Course Guide

and

Syllabus

University of St. Thomas

Dr. Steven Peña

Fall

2016
Course Information and Syllabus

Instructor: Dr. Steven E. Peña, (B.A., M.A., Ph.D.), member, American Philosophical Association, North American Dictionary Society, Bertrand Russell Society, Semiotic Society of America, International Association for Semiotic Studies, Phi Kappa Phi, etc. / author: "Belief limitations in the normative and natural sciences," "Homo Dramaticus: the semiotics of fictional worlds" (both, Semiotic Society of America), Homo Logicus: Introduction, Inquiry and Reflection in the Art of Right Reasoning, (Cengage)

Contact Info.: for class issues: penas@stthom.edu for intellectual issues: plonticlogic@gmail.com
Office number: C-2.116c (students are welcome to visit at any time)

Conference hours: TBA Final Drop Day: FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4th

Text: Strictly speaking no text is required. Nevertheless, one good work to have is Introduction to Metaphysics (Carroll and Markosian)

Online: Unless otherwise stated, Blackboard will be used only for posting grades; it will have NO course content.

Signature page: Students must sign and turn in the final page of this syllabus. No Bonus nor Extra Credit points will be awarded if this is not done, and there may be additional penalties for not doing so.

Grading scale: A----90 and above B----80 - 89, C----70 - 79, D----60 - 69, F----below 60
These are broken down further (and into a point system, 0-500) below under “Grade Posting.”

Make-up exams: Arrangements must be made by the student with the instructor before the exam in question is given in order for the student to be allowed to take a make-up exam. Ordinarily, students who take make-up exams within one week of original administration of exam will lose one letter-grade on said exam. Exams taken later than one week of original administration will lose an amount of credit deemed suitable by the instructor. The opportunity to make up a test or other work is strictly at the discretion of your instructor.

Grade derivation: The course grade will be derived from the following 5 grades:

3 tests
1 essay (guidelines in the first day handout)
final exam (may or may not be comprehensive)

Each of these items is worth 20% of the final semester grade.

As a general policy grades are not curved and points are not added under any circumstances (e.g., from 59 to 60, 89 to 90, etc., thus, an 89.4 is a B), and no “extra work” may be done to augment a student’s grade. Your instructor reserves the right to determine the amount of time allowed for each and every test to be taken. This amount of time may not be the same for every test.

Grade Posting: Grades will be posted on Blackboard. The student will see the following 8 columns for grades in Blackboard: Test 1, Test 2, Test 3, Essay, Final Exam, Optional Essay Points, Minimum Grade Points, Final Grade. The “Minimum Grade Points” column will have any points necessary to bring a grade or grades up to a 40, as I will not let anyone receive less than a 40 on any item, so long as the item was done and turned in. Thus, there will be no points in that column unless a grade under 40 was received on an item or items. A maximum of 3 minimum grade points will be awarded. It is possible that a 9th column will appear if for any reason I decide to curve a grade or grades; such a column will be labeled, “Bonus Points.” The Final Grade for the class will be derived by dividing the “Total” column by five; the Total column is the sum of all other columns.

The points in the Total column break down in the following way:

473 & above = A+ (95-100)
433-447 = B+ (87-89)
398-412 = B- (80-82)
363-382 = C+ (73-76)
323-347 = D+ (65-69)

448-472 = A- (90-94)
413-432 = B (83-86)
383-397 = C+ (77-79)
348-362 = C (70-72)
298-322 = D (60-64)
297 & below = F (59 and below)
There will be no exceptions to the grade chart above and not a single point will be added under any circumstances whatsoever, unless an error in calculation has occurred or a grade has been entered incorrectly.

**Honesty Policy:** If a student is found to be acting dishonestly in any way the instructor will decide, on a case by case basis, what punishment will be meted out.

**Attendance:** Students are expected to attend all class sessions and are responsible for what is missed.

**Withdrawal:** The student will be expected to insure that he or she is enrolled in the class (or dropped from it should the need arise). The instructor will not withdraw the student for excessive absences. The last day to withdrawal from the course is November 4th.

**Course description:** A study of the fundamental aspects of physical things, insofar as they are things, and existent, to see whether they lead to a realm that is "beyond the physical" ("metaphysical").

**Orientation to the course:** This course is lecture intensive; it will be very difficult to do well in it without attending class. Again, in order to be very clear on this point, it must be understood that the student will be tested on his/her knowledge of the material in my lectures, not directly on anything else.

**Prerequisites:** PHIL 1311 and 2314 or three courses in the historical sequence.

**Expected Due Dates:** Test 1 = third or fourth week, Test 2 = seventh or eight week, Test 3 = twelfth or thirteenth week, Required Essay = tenth week (these dates are subject to change)

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**Test- Rules and Rules for the Class**  
The student is subject to a penalty if any of these are violated

* Do not have any materials on your desk during a test  
* Do not have a phone or any other device on your desk or anywhere visible during a test  
* Do not leave the classroom until you have finished and turned in your test  
* Do not talk or make excessive noise during a test; raise your hand if you have a question  
* Do not fail to put your test code on your test, scantron or wherever indicated  
* Emails to your instructor must address him (with a title) and must be respectful; also, the student must identify him/herself
PROBABLE SEQUENCE OF TOPICS

WHAT IS METAPHYSICAL SPECULATION?

in the Tradition
Medieval and Scholastic Speculation
Modern Conceptions

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

traditional ideas
Proof in a Scientific Era

GOD AND HIS CREATURES

Forms of metaphysical thinking
the Christian Tradition

EXISTENCE

CREATION

ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE

Existential Reflection
Existence as a logical Predicate

POTENCY AND ACT

In the Scholastic Tradition
Scientifically Considered

THE TRANSCENDENTALS

ANALOGICAL REFLECTION

THE CATEGORIES

In Aristotle
Modern Analysis

METAPHYSICS AS A SCIENCE
There is one essay required for this class. Here are the guidelines for the required essay:

**The General Idea....**
You are to write a 4-5 page paper on a specific idea related to metaphysics of a specific philosopher. It must be a thinker whom we have talked about in class, will talk about, or one about whom you have got approval from me to write.

**More Specifically....**
This essay is meant to be a historical presentation of a philosopher's teaching on a given subject. Examples of this would be: Plato's view on the immortality of the soul, one of the proofs for the existence of god that we discuss, one of Hume's rebuttals of a proof for the existence of god or Kant's Categorical Imperative.

**The Two Approaches to Writing It....**
The student must choose one of the following two approaches to writing the paper:

1. In the first approach the paper is basically a detailed presentation of what a philosopher held. On this approach the student will be concerned foremost with accurately presenting, in the student's own words, just what it was that was thought, and with providing original examples or illustrations. One possible subject, for example, would be Anselm of Canterbury's argument for the existence of God. The purpose would be to relate as faithfully as possible how Anselm thinks he has proven the existence of God. The student would not need to refute or support Anselm's position; rather, the only concern here is to demonstrate in detail the line of reasoning that leads to the conclusion that there is a God. The student must use both primary and secondary material and the library will have the relevant works of virtually all the philosophers we will deal with.

2. In the second approach the student will present an assessment of a philosopher's position on a particular subject. The purpose here is to offer an analysis conveying the opinion of the student in a manner as insightful as possible. Very little if any of this paper is to be concerned with conveying just what it was the thinker believed. Rather, the student should assume that the reader understands the thinker's position and that the student has something insightful or original to convey. An example here is an essay on Plato's doctrine on the immortality of the soul. The student will want to construct a convincing argument or set of arguments for some thesis about what Plato has offered us. Here again the library should prove helpful in
composing this work and both primary and secondary material must be used.

What Kind of Paper is Unacceptable....

(1) The subject of the paper is not to be a philosopher. It is not, for example, acceptable to write on Aristotle or Kant; one must write on a specific thing that one of these, or some other philosopher, taught. I will not accept a paper on Plato; I will accept a paper on Plato’s view of immortality.

(2) The subject of the paper is not to be a work, or a portion of a work, by some thinker. For example, I will not accept a paper on Plato’s Republic, or a portion or passage of the Republic. Again, the paper is to be on a specific IDEA of one of the philosophers.

What Should NOT be Included in your Paper....

(1) Biographical or other extraneous details. Do not tell me how many sisters this philosopher had or where he/she was born; do not tell me about his influence all through the centuries or how much respect is had for this person or how important he/she is. All this is “filler” and I do not want filler in your paper.

(2) Excessive quotation. There should be no more than a SMALL amount of quotation in your paper. The quotation of sources is good, but only a small amount. More than three or four quotations in the paper is, in most case, excessive, and quotations more than two lines long is inappropriate and will likely hurt your grade.

(3) Any extraneous material. Do not add anything to your paper. The item you turn in should consist of the paper itself that you have written, the cover page and the bibliography page. Do not use folders or binders; do not staple or paperclip or in any other way add pictures, art-work, decorative material of any sort nor sources nor anything else to what you turn in.

Sources.....

At least two sources must be used and made reference to; there must be at least one primary and at least one secondary source. (If you are not absolutely clear on what “primary” and “secondary” mean you must find out; these words have a meaning in scholarly contexts distinct from ordinary usage.) Briefly, a primary source is the work of the author in question and a secondary source is the work of another person about the work of the author in question. Here is an example: a topic for the paper could be Aristotle’s proof of the existence of god. A primary source is going to be what Aristotle wrote (in translation, obviously). A book about Aristotle’s proof is a secondary source. However, a book about the existence of god that does not deal with Aristotle’s proof is not acceptable as a secondary source for this paper.
While internet material may be used it does not count for meeting the source requirements; the same is true of entire books on the internet and of book prefaces, notes and introductions. No electronic sources count toward the source requirements; for meeting the source requirements all material must be hard copy.

**Bibliography....**

The bibliography must be in conformity with the *Chicago Manual of Style*. A works cited is not acceptable, only a bibliography. Here are example entries:

**BOOK**


**ARTICLE**


**BOOK WITH TWO AUTHORS**


**Formatting....**

(1) Your paper must be stapled
(2) The paper is to be double-spaced with 1-inch margins (on all sides) and a 10-12 pt. font
(3) The paper should be one-sided and should have a cover-page listing name, ID number, paper title and class day and time. **The student’s name should not appear on any page other than the cover-page.** No specific font-size is required for the cover-page.
(4) The paper is to be paginated.
(5) The last page of the paper is to be reserved for the bibliography

**Additional Remarks....**

If I believe you are guilty of plagiarism you will have to orally explain what has been written in the essay. The student should be very careful to insure that he or she is in a position to make the sort of claims that are made in the paper. If the student’s paper states, for example, “All of Descartes’ works are written from a scientific point of view,” and there is no attribution to a source for this statement, I must assume that the student has read all of Descartes’ works and is therefore prepared to discuss them with me in order to prove that. I am happy to discuss your paper with you in order offer whatever guidance I can.
**Turning the Paper In....**

A due date will be set and announced early in the semester. I do not accept papers by e-mail, only hardcopies, nor will untyped papers be accepted. A paper is considered late if it is turned in after I leave on the day it is due. One letter-grade will be deducted for a paper turned in late.

**Grading of the Paper....**

The paper will graded in 5-point increments (as, for example, 60, 65, 70, 75...etc.), unless it is above a 90. Comments will be on the last page. The logical coherence and reasonableness of your paper will be important, as will the understanding of the basic ideas involved. Also, grammar, orthography and syntax form a major consideration in the grading of the essays. Typically, only the first half of the first page will be marked for such errors.
**SOME POSSIBLE PAPER TOPICS**

a. Xeno's paradoxes  
b. Democritus' atomistic theory  
c. Pythagoras and the existence of numbers  
d. the immortality of the soul  
e. the essence / existence distinction  
f. modern Platonic views in mathematics  
g. on the possibility of the existence of Plato's forms  
h. the metaphysical doctrine of the *De Ente et Essentia*  
i. the metaphysical proof of the Prime Mover in Aristotle  
j. the distinction between potency and actuality  
k. Maritain on metaphysical reality  
l. on a metaphysical theory of science  
m. proof of a non-physical component in humans via metaphysics  
n. non-Platonic metaphysical proofs for the immateriality of the soul  
o. the theory of hylomorphism  
p. the four causes metaphysically understood  
q. materialism vs. vitalism, metaphysically understood  
r. univocal, equivocal and analogical similarity  
s. J.S. Haldane on vitalism vs. materialism  
t. Aquinas on the three-fold history of philosophical speculation
Writing A Philosophy Paper

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Simon Fraser University

Good writing is the product of proper training, much practice, and hard work. The following remarks, though they will not guarantee a top quality paper, should help you determine where best to direct your efforts. I offer first some general comments on philosophical writing, and then some specific "do"s and "don't"s.

One of the first points to be clear about is that a philosophical essay is quite different from an essay in most other subjects. That is because it is neither a research paper nor an exercise in literary self-expression. It is not a report of what various scholars have had to say on a particular topic. It does not present the latest findings of tests or experiments. And it does not present your personal feelings or impressions. Instead, it is a reasoned defense of a thesis. What does that mean?

Above all, it means that there must be a specific point that you are trying to establish - something that you are trying to convince the reader to accept - together with grounds or justification for its acceptance.

Before you start to write your paper, you should be able to state exactly what it is that you are trying to show. This is harder than it sounds. It simply will not do to have a rough idea of what you want to establish. A rough idea is usually one that is not well worked out, not clearly expressed, and as a result, not likely to be understood. Whether you actually do it in your paper or not, you should be able to state in a single short sentence precisely what you want to prove. If you cannot formulate your thesis this way, odds are you are not clear enough about it.

The next task is to determine how to go about convincing the reader that your thesis is correct. In two words, your method must be that of rational persuasion. You will present arguments. At this point, students frequently make one or more of several common errors. Sometimes they feel that since it is clear to them that their thesis is true, it does not need much argumentation. It is common to overestimate the strength of your own position. That is because you already accept that point of view. But how will your opponent respond? It is safest to assume that your reader is intelligent and knows a lot about your subject, but disagrees with you.

Another common mistake is to think that your case will be stronger if you mention, even if briefly, virtually every argument that you have come across in support of your position. Sometimes this is called the "fortress approach." In actual fact, it is almost certain that the fortress approach will not result in a very good paper. There are several reasons for this.

First, your reader is likely to find it difficult to keep track of so many different arguments, especially if these arguments approach the topic from different directions.

Second, the ones that will stand out will be the very best ones and the very worst ones. It is important to show some discrimination here. Only the most compelling one or two arguments should be developed. Including weaker ones only gives the impression that you are unable to tell the difference between the two.

Third, including many different arguments will result in spreading yourself too thinly. It is far better to cover less ground in greater depth than to range further afield in a superficial manner. It will also help to give your paper focus.

In order to produce a good philosophy paper, it is first necessary to think very carefully and clearly about your topic. Unfortunately,

http://www.sfu.ca/philosophy/resources/writing.html
your reader (likely your marker or instructor) has no access to those thoughts except by way of what actually ends up on the page. He or she cannot tell what you meant to say but did not, and cannot read in what you would quickly point out if you were conversing face to face. For better or for worse, your paper is all that is available. It must stand on its own. The responsibility for ensuring the accurate communication of ideas falls on the writer's shoulders. You must say exactly what you mean and in a way that minimizes the chances of being misunderstood. It is difficult to overemphasize this point.

There is no such thing as a piece of good philosophical writing that is unclear, ungrammatical, or unintelligible. Clarity and precision are essential elements here. A poor writing style militates against both of these.

**THINGS TO AVOID IN YOUR PHILOSOPHY ESSAY**

1. **Lengthy introductions.** These are entirely unnecessary and of no interest to the informed reader. There is no need to point out that your topic is an important one, and one that has interested philosophers for hundreds of years. Introductions should be as brief as possible. In fact, I recommend that you think of your paper as not having an introduction at all. Go directly to your topic.

2. **Lengthy quotations.** Inexperienced writers rely too heavily on quotations and paraphrases. Direct quotation is best restricted to those cases where it is essential to establish another writer's exact selection of words. Even paraphrasing should be kept to a minimum. After all, it is your paper. It is your thoughts that your instructor is concerned with. Keep that in mind, especially when your essay topic requires you to critically assess someone else's views.

3. **Fence sitting.** Do not present a number of positions in your paper and then end by saying that you are not qualified to settle the matter. In particular, do not close by saying that philosophers have been divided over this issue for as long as humans have been keeping record and you cannot be expected to resolve the dispute in a few short pages. Your instructor knows that. But you can be expected to take a clear stand based on an evaluation of the argument(s) presented. Go out on a limb. If you have argued well, it will support you.

4. **Cuteness.** Good philosophical writing usually has an air of simple dignity about it. Your topic is no joke. No writers whose views you have been asked to read are idiots. (If you think they are, then you have not understood them.) Name calling is inappropriate and could never substitute for careful argumentation anyway.

5. **Begging the question.** You are guilty of begging the question (or circular reasoning) on a particular issue if you somehow presuppose the truth of whatever it is that you are trying to show in the course of arguing for it. Here is a quick example. If Smith argues that abortion is morally wrong on the grounds that it amounts to murder, Smith begs the question. Smith presupposes a particular stand on the moral status of abortion - the stand represented by the conclusion of the argument. To see that this is so, notice that the person who denies the conclusion - that abortion is morally wrong - will not accept Smith's premise that it amounts to murder, since murder is, by definition, morally wrong.

6. When arguing against other positions, it is important to realize that you cannot show that your opponents are mistaken just by claiming that their overall conclusions are false. Nor will it do simply to claim that at least one of their premises is false. You must demonstrate these sorts of things, and in a fashion that does not presuppose that your position is correct.

**SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING YOUR PHILOSOPHY PAPER**

http://www.sfu.ca/philsoc/pdfsources/writing.html
1. **Organize carefully.** Before you start to write, make an outline of how you want to argue. There should be a logical progression of ideas— one that will be easy for the reader to follow. If your paper is well organized, the reader will be led along in what seems a natural way. If you jump about in your essay, the reader will balk. It will take a real effort to follow you, and he or she may feel it not worthwhile. It is a good idea to let your outline simmer for a few days before you write your first draft. Does it still seem to flow smoothly when you come back to it? If not, the best prose in the world will not be enough to make it work.

2. **Use the right words.** Once you have determined your outline, you must select the exact words that will convey your meaning to the reader. A dictionary is almost essential here. Do not settle for a word that (you think) comes close to capturing the sense you have in mind. Notice that "infer" does not mean "imply"; "disinterested" does not mean "uninterested"; and "reference" does not mean either "illusion" or "allusion." Make certain that you can use "its" and "it's" correctly. Notice that certain words such as "therefore," "hence," "since," and "follows from" are strong logical connectives. When you use such expressions you are asserting that certain tight logical relations hold between the claims in question. You had better be right. Finally, check the spelling of any word you are not sure of. There is no excuse for "existance" appearing in any philosophy essay.

3. **Support your claims.** Assume that your reader is constantly asking such questions as "Why should I accept that?" If you presuppose that he or she is at least mildly skeptical of most of your claims, you are more likely to succeed in writing a paper that argues for a position. Most first attempts at writing philosophy essays fall down on this point. Substantiate your claims whenever there is reason to think that your critics would not grant them.

4. **Give credit.** When quoting or paraphrasing, always give some citation. Indicate your indebtedness, whether it is for specific words, general ideas, or a particular line of argument. To use another writer's words, ideas, or arguments as if they were your own is to plagiarize. Plagiarism is against the rules of academic institutions and is dishonest. It can jeopardize or even terminate your academic career. Why run that risk when your paper is improved (it appears stronger not weaker) if you give credit where credit is due? That is because appropriately citing the works of others indicates an awareness of some of the relevant literature on the subject.

5. **Anticipate objections.** If your position is worth arguing for, there are going to be reasons which have led some people to reject it. Such reasons will amount to criticisms of your stand. A good way to demonstrate the strength of your position is to consider one or two of the best of these objections and show how they can be overcome. This amounts to rejecting the grounds for rejecting your case, and is analogous to stealing your enemies' ammunition before they have a chance to fire it at you. The trick here is to anticipate the kinds of objections that your critics would actually raise against you if you did not disarm them first. The other challenge is to come to grips with the criticisms you have cited. You must argue that these criticisms miss the mark as far as your case is concerned, or that they are in some sense ill-conceived despite their plausibility. It takes considerable practice and exposure to philosophical writing to develop this engaging style of argumentation, but it is worth it.

6. **Edit boldly.** I have never met a person whose first draft of a paper could not be improved significantly by rewriting. The secret to good writing is rewriting— often. Of course it will not do just to reproduce the same thing again. Better drafts are almost always shorter drafts— not because ideas have been left out, but because words have been cut out as ideas have been clarified. Every word that is not needed only clutters. Clear sentences do not just happen. They are the result of tough-minded editing.

There is much more that could be said about clear writing. I have not stopped to talk about grammatical and stylistic points. For help in these matters (and we all need reference works in these areas) I recommend a few of the many helpful books available in the campus bookstore. My favorite little book on good writing is *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk and E.B. White. Another good book, more general in scope, is William Zinsser's, *On Writing Well*. Both of these books have gone through several editions. More advanced students might do well to read *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*, by A.P. Martinich.

Some final words should be added about proofreading. Do it. Again. After that, have someone else read your paper. Is this person able to understand you completely? Can he or she read your entire paper through without getting stuck on a single sentence? If not, go back and smooth it out.
In general terms, do not be content simply to get your paper out of your hands. Take pride in it. Clear writing reflects clear thinking; and that, after all, is what you are really trying to show.
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* Do not have a phone or any other device on your desk or anywhere visible during a test
* Do not leave the classroom until you have finished and turned in your test
* Do not talk or make excessive noise during a test; raise your hand if you have a question
* Do not fail to put your test code on your test, scantron or wherever indicated
* Emails to your instructor must address him (with a title) and must be respectful; also, the student must identify him/herself

By signing you affirm that you have read the above rules and the first two pages of the syllabus and agree to abide by said rules and that you understand and acknowledge the syllabus. It is expected that the student will turn in this Signature Page by no later than the third week of the semester.

PRINTED NAME ________________________________

SIGNATURE ________________________________