

PHIL 1301 - 004 | Introduction to Philosophy

Spring 2024

Dr. Harris B. Bechtol

CRN: 24508

Class Time: MW 11:00-12:15 PM; Location MADLA 224

Office Hours: MTW 2:45-4:45 PM; Th 9-11 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 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! We have a really exciting class to experience together based on my over ten 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 the 20th century French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir of Jacques Derrida. 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 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.

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

REQUIRED TEXTS

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2011. ISBN-13 978-0226026756

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

Simone de Beauvoir, *A Very Easy Death*. Translated by ????. New York: Pantheon, 1965. ISBN-13 978-0394728995

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 embrace their finitude, the transience of things, and the loss of others in their life.
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 points (2 points each)
(2) Packback Questions	30 points (3 points each)
(3) <u>Two Essays</u>	<u>50 points (25 points each)</u>
Total Possible Points	100 points

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 15 quizzes in order to earn your 20 points for your total quiz grade. 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) 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-examination. So all of your activity on Packback will be geared toward this objective.

Your participation on Packback will count toward thirty percent of your final grade. In order to receive your points, you will have 10 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:

You will need to pay for Packback on the Packback website. It costs \$39. If you need assistance in paying for this, reach out to help@packback.co asking in them for assistance with paying. 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!

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

- PB 1: Introduce yourself to the class by posting about what question or series of questions you have about the study of philosophy.
- 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 Heraclitus about the theme of life/death in connection with your own experience?
- PB 4: What question about living the examined life in your own life would you like to ask Socrates?
- PB 5: What question about living the philosophical way of life in your own life would you like to ask Plato?
- PB 6: What question would you raise to Aristotle about how his ethics can help us lead the good life today?
- PB 7: What question would you raise to Epicurus about how his ethics can help us lead the good life today? -or- What question would you raise to Seneca about how his ethics can help us lead the good life today?
- PB 8: After reading Camus, what question would you raise about Sisyphian stones in your own life? And how can you find happiness in accepting it?
- PB 9: What question about the death of the other would you like to ask de Beauvoir?
- PB 10: What question would you like to ask Derrida about his understanding of life as survival?

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 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.

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All essays will be turned in to TurnItIn through Blackboard.

Below are the prompt options for each of the essays. Some modifications may be made to these prompts based on the material that we cover in the course. Each essay must be answered in 2-3 pages. See below for due dates:

ESSAY #1 OPTIONS

- i. Heraclitus sought out himself in his inquiry on the nature of things. Explain how the images of the fire, the river, and especially the bow are integrally connected to this search and inquiry by elaborating on the Heraclitean theme of life/death.
- ii. Explain the approaches toward death by Socrates and Plato. For Socrates, relate his approach to death to his living the philosophical way of life that he calls the examined life in the *Apology*. For Plato, relate his approach to death to his own contribution to living the philosophical way of life in the *Phaedo*.

ESSAY #2 OPTIONS

- i. Compare and contrast the philosophical approaches of Aristotle and Epicurus by focusing on each philosopher's definition of the good life and how they think we should approach our own death. Which approach do you think would better help to lead to the good life in today's culture?
- ii. Pick two of the three philosophers covered in the last section of the course—Camus, de Beauvoir, and Derrida—in order to compare and contrast the way that they suggest we should accept our fate and finitude.

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 C 69.5-79 D 59.5-69 F 59.4-0

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Weeks	Sections, Themes, and Readings	Writing Assignment Due Dates
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Weeks 1-2	M 1/17	I. Course Introduction Section -Introductions -Syllabus & Netiquette Discussion -"How to Read Philosophy" (Blackboard)	PackBack 1 due 1/19 PB 2 due 1/26
Weeks 3-4	M 1/29	II. Pre-Socratic Section — Life/Death -Heraclitus Fragments (Blackboard)	PB 3 due 2/9
Weeks 4-8	M 2/12	III. Socrates-Plato Section — Self-Examination and Immortality -Plato, "Apology" (<i>Five Dialogues</i>) -Plato, "Phaedo" (<i>Five Dialogues</i>)	PB 4 due 2/23 PB 5 due 3/8 Essay #1 due 3/19
Weeks 9-12	M 3/18	IV. Aristotle and Roman Section — The Goodlife and Mortality -Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> -Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus" (Blackboard) -or- Seneca, "On the Shortness of Life" (Blackboard)	PB 6 due 4/5 PB 7 due 4/12
Weeks 12-15	W 4/10	V. Postmodern Section — Embracing Finitude -Albert Camus, <i>Myth of Sisyphus</i> -Simone de Beauvoir, <i>A Very Easy Death</i>	PB 8 due 4/19 PB 9 due 4/30
Week 16		Essay #2 TBA — No Class	

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

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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. 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

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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.

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.