about learning to live now? This is the orienting question of this course. Not only will we learn about the different facets of this question, but we will also explore a number of answers to this question. The goal is to introduce students to some of the major figures in philosophy with particular interest in how these philosophers have answered the question of the course. Thus, we will learn not only information about various philosophers but also what living philosophically can look like. We will move historically through the history of philosophy beginning with some of the pre-Socratic philosophers and ending with some 21st century thinkers. Through this historical survey, students will not only engage with difficult philosophical texts but also have the opportunity to understand the world and their place in it through many different perspectives. For this learning

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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— Also at Course Reserves at the Library Front Desk

Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* and Other Essays. Translated by Justin O'Brien. First Vintage International Edition, 1991. ISBN-13 978-0525564454

Plato, *Five Dialogues*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube 2nd Edition. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002. ISBN-13: 978-0872206335

Packback Account (**Purchase online from Packback.co not the bookstore (see below for more details)**)

Other pdf Readings on Blackboard

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify major philosophers and themes in the history of philosophy.
2. Communicate philosophical ideas and arguments effectively through speaking and writing.
3. Apply critical thinking skills to develop and evaluate philosophical questions and arguments.
4. Demonstrate close reading and understanding of philosophical texts.
5. Examine assumptions in their thinking and practice philosophical self-reflection.
6. Engage with different philosophical approaches to ethical issues facing individuals and groups.

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) Two Essay Exams	50% (25% each)

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 every Wednesday throughout the semester. I will keep a running tally of your quiz points. You will have 14 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.

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) 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 the your 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.

Your participation on Packback will count toward 30% of your final grade. In order to receive your points, you will have 9 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.

You will need to pay for Packback on the Packback website. It costs \$39 plus tax if you get it straight from Packback. If you need assistance in paying for this, reach out to help@packback.co asking in them for assistance with paying. To Register for Packback and Submit Assignments Follow These Instructions *Only*:

- Log in to our Blackboard page. Once there, click on the “Packback Assignments” Module.
- Click the first link in this module that says “Packback — Click Here to Begin.” This will take you to Packback where you can set up your account by following the onscreen instructions.

If you have ANY questions or concerns regarding Packback throughout our semester, please feel free to talk to me, your peer-leader Shaun Ferry, or contact the customer support team at help@packback.co!

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

- PB 1: Introduce yourself to your classmates by developing a question about and response to the study of philosophy. This could involve the meaning of life, the role of AI in everyday life, an ethical question regarding AI driven cars, etc.
- PB 2: Addressing yourself to the students in our class, 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: Pretend that you are interviewing Heraclitus. Ask him a question regarding how you see your Clifton’s strengths connected with the theme of life/death. In your elaboration, you can either expound upon your question or offer what you might think would be Heraclitus’s response.
- PB 4: Addressing yourself to students in the class, ask a question about living the examined life according to Socrates today.
- PB 5: Addressing yourself to students in the class, ask a question about living the philosophical way of life according to Plato today.
- PB 6: What question would you raise to Epicurus about how his ethics can help us lead the good life today?
- PB 7: What question would you raise to Seneca about how his ethics can help us lead the good life today?
- PB 8: Pretend that you are interviewing Camus. Ask him a question about his idea of Sisyphean stones in relation to your own life. Think how this might relate to the topic of Civic Engagement from your FYS course. In your elaboration, you can either expound upon your question or offer what you might think would be Camus’s response.
- PB 9: What question about the death of the other would you like to ask de Beauvoir?

b. ESSAY EXAMS

We will have two, in-class essay exams. More information for these exams will be provided within one week of the exam. See the Course Schedule for the exam dates.

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

Weeks	Sections, Themes, and Readings	Due Dates
Weeks 1-2	I. Course Introduction Section -Introductions -Syllabus & Netiquette Discussion -"How to Read Philosophy" (Blackboard)	PackBack 1 due 8/28 PB 2 due 9/4
Weeks 3-4	II. Pre-Socratic Section — Life/Death -Heraclitus Fragments (Blackboard)	 PB 3 due 9/18
Weeks 5-8	III. Socrates-Plato Section — Self-Examination and Immortality -Plato, "Apology" (<i>Five Dialogues</i>) -Plato, "Phaedo" (<i>Five Dialogues</i>)	PB 4 due 10/2 PB 5 due 10/16 EXAM - 10/21
Weeks 10-12	IV. Roman Section — The Goodlife and Mortality -Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus" (Blackboard) -Seneca, "On the Shortness of Life" (Blackboard)	 PB 6 due 11/6 PB 7 due 11/13
Weeks 12-15	V. Postmodern Section — Embracing Finitude -Albert Camus, <i>Myth of Sisyphus</i> -Simone de Beauvoir, <i>An Easy Death</i> (selection)	 PB 8 due 11/24 PB 9 due 12/4
Week 16	Final Exam 12/9 12:00-1:50 PM	

Schedule, topics, and assignments are subject to change at the discretion of the Instructor.

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 thoughts based on the directions for the “Community Rules” discussion board by 8/28. Your participation in this discussion board will count as early bonus 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

For PHIL 1301, I assume that all work submitted by students will be generated by the students themselves from working individually or in groups. Students should not have another person/entity do the writing of any portion of an assignment for them, which includes hiring a person or a company to write assignments and/or using artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT. Use of any AI-generated content in this course qualifies as academic dishonesty and violates Texas A&M-San Antonio's standards of academic integrity.

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES

Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to providing all students with reasonable access to learning opportunities and accommodations in accordance with The Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, Disability Support Services is located in the Central Academic Building, Suite 210. You can also contact us via phone at (210) 784-1335, visit us <https://www.tamusa.edu/Disability-Support-Services/index.html> or email us at dss@tamusa.edu. Disabilities may include, but are not limited to, attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability-related needs with Disability Support Services as soon as possible.

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. 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.