

Phil 001: Introduction to Philosophy

Instructor: Devin Sanchez Curry

Room: Cohen Hall 493

Time: Tues/Thurs, 1:15-5:05 PM

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Hours: Wed, 1:15-3:15 PM

In this course, we will take a whirlwind tour of philosophical inquiry. We'll begin by acquiring some of the basic tools of logical thinking, and sharpening these tools by identifying good and bad arguments in a US presidential debate. We'll then bring our critical tools to bear on the work of two of the greatest philosophers of the Western tradition: Plato and René Descartes. Finally, we'll read and discuss recent essays on consciousness, race, and ethics. By the end of the course, we will have studied many (though not nearly all) of the big questions that comprise the subject matter of philosophy.

How ought we live, and why ought we live that way? What is virtue? How do we learn? What is justice? Can we trust the evidence delivered by our senses? Do we really know anything for certain? Can we prove that God exists? What is the relationship between mind and body? Can we know what it's like to be another person? What about what it's like to be a bat? Are races biologically real, socially constructed, or illusory? Ought 'race' be conserved as a way of classifying human beings? How ought we treat other humans? Should we be partial to our loved ones? And how ought we treat other animals? Should we raise sentient organisms for meat?

We may not walk away from this course with satisfactory answers to all of these questions, but we will develop a deeper understanding of both the questions themselves and the various possible ways of answering them. By immersing ourselves in Plato's 4th century BCE dialogues, Descartes's 17th century *Meditations*, and various 20th and 21st century polemics and analyses, we will also come to appreciate several distinctive ways of doing philosophy.

Required books

Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments* (Hackett, 4th edition; purchase [here](#))

John Holbo & Belle Waring (trans.), *Reason and Persuasion: Three Dialogues by Plato* (4th edition; purchase hard copy [here](#); free pdf available [here](#))

Michael Moriarty (trans.), *Descartes's Meditations on First Philosophy with selections from the Objections and Replies* (Oxford World's Classics; purchase [here](#))

Brief Schedule

First day: Introduction

June 30th: What is philosophy? And a synopsis of the course to come.

Week 1: Critical thinking

July 5th: Arguments

July 7th: Fallacies and tools for thinking

Week 2: Plato

July 12th: Introduction to Socrates and Plato, *Euthyphro*

July 14th: *Meno* and *Republic* Book I

Week 3: Descartes

July 19th: Letter, Preface and *Meditations* I-II

July 21st: *Meditations* III-VI

Week 4: Theoretical philosophy

July 26th: The mind-body problem

July 28th: Is race real?

Week 5: Practical philosophy

August 2nd: What do we owe other humans?

August 4th: What do we owe other animals?

Grading breakdown

Critical thinking project: 20%

Plato take-home: 20%

Descartes take-home: 20%

In-class quizzes: 20%

Final essay: 20%

Critical thinking project

We will watch a US presidential debate in class on July 7th. Assignment due July 12th. Your task:

(1) Identify at least two fallacies employed by presidential candidates during the debate, and explain why they are fallacies. (Worth 5 points each.)

and

(2) Identify one logically *valid* and one logically *invalid* argument employed by presidential candidates during the debate, and reconstruct each argument in premise-conclusion form. Explain why the invalid argument is invalid. Then, state whether or not you think the valid argument is *sound*. If you think the argument is sound, briefly explain your reasons for thinking each of the premises is true. If you think the argument is unsound, identify which premise(s) you think is false, and explain your reasons for thinking it is false. (Worth 5 points each.)

Two take-home exams

Three essay questions. Two answers (500-750 words each) will be scored. Plato exam due July 19th; Descartes exam due July 26th.

Four reading quizzes

Six multiple choice or short answer questions each, on the assigned reading for the day of the quiz. (Best five answers will be scored, worth 1 point each.) Quizzes will be distributed and completed at the beginning of class on July 26th, July 28th, August 2nd, and August 4th.

Final essay

Write a 500-1000 word essay on *either* the question 'what is philosophy?' *or* a philosophical topic chosen in consultation with me by August 2nd. Make at least one logically valid argument, defend the premises of your argument(s), and consider objections. Due August 6th.

Participation

Come to each class having read (and, if necessary for comprehension, reread) the assigned readings. Contribute to class discussion when you have something to say. Listen to your peers carefully and respectfully whether or not you have something to say.

Plagiarism

Don't do it. Exercise academic integrity, as defined [here](#). Or [else](#).

Accommodations

If you have good reason to be exempt from any policy on this syllabus, please let me know. We'll work something out.

Detailed Schedule

First day: Introduction

Date: June 30th

Topic: What is philosophy? And a synopsis of the course to come.

Required readings: None.

Recommended: Thomas Nagel, *What Does it All Mean?*
Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*

Week 1: Critical thinking

Date: July 5th

Topic: Arguments

Required readings: Weston, *xi-xiv*, 1-47

Recommended: Weston, 49-72
J. David Velleman, [*Blogic*](#)

Date: July 7th

Topic: Fallacies and tools for thinking

Required readings: Weston, 73-86

Recommended: Daniel Dennett, *Intuition Pumps and other Tools for Thinking*
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy [entry on fallacies](#)

Week 2: Plato

Date: July 12th

Topic: Introduction to Socrates and Plato, and *Euthyphro*

Assignments: Presidential debate project due.

Required readings: Holbo, 1-18, 130-156

Recommended: Holbo, 19-129
Peter Adamson, podcasts on [the sophists](#), [Plato's Socrates](#), and [Plato](#).

Date: July 14th

Topic: *Meno* and *Republic* Book I

Required readings: Holbo, 212-264, 326-377

Recommended: Holbo, 157-211, 265-325
Peter Adamson, podcasts on the [Meno](#) and the [Republic](#).

Week 3: Descartes

Date: July 19th

Topic: Letter, Preface and Meditations I-II

Assignments: Plato take-home due.

Required readings: Moriarty, 2-24

Recommended: Moriarty, *ix-xl*
Gary Hatfield, *Descartes' Meditations*, 1-145

Date: July 21st

Topic: Descartes, Meditations III and VI

Required readings: Moriarty, 25-37, 51-64

Recommended: Moriarty, 38-51, 67-231
Gary Hatfield, *Descartes' Meditations*, 146-342

Week 4: Theoretical philosophy

Date: July 26th

Topic: The mind-body problem

Assignments: Descartes take-home due; quiz at beginning of class.

Required readings: Descartes-Elisabeth Correspondence, selections (to be distributed)
Gilbert Ryle, selections from *The Concept of Mind* (to be distributed)
Thomas Nagel, "What is it like to be a bat?"

Recommended: John Heil, *Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction*
U.T. Place, "Is Consciousness a Brain Process?"
Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*
David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*
Patricia Churchland, "The Hornswoggle Problem"

Date: July 28th

Topic: Is race real?

Assignments: Quiz at beginning of class.

Required readings: Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race"
Paul Taylor, "Appiah's Uncompleted Argument: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Reality of Race"

Recommended: W.E.B. DuBois, "The Conservation of Races"
K.A. Appiah & Amy Gutmann, *Color Conscious*
Sally Haslanger, "Gender and race: (what) are they? (What) do we want them to be?"
Ron Mallon, "Race: Normative, Not Metaphysical or Semantic"
Quayshawn Spencer, "A Radical Solution to the Race Problem"

Week 5: Practical philosophy

Date: August 2nd

Topic: What do we owe other humans?

Assignments: Quiz at beginning of class.

Required readings: Confucius, selections on differentiated caring (to be distributed)
Ursula LeGuin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"
Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality"
Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism"

Recommended: reread Plato's *Euthyphro*
Susan Wolf, "Morality and Partiality"
J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*

Date: August 4th

Topic: What do we owe other animals?

Assignments: Quiz at beginning of class; final essay due August 6th.

Required readings: Descartes, selections on animals (to be distributed)
David Foster Wallace, "Consider the Lobster" (read [here](#) or listen [here](#))
Peter Singer, three minute video [on animal suffering](#)
Cora Diamond, "Eating Meat and Eating People"

Recommended: Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*
J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*
Kristin Andrews, *The Animal Mind*