

PHIL 300 Introduction to Philosophy – Spring 2018 12:00

Instructor and Section Information

Contact Information

Jeff Dale (JD), adjunct professor, www.JDphilosophy.com.
DaleJ@crc.losrios.edu, or use the email tool in the course's Canvas site.

Class Meetings

MW 12:00 – 1:20 pm, LRC 104 (class #14664).
Final exam M 5/14, 12:45 – 2:45 pm, LRC 104.

Office Visits

Drop-ins MW 3:00 – 4:15 pm, BSS 143, including final exam week. (Exceptions: campus closures.)
For other times, email for appointment.

Communications

If you email me and don't receive a reply within a day, please feel free to contact me again. Students should be proactive so as to avoid the need for last-minute email exchanges, in which I might be unable to give timely replies. Please do not leave me handwritten messages or try to reach me at the division office, because my receipt of such communications may be delayed by several days.

Special Note

All Los Rios CCD faculty are considered "mandated reporters" for suspected child abuse or neglect under the California Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act. Hence, I am bound by the requirements of [Penal Code 11166](#).

Course Information

Catalog Description

"In this course, students will apply the critical thinking techniques of analysis, evaluation, and synthesis to areas of philosophical inquiry including meta-philosophy, epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of religion, history of philosophy, and existentialism. Students will practice distinguishing fact from opinion, employing inductive and deductive reasoning, identifying logical errors and fallacies, and developing oral and written arguments to support their own philosophical perspectives or challenge the perspectives of others. The quality and quantity of the course's required writing will reflect the standards of a second semester composition course." 3.0 units. No prerequisites.

Textbook and Other Requirements

The Norton Introduction to Philosophy, Gideon Rosen, et al., 1st Edition (2015), ISBN 978-0-393-93220-1, available at the bookstore and elsewhere.

[Logical Reasoning](#), Bradley H. Dowden, free online. (Link in Canvas in the applicable module folders.)

Other readings free online. (Links in Canvas in the applicable module folders.)

A subscription to [Top Hat](#) interactive technology, and either an Internet-connected device (Android, Apple iOS, or Windows) or a text messaging device (such as a basic phone with cellular service) to bring to each class meeting.

Level of Course

Students in this course are expected to have college-level writing skills, such as would be represented by successful completion of ENGWR 300 or the equivalent. Students without that level of skill will probably need to work harder than average to meet the performance standards of this course.

Statement on Philosophy and Pedagogy

Philosophy is not a “soft” subject. Some people think that philosophy is characterized mainly by vague but deep-sounding notions, and a philosophy class is about sharing our subjective reactions to such notions. This conception bears little resemblance to what you’ll generally find in academic philosophy.

In part, philosophy resembles science. We strive for clarity and precision. We aim for objective truth, as best we can determine it. We ask skeptical questions and carefully judge the quality of the answers. But whereas science analyzes things of the world (empirical data), philosophy analyzes ideas – including ideas about the nature of reality and of knowledge (the foundations of science), about the nature of ourselves, and about how to judge goodness, beauty, and truth, and how to defend those judgments. In some ways, this is easier than science – thought experiments don’t require expensive lab facilities or extensive data collection. But in its focus on the abstract rather than the concrete, and in its exploration of difficult questions of value, philosophy offers plenty of challenges for even the sharpest intellect.

Studying philosophy generally does not involve absorbing a large body of facts – we might spend an hour wrestling with a single idea. What it does involve is a sustained effort in improving the strength and agility of one’s thought – valuable brain training that’s hard to find elsewhere. Accordingly, I design my courses to generate and reward the investment in thinking skill – philosophical astuteness that will continue to serve you in life beyond the course. I will challenge you, but if you persevere, and seek help when you need it, you may be surprised at how much you can learn.

General Education Requirements

This course meets the following GE requirements: AA/AS Area II(b); CSU Area A3; CSU Area C2; IGETC Area 3B.

Learning Objectives

1. Identify important questions and conceptions within a range of traditional subfields of philosophy (epistemology, metaphysics, logic, ethics, and aesthetics), distinguish from among divergent interpretations those that are better supported and those that are less well supported, construct well supported interpretations of diverse viewpoints, and reason well about written and oral discourse.
 - 1a: Evaluate information concerning central issues within a range of traditional subfields of philosophy for quality, validity, and bias to determine if it is objective and reliable.
 - 1b: Evaluate the relationship of language to logic and analyze, criticize, and rationally justify points of view concerning central issues within a range of traditional subfields of philosophy.
2. Reason inductively and deductively; reach conclusions concerning central issues within a range of traditional subfields of philosophy based on sound or cogent inferences drawn from unambiguous statements of knowledge or belief.
 - 2a: Distinguish fact from non-factual judgment, belief from knowledge, and fallacious reasoning from correct (invalid or weak) reasoning in respect to central issues within a range of traditional subfields of philosophy.

Course Plan

- The first part of the course is for development of a framework of understanding for philosophical thinking, which is both to support student success in the remainder of the course and to provide a general philosophical education that non-majors might not get anywhere else: belief, knowledge, and objectivity, and the conduct of discussion; conceptual analysis, logical reasoning, and the formulation and analysis of arguments.
- The remainder of the course is in six parts to engage the following core philosophical topics: skepticism and the limits of knowledge, the nature of the mind, the nature of the self, the possibility of free will, the existence of God, and the foundations of morality.
- The course also includes a progressive exercise in argumentative essay writing: argument analysis, argument critique, outlining, thesis writing, draft version, instructor comments, and final version.

Student Work and Assessments

Approach to Study

The course is designed to reward consistent engagement and study throughout the semester. Students are advised to ensure that they have mastered each unit of material as we are completing our coverage of it. When students fall behind, their grades tend to suffer in multiple ways as they struggle to understand the new material. The final exam is cumulative, and cramming to learn large blocks of previously neglected material in the days leading up to the final exam is unlikely to be adequate.

Students should review [“How to Do Well in a College \(Philosophy\) Class,”](#) by CSUS philosophy professor Matt McCormick.

Grading Scale

Course grading is based on a nominal total of 1,000 points for the semester, with the following minimums: 900 A, 800 B, 650 C, 500 D. CRC doesn't assign +/- grades.

The department discourages grade inflation and fixed grading curves. To earn a grade better than a C will require better than satisfactory performance. The course grade distribution is not predetermined, but will reflect actual performance of the students in the class.

Grade Calculation

The nominal total of 1,000 points for the semester is calculated as follows:

600	The top 6 scores from the Pool, consisting of the following: the discussion score, the quiz total, and the 6 module exam scores.
200	The essay score, doubled.
<u>200</u>	The final exam score, doubled.
<u>1,000</u>	The nominal total.

Discussion

Class discussion contributes significantly to students' understanding of the material. Discussion credit is available for students' preparation for and productive use of class time, as reflected in (1) answers to in-class questions on the material, and (2) contribution to class discussion of relevant questions, comments, or whiteboard work.

At intervals during the semester, I will assign in-class timed multiple-choice questions on the material. Students must use Top Hat service (as described below under “Policies and Procedures”) to submit their answers. Students earn five points for each correct answer and two points for each incorrect answer. The timing and number of questions will not be announced, but I expect to assign a total of between 15 and 25 questions over the semester, often but not always at the start of class meetings. Students should understand that they risk missing questions if they miss class time.

Students also earn five points for each class meeting in which they make one or more contributions to discussion. Thus, students are rewarded for contributing to multiple discussions, but not rewarded extra for multiple contributions to the same discussion.

Discussion credit is limited to 100 points in total, from both sources combined. Students could earn the maximum from answers to questions, from contribution to discussion, or (more likely) from a mix of the two. The discussion score is one of the eight scores in the Pool.

Quizzes

The quizzes in Canvas are intended to build upon students' learning, as well as to provide structure to students' questions for best use of our class discussion time. Accordingly, multiple submissions will be accepted for quizzes, so that students may attempt them at least once before class discussion, prepare questions to bring to class, and

complete the remaining attempts afterward. Only the highest-scoring attempt of each quiz is counted as the score for that quiz.

Each quiz is worth 10 points, and each student's ten highest quiz scores are counted in the semester grade, for a maximum of 100 points from quizzes. The quiz total is one of the eight scores in the Pool.

Module Exams

Instead of one big midterm exam, there will be six module exams. These exams will be administered during class meeting time as indicated in the schedule worksheet in Canvas under "Course." Students will not need to bring a blue book, Scantron form, or other paper to these exams, unless otherwise informed. Each module exam is nominally worth 100 points, and the module exam scores are six of the eight scores in the Pool.

The Pool

The Pool consists of the discussion score, the quiz total, and the six module exam scores. Of these eight scores, the top six are counted in the semester grade.

Essay

Students will be assigned an argumentative essay, to be graded on both content and mechanics. The essay project includes three scaffolding steps to help students prepare the groundwork for their essays, each conducted via in-class group discussion and exercises: (1) the Essay Argument Analysis (EAA), (2) the Essay Argument Critique (EAC), and (3) the Essay Outline and Thesis (EOT). Students will also have the opportunity to submit a draft version of their essay (EVD) for my comments to use in revising or rewriting for submission of a final version (EVF).

Each version of the essay is nominally worth 100 points, but only the higher of the two version scores is counted as the essay score. The essay score is counted double in the semester grade.

Students are advised not to underestimate the value of the opportunity afforded by the structure of this essay project, nor to underestimate the likely cost of putting inadequate effort into the essay. Competent philosophical writing requires more precision than what many students have yet experienced, even in other classes' college-level writing. Students waiting until the due date to start are likely to find the task more complex and challenging than they expected; the risk of a serious hit to the semester grade is high, and the temptation to cheat (making matters even worse) may be high as well.

The CSUS philosophy department provides useful links on [general writing guidelines](#), [how to write a critical analysis](#), and [essay grading standards](#). Students who need individual assistance with writing mechanics should consider contacting the [CRC Reading Writing Center \(RWC\)](#) well ahead of deadlines.

Final Exam

The final exam will be *comprehensive*; students should study consistently throughout the semester rather than relying on cramming at the end. Students will not need to bring a blue book, Scantron form, or other paper to the final exam, unless otherwise informed. The final exam is nominally worth 100 points, and is counted double in the semester grade.

Philosophy Event Write-Ups: Extra Credit

Students can earn extra credit for attending one or two approved philosophy events and submitting a write-up of each. Some events that don't mention philosophy in their title or description (or in the credentials of their speakers) might nonetheless be countable as philosophy events (with my approval), if they are substantially philosophical in emphasis. Students should carefully read the instructions, and ensure that events they plan to attend are included in the approved event list; both documents are in Canvas under "Course." Each philosophy event write-up is worth 10 points, and is counted as extra credit in the semester grade.

As described below under "Policies and Procedures," this is the *only* opportunity for extra credit in this course. I offer extra credit for philosophy events for both the benefits of participation in extracurricular activities generally and the opportunity for practical exercise of philosophical astuteness. I strongly encourage students to participate

in a variety of the extracurricular activities on offer at university and college campuses and in surrounding areas – speaker events, performances, exhibits, clubs, recreational activities, and more. Higher education is a great opportunity for personal growth and development of self-understanding, and to exploit that opportunity fully requires not only working hard in classes but also exploring and experimenting in other areas.

Policies and Procedures

Reading and Preparation for Class Meetings

Students are expected to do *all* of the assigned reading *before* the first class meeting for which it's assigned, and to come to class prepared to ask questions and discuss the material. Class discussions are conducted with the assumption that students have done the reading, and class discussions are not a substitute for the reading. Students should anticipate that careful and repeat reading will be needed for adequate understanding, and are encouraged to jot down questions while reading and to bring them to the next class meeting.

Conduct of Discussion

Doing philosophy involves the open and critical discussion of ideas. Even the expression of a mistaken idea may be useful in advancing understanding, and no idea is above challenge or exempt from justification. Good discussion requires an environment in which all participants feel safe and valued. *People deserve respect; ideas do not.* Harassment, personal attacks, and contemptuous behavior will not be tolerated. Any student with concerns about classmates' behavior should inform me as soon as practical.

Doing philosophy also requires concentration and careful thought. Accordingly, students should take care to minimize distractions, to themselves and to others, in class meetings. We will try to keep the rules casual about arrival and departure, use of electronics, and classroom procedure, but I reserve the prerogative to implement further rules if needed.

Attendance and Drops

In accordance with CRC's policies, students are expected to attend all class meetings, and may be dropped from the course for non-attendance under the following circumstances:

- Missed the first class meeting: dropped, unless there are enough available enrollment slots.
- Missed the first three class meetings: may be dropped regardless of the demand for enrollment slots.
- Missed any four class meetings: may be dropped at my sole discretion.

Staying Informed

Students are responsible for attending class meetings (and obtaining notes from other students for class meetings missed), for regularly checking campus email, for referring to this syllabus regularly and carefully following the class schedule in Canvas under "Course," and for familiarity with the layout of the course's Canvas site.

Use of Technology

Each student is responsible for bringing to class a working device capable of and prepared for use with Top Hat service: either an Internet-connected device (Android, Apple iOS, or Windows) or a text messaging device (such as a basic phone with cellular service). Students are responsible for purchasing a Top Hat subscription and for understanding and troubleshooting the use of Top Hat service. The Top Hat join code for this course will be posted in Canvas under "Course." Top Hat's "Success Center" includes helpful links on [creating your account](#), [submitting answers via text messages](#), and other topics.

Each student is responsible for maintaining reliable regular access to Canvas and campus email, for understanding and troubleshooting their use, and for verifying successful electronic submission of work. Students encountering technical difficulties are advised to make alternative arrangements (such as the use of a friend's computer or an on-campus computer lab) and/or to communicate with [campus technical support personnel](#) as needed.

All written work submitted by students outside of class is scanned via Vericite service. Vericite compares each written submission with an extensive worldwide database of class submissions, links, and publications, and

displays possible matches and a “similarity score.” It does not determine whether plagiarism has occurred; that determination is made upon a thorough assessment for which the similarity report is merely a tool. Vericite is very good at detecting patterns of text even when deliberately obscured. Students need not include names or other identifying info in their submissions – Vericite stores submissions anonymously, and links to my students’ accounts are accessible only to me. Submissions are retained in Vericite’s database for future comparisons.

Video or audio recording of any portion of our class meetings is not permitted, except in accordance with properly documented disability accommodations or as may be required by law.

Missed Exams and Missed Due Dates

Exams are generally scored at zero if not taken during the class meetings in which they are scheduled. Quizzes are generally scored at zero if no attempts are submitted by their due dates. The essay final version may be submitted after its due date, but at a progressive scoring reduction stipulated in the instructions.

Students who, for some good reason, need an exception to any of the policies about missed exams and missed due dates should request an exception in advance, with appropriate documentation, if possible. Exceptions are subject to my sole judgment of what counts as a good reason.

Extra Credit: No Other Opportunities

Students should not anticipate opportunities for extra credit, other than the philosophy event write-ups described above. Students are accountable for exerting sufficient effort for the assessments described above, which are designed to be a fair reflection of student performance.

I don’t offer unplanned extra credit opportunities because it is effectively impossible to do so without breaching fairness. If I were to offer an extra credit opportunity to one student requesting it, I would have to offer it to all of my students, *but doing so still wouldn’t make it fair*. Students make decisions throughout the semester about how to economize their coursework time, based on the course plans laid out in their courses’ syllabi. Some of my other students will have chosen at various points to reduce time spent on other courses in order to make more time for work in this course. If they had known that I would add an extra credit opportunity later in the semester, they could’ve relied on it to achieve the same grade in this course, while reallocating their time to those other courses to earn better grades there. Those other students cannot get back the opportunities they’ve missed in those other courses, whereas the student requesting the extra credit in this course already made their choices about allocating time to their other courses during the semester, and now are trying to get a better grade in this course as well.

Unplanned extra credit opportunities also would tend to undermine the integrity of the course. What may seem like a fairly modest increase in the semester grade, such as five percent, actually represents a substantial chunk of the coursework. For example, five percent is 50 points – equivalent to half the credit on a module exam, enough to raise a score of, say, 40 to 90. Replacing an F with an A on a module exam, outside of the established method of assessment, would represent a significant departure from the course plan laid out in the syllabus – it would write off the difference between failing to learn the material of that module and showing excellent knowledge of that material, by a means not part of the original agreement (formalized by the syllabus) among the students, the professor, and the institution. The integrity of the institution, and with it the value of the degrees it awards and the transcripts it certifies, depends on the integrity of the courses the institution offers. And the integrity of a course depends on the meaningfulness of the grades issued in it, which would be undermined by the professor’s willingness to write off a substantial chunk of the performance measurement in the original agreement.

Study Aids

I provide two useful types of study aids: copies of the class meeting slides and review copies of the quizzes (“quiz reviews”). These can be found in the applicable module folders in Canvas, when available – slides at the end of our discussion on the applicable material, and quiz reviews after the related for-credit quizzes are due. I don’t condense these materials into a study guide, but students may benefit from doing so.

Disability Accommodations

Students needing disability accommodations should provide me the appropriate documentation from the [Disability Support Programs & Services \(DSP&S\)](#) as soon as practical.

Academic Integrity

Cheating, including plagiarism, is a serious offense. Students are accountable for understanding and complying with [the college's policies on academic integrity](#).

Students should understand that plagiarism includes not only direct quotation without quotation marks or attribution, but also paraphrasing without attribution, or otherwise using the ideas of others (including me or fellow students) as though they were one's own. Note also that plagiarism can result from the careless error of copying another's ideas or words and forgetting to cite the source. Students are urged to protect themselves by developing the habit of citing all sources *immediately* upon copying or jotting down other people's words or ideas, even in an outline or rough draft that's not intended to be seen by anyone else.

Students should also understand that facilitating other students' cheating is itself a form of cheating. For example, if Student #1 gives a copy of their essay to Student #2, and #2 plagiarizes the essay, #1 may be accused of cheating. Students are urged to protect themselves by never risking their work being copied in this way. Note also that students can be penalized *after* leaving the class, including the rescinding of their recorded grades in the class, if they facilitate the cheating of students in later semesters.

A violation of academic integrity may result in a zero on the applicable assignment or test, communication of the incident to the dean, and the filing of a Referral for Student Code of Conduct Violation with the Vice President of Student Services for possible administrative sanctions up to and including expulsion from the college.

Required Affirmation at Start of Semester

Each student is required to submit, in Canvas under "Course," an affirmation that they have read, understood, and accepted (1) [the college's policies on academic integrity](#) and (2) this syllabus. *Students are subject to receipt of a score of zero on any exams taken or work submitted prior to submission of this affirmation.*