Course Syllabus

PHIL 1311: Philosophy of Human Person
Spring
PHIL 1311 A: MoWedFri 9:10AM - 10:00AM Jerabeck 202
PHIL 1311 B: MoWedFri 10:10AM - 11:00AM Jerabeck 201

John Boyer, Adjunct Professor
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Office Hours: Friday, 2:00-2:45PM, Sullivan Hall #205

Required texts:


All other texts for the class will be found in the course documents section on Blackboard. The required texts can be purchased from the University bookstore. To get them at a lower price, I would recommend checking on Amazon as well as the local Half-Price Books stores, especially the Westheimer @ Yoakum and Rice Village locations.

The aim of the course

This is an introductory course in Philosophy. In this course, we will consider several important questions: “What is the human person?”; “How do we know things?”; “Is the soul immortal?” and “What has philosophy to do with human life?” We will explore these questions through some of the most notable writings in the western canon.

We will read authors spanning the entire history of philosophy: Ancient (Plato and Aristotle), Medieval (Thomas Aquinas), Modern (Descartes, Locke, Hobbes, and Hume), and Contemporary (Parfit, Olson, and Baker). Students are expected to understand the issues and positions of each philosopher and how these positions are related to each other. We will also focus on the arguments which the authors present to support their positions. By the end of the course, students should be able to analyze an argument into its premises and conclusion(s).
An important part of philosophy, as well as an important part of being an intelligent, educated person, is being able to understand why something is true or claimed to be true. Human beings, as rational animals, use arguments to support and justify what they think to be true. Thus, in addition to exploring what the human person is, you will also learn how to identify and explain arguments. This is a crucial skill. It is not enough to know what positions a philosopher or thinker holds; you must also understand why. Until you understand why a thinker holds a position, you are not able to properly determine whether the position is true or false. Since we will be reading a wide range of philosophical positions, you will encounter positions with which you disagree. You do not need to agree with any one author or with the professor’s own interpretations, but you should understand any view before you accept or reject it.

The papers and pre-class writing assignments which focus on arguments will prepare you for later philosophy classes, in which you will have to be able to present counterarguments and recognize how particular arguments function within the context of a broader argument. In order to succeed at these papers, you need to clearly present the arguments, premise by premise, rather than merely summarizing the text. You must also cite and quote the text to support your analysis of what the argument is.

Assignments and Grading

This class requires a combination of papers, a final exam, and class participation. There will be five papers. You will write two papers this term, due on Blackboard (due dates TBD. Each paper will focus on an important argument found in one of the texts we have read. Students will correctly identify and explain the premises and conclusion of an argument imbedded in the texts we have read. Students will also have daily pre-class writing assignments to be turned in at the beginning of class. These are worth 1 point each and will be graded on a pass/fail basis. Prompts for these will be given every day. The purpose of paper writing is threefold: First, it demonstrates that you have read and comprehended the material. Second, it demonstrates that you can clearly communicate and convey this understanding. Third, it is a means by which you practice and improve your writing ability.

Final Grade Breakdown and Grade Scale

| Papers: 40%       | A  = 100-94%               |
| First Paper: 10%  | A- = 90-93%                |
| Second Paper: 10% | B+ = 87-89%                |
| Third Paper: 10%  | B  = 84-86%                |
| Fourth Paper: 10% | B- = 80-83%                |
|                   | C+ = 77-79%                |
|                   | C  = 74-76%;               |
|                   | C- = 70-73%                |
| Final Exam: 40%   | D+ = 67-69%                |
| Attendance/Participation: 20% | D  = 60-66%               |
|                    | F  = 59% and below         |
Attendance and Participation

One of the best ways to learn is to ask questions and to discuss them. This is definitely true of philosophy. Since most students will not have taken any philosophy classes before, questions and discussion are encouraged. Participation has three components.

First, students must attend every class. If you cannot attend class, you must notify me ahead of time and provide a valid reason for your absence. Second, students must do all assigned reading and bring the assigned text to class. Third, students must come prepared with questions, be ready to answer questions, and participate in class discussions.

Electronic distractions such as computers, smartphones, and tablets (e.g. iPads) may not be used during class except with my permission. Students may record lectures if they wish.

Academic Dishonesty

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. If I discover cheating or plagiarism, the student will automatically fail the class and will be reported to Student Affairs per University guidelines. Plagiarism is presenting someone else’s work as your own. This includes paraphrasing an author’s words without attribution. For suggestions about paraphrasing and information on when and how to cite a text to which you are referring, I recommend visiting pleasecampusguides.stthom.edu/plagiarism.

Disabilities

Any student with a documented disability needing academic accommodations is requested to speak with me as early as possible. All discussions are confidential. Students with disabilities will also need to contact Counseling and Disability Services in Crooker Center. This office can be reached at (713) 525-2169 or 6953.

Disclaimer: This syllabus is subject to change at the professor’s discretion.
Reading List

WEEK 1: (1/19)
• “Introduction to Argument” Handout (BB)

WEEK 2: (1/22-26)
• Plato, *Euthyphro; Apology*

WEEK 2 (1/29-2/2)
• Plato, *Meno; Phaedo*

WEEK 3 (2/5-9)
• Plato, *Phaedo*
• Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 1.1-2, 2.1-2, 2.19
  • Paper 1 Due 2/9

WEEK 4 (2/12-16)
• Aristotle, *Physics* 1.1, 1.7-8, 2.1, 2.3-9

WEEK 5 (2/19-23)
• Aristotle, *De Anima* 1.1, 2.1-2, 3.4-5

WEEK 6 (2/26-3/2)
• Aquinas, *ST* Ia, q. 75, aa. 1-4, 6
• Aquinas, *ST* Ia, q. 76, aa. 1-3
• 3/5: NO CLASS

WEEK 7 (3/5-9)
• Aquinas, *ST* Ia, q. 77, aa. 1-3, 5-6, 8
• Aquinas, *ST* Ia, q. 78
• Paper 2 Due 3/9

WEEK 8 (3/12-16)
• SPRING BREAK (NO CLASS)

WEEK 9 (3/19-23)
• Aquinas, *ST* Ia, q. 79, aa. 1-5
• Aquinas, *ST* Ia, q. 84

WEEK 10 (3/26-30)
• Aquinas, *ST* Ia, q. 85
• 3/30: EASTER BREAK (NO CLASS)

WEEK 11 (4/2-6)
• Aquinas, *ST* Ia, qq. 80-81
• Aquinas, *ST* Ia, q. 82, aa. 1-2
• Aquinas, *ST* Ia, q. 83, aa. 1-2

WEEK 12 (4/9-13)
• Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditations 1-4
  • Paper 3 Due 4/13

WEEK 13 (4/16-20)
• Locke on “Immateriality of the Soul,” pp. 203-205 (BB)
• Locke on Immortality and Personal Identity: Locke *Essay on Human Nature*, Bk. 2, Ch. 27 (BB)
• Hume, *Of the Immortality of the Soul* (BB)

WEEK 14 (4/23-27)
• Parfit, “The Unimportance of Personal Identity” (BB)

WEEK 15 (4/30-5/4)
• Olson, “Was I ever a fetus?” (BB)
• Baker, “What Am I?” (BB)
  • Paper 4 Due 5/4

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