INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

MW 2:00 – 3:15
OCNR 117

https://philosophy.tamucc.edu

Professor:
Don Berkich, Ph.D.

Office: FC-280
Hours: TR 11:00 – 2:00
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Course Description:
Welcome to the Philosophy Gym, where we exercise our minds, no question or puzzle is off-limits, discussions are open, and we discover the importance of playing with ideas.

Tentative Topic Schedule:

Weeks 1&2  Philosophical Puzzles: Pausing to Think Clearly
Weeks 3&4  Should you take just the one box, or both of them? Should you push the fat man off the bridge? Could you have chosen otherwise?
Weeks 5,6,7  Could you be dreaming all this, and would it matter if you were? Would it really be you getting off the tele-transporter? Do other people see the world the same way you do?
Weeks 8,9,10  Why do so many awful things keep happening? Did God create man, or did man create God?
Weeks 10,11,12 & 13  Why is there something and not nothing? What can we know? Will our machines replace us? Where do you go from here?

Texts:
All readings will be provided as necessary by the professor.

Student Learning Outcomes:
Successful completion of the course provides you with a foundational understanding of Western philosophical thought. In particular, you will be familiar with basic logical, epistemological, and
metaphysical issues discussed in classic and contemporary literature. These outcomes will be measured through in-class quizzes, tests, and take-home essay assignments. By the end of the course, you will also know the basic elements of logic (e.g. recognizing arguments, argument forms, and using terms of appraisal) and be able to compose philosophical essays on topics such as the mind-body problem, the existence of God, and freedom of the will. Ideally, you will develop a coherent understanding of the nature philosophical inquiry and begin forming a philosophical perspective of your own. Since much of our time is spent on close textual analysis, you will also improve your reading comprehension skills and strengthen your abilities to construct logical arguments.

* Ignore this. It's just something we're required to have on our syllabi. Pointless drivel. A requirement of the University for accreditation purposes only. A result of the contemptible commodification of education and the corporatization of its institutions. Used as the basis for a pre- and post-test in a facile attempt to demonstrate quality in teaching and learning. Fails to reflect any grasp of the distinction between training and education by presupposing that understanding, discovery, and knowledge can be precisely measured, economized, and thereby controlled. An embarrassing academic fad and an affront to the towering intellects whose investigations we have the privilege of pursuing this semester.†

† The professor whose course this is has been informed by the administration that the above statement repudiating Student Learning Outcomes is both 'uncivil' and 'sets a poor example for students'. The professor is deeply grateful to the administration for their protest and takes no small pride in their having echoed (albeit unwillingly and however distantly) Meletus' charges against Socrates. Frankly, there can be no greater honor for those who find inspiration in Socrates the gadfly, Socrates the midwife, and, above all, Socrates the self-stinging stingray.

Requirements:

Weekly Take-home Essay:

Starting the second week of class, a weekly take-home essay will be assigned Thursday and due the following Tuesday. Specific content and instructions will be announced in class. There will be exactly 10 such essays.

Participation:

Students should be prepared to contribute to class discussion, solve problems with the class, and be actively engaged in helping others solve problems.

Policies:

The professor assumes that students enrolled in this course are sincere student-scholars. That is, the professor shall treat them with the respect due scholars, and, as scholars, they should do their best to live up to the standards of scholars. To wit,

Preparation:

Scholars carefully read assignments in advance of class, take notes on their reading, explore specific issues in discussion with fellow scholars, and follow-up class by re-reading portions of the required readings and exploring suggested readings.

Participation:

Scholars are eager to respectfully, openly, and critically discuss arguments and issues raised by the readings. Scholars are adept at following a line of reasoning wherever it may lead. Most importantly, scholars welcome the insights and criticisms of their peers: A scholar understands that it is possible to entertain a proposition without believing it, just as it is possible to present an argument without personally endorsing the argument. Scholars enjoy vigorous deliberations and are always careful to treat fellow scholars with patience and
good humor.

Assignments:

Scholars fully immerse themselves in assignments and never assume that an assignment is only legitimate if it will be covered on a test. Scholars are naturally curious and see every assignment as an opportunity to explore new issues, see old issues in new light, and hone their growing skills.

Cheating:

Scholars are very careful to give proper credit and maintain the highest standards of scholarly conduct. Thus, subject to university guidelines, any instance of cheating (including plagiarism) will be vigorously prosecuted.

Attendance:

Scholars always attend class barring serious injury, illness, or disaster. Scholars view class-time as rare and valuable for the thought it evokes and the opportunities it presents. Scholars arrive early for class and never leave class early without obtaining prior approval from the professor. Scholars who miss class are responsible for obtaining class-notes, completing the readings, and getting any missed assignments submitted in a timely manner.

Screens:

In light of a raft of recent research revealing that screens (watches, phones, tablets, computers, etc.) serve only to distract and obstruct lecture and discussion, no scholar will ever use a screen in class unless directed to do so by the office of student disabilities. Scholars will respectfully excuse themselves from class to attend to emergency calls only.

Grading Formula:

There are 1000 points possible as follows:

Weekly Take-home Essays 100 pts each

Total Points = sum of the weekly in-class essays - 50 * (sum of unexcused absences over two)

Course Grade is determined by the following scale:

A 900-1000
B 800 - 899
C 700 - 799
D 600 - 699
F 000 – 599

Additional Notes:

Any change in the above will be announced in class. No change will be made which would be detrimental to the student's grade.

This syllabus is not authoritative. That is, the syllabus on the course website supersedes this
syllabus wherever they differ. The professor and the students are only responsible for the syllabus as it appears in its entirety on the website, including the schedule of topics and readings.

Any student missing a due date must provide a documented, acceptable reason according to university guidelines. Students with a proper excuse for missing a due date will be given a reasonable extension.

Required University Note to Students with Disabilities: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall 116. If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

Required University Note on Dropping a Class:* I hope that you never find it necessary to drop this or any other class. However, events can sometimes occur that make dropping a course necessary or wise. Please consult with your academic advisor, the Financial Aid Office, and me, before you decide to drop this course. Should dropping the course be the best course of action, you must initiate the process to drop the course by going to the Student Services Center and filling out a course drop form. Just stopping attendance and participation WILL NOT automatically result in your being dropped from the class. The last day to drop a class for the spring semester is April 10, 2020.

*Please note that the professor whose course this is did not write the above note, despite its having been written in the first-person. Whoever it was meant well, no doubt. It is not what this professor would have written.

Required College of Liberal Arts Note on the Grade Appeal Process: As stated in University Procedure 13.02.99.C0.03, Student Grade Appeal Procedures, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Procedure 13.02.99.C0.03, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Dean's office in the college in which the course is taught or the Office of the Provost. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Web site at:

http://academicaffairs.tamucc.edu/rules_procedures/assets/13.02.99.C0.03_student_grade_appeals.pdf

Required College of Liberal Arts Note on Academic Advising: The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. Degree plans are prepared in the CLA Academic Advising Center. The University uses an online Degree Audit system. Any amendment must be approved by the Department Chair and the Office of the Dean. All courses and requirements specified in the final degree plan audit must be completed before a degree will be granted. The CLA Academic Advising Office is located in Driftwood #203. For more information please call 361-825-3466.

By accepting this syllabus the student indicates that the syllabus has been read, all requirements are understood, and all policies are acknowledged.