

Course: Introduction to Philosophy
PHIL 20101-09
Instructor: Daniel Immerman
MWF 5:05 - 5:55 in 206 DeBartolo

Contact Info

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Course website: <http://www3.nd.edu/~dimmerma/teaching/20101-09.html>

Readings

You do not need to purchase any texts for this class; all readings will be available on the website.

Course Description

This course will introduce students to some of the topics that philosophers discuss and to some of the ways they go about discussing them. We will look at various texts, both historical and contemporary, focusing on the following questions:

- When is it ok, if ever, to disobey the law?
- Do humans have free will?
- What is the meaning of life?
- What is art?
- What is beauty?
- Is it rational to have emotional responses to fiction?
- Is evil incompatible with God's existence?
- What does it mean to say God is all-powerful?
- Why is there something rather than nothing?
- What makes up my identity?

Course Goals

In this course you will:

- Become familiar with the main branches of philosophy and several particular debates within philosophy.
- Improve your ability to identify an author's claims, arguments, and objections in a text, to restate them in your own words clearly and precisely, and to state and evaluate responses to them.
- Learn how to identify a philosophical topic you are interested in, find others who have written on it, identify a research question related to it, and write a paper on it.
- Work out for yourself your own position on several of the debates we discuss.

Expectations

In order to ensure that these goals are achieved, you will need to do your part. In particular, many of the course goals require you to develop your philosophical skills, which in turn requires practice.

With each reading assignment, I will provide some questions for you to think about as you do the reading. Answering these questions will help you hone your philosophical skills.

In addition to practicing these skills at home, you will also be practicing them in class. To accommodate this, the classes will not have much lecturing in them. Because most of the time spent in class will be time when you are talking, it is integral that you come to class prepared and participate in class discussions.

Evaluation

Here is the breakdown of grades in the class:

- Papers:
 - During the first two thirds of the course, I will assign mini papers, which will usually be about a page. Together these will be worth 30 percent of your grade in total. I will drop your lowest mini paper grade.
 - During the second half of the course, you will be working on a longer paper, which will ultimately be at least 1500 words. I will not assign a topic, instead, you will be responsible for selecting it. Early in the second half of the semester (November 4), you will turn in a short document called a prospectus that will describe the topic you have chosen, some relevant readings, and what you plan to argue in your paper. This prospectus will be graded pass/fail/didn't turn in and worth 2 percent of your grade.
 - Near the middle of the second half of the course (November 23), you will turn in a rough draft of your paper. This will be graded pass/fail/didn't turn in and worth 2 percent of your grade.
 - The final draft of the paper will be due near the end of the semester (December 13), and worth 35 percent of your grade.

- Quizzes:
 - On at least ten days in the semester we will have pop quizzes. There won't be any before the third week of the semester. The material on these will come from that day's readings plus material from previous classes. They will be worth 10 percent of your grade in total. They can't be made up, but if you miss one because of an excused absence, I'll drop that one from your grade. I will drop your lowest pop quiz grade.

- Presentation:
 - You will give a short presentation on one of the branches of philosophy. This will be graded pass/fail/didn't give and worth 2 percent of your grade.

- Participation:
 - I will also be grading you based on participation. I will pass out a rubric on the first day that indicates what you need to do to get a good participation grade. Participation is worth 15 percent of your grade. I'll check in with you regarding how you're doing on participation at some point in the middle of the semester, but you should also feel free to contact me at any point if you want to know how you're doing on participation.

- Reflections:
 - Sometimes during class I'll have you jot down answers to questions regarding what you've learned in the last week's debate, how your skills are developing, what questions you yourself have going forward, etc. For each one, failure to turn it in will result in 1 point off your participation grade, unless you have an excused absence.
 - Two times during the semester, once near the middle (October 14) and once at the end (December 9), I will have you write a brief paper outside of class reflecting on your progress. These papers will be graded pass/fail/didn't turn in and worth 2 percent of your grade each.

I will be using a 15 point scale:

- 15 = A
- 14 = A-
- 13 = B+
- 12 = B
- 11 = B-
- 10 = C+
- 9 = C
- 8 = C-
- 6 = D
- 3 = F
- 0 = Didn't turn in

I may on occasion give assignments a 16, which would correspond to an A+, or a 17, which would correspond to an A++. (The highest final grade I can give is an A).

On rounding: when calculating your final grade, if the first decimal of a grade is 5 or higher, I will round up, and if it is 4 or lower, I will round down. So e.g. an average of a 9.499 is a C, while an average of a 9.500 is a C+.

Academic Honesty

Notre Dame students are expected to abide by Academic Code of Honor Pledge. “As a member of the Notre Dame community, I will not participate in or tolerate academic dishonesty.” The university academic code of honor is available at <http://honorcode.nd.edu/>. The philosophy department also has a document on plagiarism, which is available at <http://philosophy.nd.edu/assets/77703/plagiarism.pdf>. I take issues of plagiarism very seriously. If you’re ever in doubt about an issue in this area, please come talk to me.

ADA statement

If you think you might need an accommodation because of a disability, you can contact me privately. Please also contact the Office of Disability Services. Their contact information is available at <http://disabilityservices.nd.edu/about/contact>

Attendance

I don’t take off points for attendance, but missing class without having a valid excuse will keep you from being able to complete certain in-class assignments, e.g. pop-quizzes, that may affect your grade.

Late Papers

I will not accept late mini papers because we will be discussing them in class. This includes papers that you printed but forgot to hand in, papers you meant to email but forgot to attach to the email, email attachments that are corrupted, etc. (When you email me papers, I always email back to confirm that I’ve gotten it.) But you can turn in one other paper up to 48 hours (2 days) late with no penalty to your grade. In particular, you can use this for your prospectus, rough draft, final draft, or one of the two longer reflection papers. If you turn in further late items, I will take off 1 grade

point for every day its late (see grading scale). I don't round down on days. That means that if you turn in a paper an hour late, that counts the same as turning it in 23 hours late.

Reading drafts of papers

I will read as many drafts of papers as you care to send me, with the following exceptions. I will not read a draft turned in less than 48 hours (2 days) before the paper is due. Also, if I send a draft with comments back to you, you should wait at least 48 hours (2 days) before sending me a new draft to look at.