

PHI 1103, SECTIONS 05 & 06 (ONLINE)

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

Fall 2018, Department of Philosophy & Religion

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OFFICE: 071 College Park, Meridian
OFFICE HOURS: Wednesday & Thursday,
4:00 pm – 6:00 pm

Do not leave a message at either of the phone numbers—I won't get it if you do. Email is the best way to reach me, and I will usually respond within 24 hours. If you would like a more immediate response, you can try calling or sending a text message to 267-416-0292. The office hours are times when I will be available in Meridian. I may, occasionally, be able to meet by appointment in Starkville.

With suitable notice, the instructor may make any changes to the syllabus, readings, assignments, or schedule at any time during the semester.

READINGS

Purchase the course pack from Barnes & Noble, and get this book from Barnes & Noble or online:

Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, third edition (translated by Grube and Cooper). ISBN-13: 978-0872205543.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Before taking a philosophy course, most people are unfamiliar with the subject. So, by way of introduction, here is an excerpt from a lecture on Plato's dialogue the *Apology* (which we'll read) by the philosopher Steven Smith,

Philosophy grows out of a desire to replace opinion with knowledge, to replace opinion or belief with reason. For philosophy, it is not enough simply to hold a belief on faith, but one must be able to give a rational account, a reasoned account for one's belief. Its goal, again, is to replace civic faith with rational knowledge. And, therefore, philosophy is necessarily at odds with belief and with this kind of civic faith. ... The philosopher seeks to judge those beliefs in the light of true standards, in the light of what is always and everywhere true, as a quest for knowledge. There is a necessary and inevitable tension between philosophy and mere belief.

Philosophy is different than science, but only to a degree. Science investigates the world by collecting data and doing experiments. Philosophy, meanwhile, usually does neither of these things. But still, the philosopher seeks knowledge, and the tool for seeking knowledge is reason. Given some facts (perhaps uncovered by science), what follows? What is likely to be—or must be—true?

The theme of this course is challenging our beliefs. There are things that we want to believe, for instance, that we have free will, that a god exists, that we will continue to exist after we die. How well do these beliefs hold up when we examine them and consider the evidence? We'll see.

We will start out with a topic that doesn't challenge our beliefs: arguments. These are the basic tool for doing philosophy. Next, we'll consider Galileo. That

the earth revolves around the sun shouldn't challenge what you believe, but it sets the stage for the topics to follow. Why, in his day, was Galileo's claim that the earth revolves around the sun threatening? What role did the evidence have in the debate about whether the sun revolves around the earth or the earth revolves around the sun? What else was a factor?

After Galileo, we will examine the following questions. What is the mind and who has one? Do we survive death? Do we have free will? Are we living in a computer simulation? And does God exist? These are real questions, not philosophical exercises. Although interestingly, how these questions turn out doesn't affect our day-to-day lives. When people finally accepted that the earth is not the center of the universe, nothing really changed (except for astronomers). Similarly, if it turns out that we don't have free will or that we're living in a computer simulation, you will still go on with your life. Nothing will suddenly seem different.

In the last three weeks of the semester, we will read two of Plato's dialogues, the *Apology* and the *Crito*. The first is an account of the trial of Socrates. The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates was put on trial for, essentially, the very thing that this course is about, questioning commonly held beliefs and seeking knowledge. He was found guilty, and in the *Crito* Socrates is waiting to be put to death. Here, again, Plato examines the relationship between the individual citizen, especially one like Socrates, and the state.



This is an online course, and it is not designed to be too similar to a classroom course. Instead of lectures being central to the course, the main focus is on students working independently on the readings. Of course, the instructor is available and will be in contact with you, and you should email the instructor as often as you find useful. But think of this course as a very structured independent study (that is, structured by the instructor for you) rather than as a standard classroom course. See the Welcome document on Blackboard for further information about the course.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Naturally, one objective is to become acquainted with the assigned material. Other, no less important, goals are improving your reading comprehension, critical thinking, and writing skills.

COURSEWORK AND GRADING

Letter grades will be assigned using the following scale.

A, 90 – 100 percent	D, 60 – 69 percent
B, 80 – 89 percent	F, below 60 percent
C, 70 – 79 percent	

The grades for the course will be based on this coursework and these percentages:

quizzes	15 percent
HW assignments & discussion board	45 percent
writing assignments	40 percent

The quizzes will consist of multiple choice questions, and they are open-book assignments (although you have to take them alone). Generally, there will be one or two quizzes per week.

In addition to the quizzes, most weeks there will be a homework assignment or work that has to be done on the discussion board. For the discussion board, specific questions will be provided. Three longer writing assignments (about 2 to 4 pages) will be due on these dates:

paper 1	Sunday, September 23
paper 2	Sunday, October 28
paper 3	Monday, December 3

Every due date is firm. Quizzes, the homework assignments, and the discussion

board assignments cannot be completed after their due dates. Papers will be accepted late, but the grade for a late paper will be penalized. Briefly, the reasons for this are as follows. First, although different professors have different policies, when a student signs up for a course, the student is agreeing to work within the schedule set for that course. If you can't do that—for whatever reason (good or bad)—you should expect that your grade will be affected. Second, it is necessary to keep the entire class organized and moving in the right direction. For large classes especially, it's not possible to do that and have flexible due dates.

All that being said, each student's lowest discussion board or homework grade and two lowest quiz grades will be dropped. There will not be any extra credit at the end of the course. Therefore, you should do as well as you can throughout the semester.

STUDENT HONOR CODE & ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

First, read this: <http://www.honorcode.msstate.edu/pdf/commonMyths.pdf>.

Mississippi State has an approved Honor Code that applies to all students.

The code is as follows:

As a Mississippi State University student, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do.

Upon accepting admission to Mississippi State University, a student immediately assumes a commitment to uphold the Honor Code, to accept responsibility for learning, and to follow the philosophy and rules of the Honor Code. Student will be required to state their commitment on examinations, research papers, and other academic work. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the MSU community from the requirements or the processes of the Honor Code. For additional information, please visit: <http://honorcode.msstate.edu/policy>

To be clear, students who cheat in any way will be penalized. Cheating includes giving as well as receiving help when such help is not explicitly allowed. Plagiarism is also a form of cheating. If you have any further questions about what

constitutes cheating, either ask me or see the University's policy on academic dishonesty. (I am happy to answer to any questions about cheating. But ask me before you do it.)

Also, the Office of Student Conduct:

<http://students.msstate.edu/studentconduct/>.

And questions your parents will have if you get caught cheating:

<http://www.honorcode.msstate.edu/resources/parents/faqs.php>.

READING SCHEDULE

See the calendar on Blackboard for the exact schedule. This is an outline.

Weeks 1 & 2, An introduction to arguments (Johnson)

Week 3, Copernicus and Galileo (Gingerich)

Weeks 4 & 5, Mind (Johnson)

Week 6, Do we survive death? (Rachels)

Weeks 7 & 8, Free will (Pojman)

Week 9, Are we living in a computer simulation? (Bostrom)

Week 10, God and the problem of evil (Rowe)

Weeks 11 – 13, *Apology* (Plato)

Week 14, *Crito* (Plato)

Week 15, no new reading

EMAIL & USING THE INTERNET

It is assumed that all students are familiar with the internet. Nonetheless, if you have any questions, please ask.

For this class (and probably for all of your classes), you have to check your Mississippi State email frequently. If you don't want to bother with another email

account, then forward your Mississippi State email to your personal email account. Instructions for how to do that are here:

<https://www.its.msstate.edu/files/BullyMailForward1.pdf>.

Occasionally students have trouble connecting to Blackboard or getting it to work properly. If this happens, it is often useful to try a different web browser (this is more worthwhile than trying a different computer). If you are using a PC, you probably already have Internet Explorer; and if you are using a Mac, you probably already have Safari. These are the best alternatives to Internet Explorer and Safari:

Firefox, <http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/>

Google Chrome, <http://www.google.com/chrome/>

Opera, <http://www.opera.com/>

Try using one of them if Blackboard is giving you trouble (use the link to download the browser if you don't already have it installed on your computer).

That being said, **you are responsible for making sure that you have access to Blackboard**. If you wait until the last moment to complete an assignment and then run into computer or internet problems, you simply won't be able to do that assignment—no exceptions will be made for you.

SUPPORT SERVICES

It is the policy of Mississippi State University to accommodate students with special needs and learning disabilities as per the MSU Student Support Services policy. Students seeking accommodations on the basis of a disability or special need must contact the Office of Student Support Services (<http://www.sss.msstate.edu/>) to verify eligibility. Additional guidelines may be obtained from the Office of Student Support Services.

Academic accommodations and services are based on an individual's needs. All documentation is confidential.

TITLE IX

MSU is committed to complying with Title IX, a federal law that prohibits discrimination, including violence and harassment, based on sex. This means that MSU's educational programs and activities must be free from sex discrimination, sexual harassment, and other forms of sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know has experienced sex discrimination, sexual violence, or harassment by any member of the University community, you are encouraged to report the conduct to MSU's Director of Title IX/EEO Programs at 662-325-8124 or by e-mail to titleix@msstate.edu

Additional resources are available here:

<http://students.msstate.edu/sexualmisconduct/>

<http://www.msstate.edu/dept/audit/PDF/91118.pdf>

<http://www.msstate.edu/web/security>