

Introduction to Philosophy: “God, Man, and World” (PHL 200, Fall 2016 Syllabus)

Instructor: Keith Buhler

Email: keith.buhler@uky.edu

Office Hours: T/Th, 9:30-10:30 Kinlaw Library by the Lewis Corner.

Required Texts

- Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie’s World* ISBN: 0374530718
- Plato, *Last Days of Socrates* (Euthyphro, Apology, Phaedo) ISBN: 0140449280
- Augustine, *Confessions* ISBN: 0199537828

Buy these three books right away. Use these ISBNs only, please. No Kindle unless cost is prohibitive, since paper books are better for taking notes, and make it easier to stay on the same page. New or used is fine. Other handouts provided online.

Handouts:

- JP Moreland, “Love your God with all your mind”
- Genesis (Chps. 1-2)
- Peter Kreeft, “Is truth objective?”
- Keith Buhler, “Logic 101”
- Peter Kreeft, “Are universals real?”
- Aquinas, “Five Ways of Proving God’s Existence”
- Richard Dawkins, “Why there is almost certainly no god”
- Dargis, “In Defense of Slow Movies”
- Hume, Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding
- The Gospel of John (without chapters, verses, or cross-references)
- Wall-E
- The Matrix
- 2001: A Space Odyssey
- Tree of Life

Course Description

This course is an exercise in a different way of thinking. We will also learn some historical facts, new vocabulary words, some big names and big philosophical concepts. But our main task is to grow by thinking slowly, carefully, methodically, and deeply.

This course is eclectic in themes. Recurring questions are (1) “Who are you?” (2) “Where does the world come from?” (3) “Why is there evil?” (4) “What is happiness?” Some of these are more abstract, others more practical. All of them are windows into a reality beyond the day-to-day.

There is no textbook; instead, we will consume books, essays, and film including history, Scripture, biography, and fiction. There are no long lectures; we will dialogue together every day. Don’t just sit back waiting to be programmed with knowledge. Rather, begin to discuss these topics in class and out of class. You will be confused. Enjoy the ride. Ask questions. Get frustrated. Doodle. Guess. Take risks.

There are only two tests; more important is that we become competent in skills like reading, dialoging, and writing clearly and logically. The top five most coveted job skills are communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and creativity, and self-discipline. These skills you can improve in philosophy but they are not just useful for philosophy. They will make you better in computer programming or chemistry, better in motherhood or the ministry.

There are no *easy* answers; instead, we will find hard answers, if we work at it. The ultimate motivation for having the conversation we call philosophy must be that it can make us better. We enter into the Great Conversation with our own, often confused, thoughts. We may learn to love God with our minds. We may become more connected, integrated, thoughtful, reflective human beings. We may become part of the Conversation, and by it be forever changed.

Our goals then are:

- To read, comprehend, evaluate and discuss difficult philosophical arguments.
- To become familiar with the thought of major philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, and to understand the major questions they seek to answer.
- To understand the Christian answers to questions about the meaning of life, the structure of the cosmos, the possibility of scientific knowledge, and the ground of morality, as contrasted with metaphysical naturalism, nihilism, and deism.
- To practice reflect thinking upon our own lives, beliefs, attitudes, culture, and goals, in order to become more thoughtful human beings in the pursuit of goodness, truth, and beauty.

I. Scope and Sequence

This course focuses on an eclectic set of eleven related themes: Truth, Socrates, Causes, Logic, God, Evil, Time, Empiricism, Miracles, Cosmos, and the Tree of Life. Each Unit consists of readings, quizzes, and philosophical dialogue. There are five papers and two quarter tests.

Grading

You will be graded equally on each component, plus applicable extra credit.

Assessment category	Percent of semester grade
Reading quizzes	25%
Participation (Talking, writing)	25%
Tests (Q1, Q3)	25%
Disputations	25%
Extra Credit	5% (max)

Letter Grade	Percentage
A	99%-90%
B	89%-80%
C	79% - 70%
D	69% - 60%
F	< 59%

I typically do not round up. So 89.5 is a “B”. Your best bet for getting an ‘A’ is to (a) read carefully every week, (b) attend and participate in class through talking and/or writing, (c) study hard for the tests, and (d) write the Papers according to the given instructions.

Reading

The primary work of this class is reading and thinking about these books, essays, and films. It will take about 3 hours per week of reading. And some is very hard, requiring re-reading and time. Read actively, read ahead, and try to understand the book. Primarily, your goal is not just to read but to *understand*. Reflect on what you’ve read. Bring to class a question from the reading – focus on what confuses you. Reading tips are online.

Short, online reading quizzes are due almost every class day. The quiz covers that day’s reading. It closes when class starts. The quizzes are timed and can only be taken once, so please complete them when you finish your reading. Don’t start them before your reading is done as you will not have enough time to search the reading for answers. You will quickly find that you really must do the reading and do it quite carefully to do well on these quizzes. Please keep up.

Attendance

We need you here! Attendance is mandatory. Roll will be taken each class by marking a 3x5 card. (Being repeatedly or egregiously late will count as an absence.) You may check your absences at any time by requesting to see your card. I recommend you aim for perfect attendance to maximize your learning. You are paying for this education including this class, so why wouldn't you make the most of it?

That said, I give everyone up to 3 "Personal absences". These 3 absences apply for *for any reason*, including emergencies, family visits, sickness, sports, or sleep. One week is usually sufficient for emergencies, and sometimes you just need a break. But after that, absences *require an excuse*. After 3 personal absences, any unexcused absences will cost 2% deduction from the semester grade *per absence*. 6 unexcused absences is a letter grade and 9 will make a passing grade impossible.

1 = -0

2 = -0

3 = -0

4 = -2%

5 = -4%

6 = -10% (a letter grade)

7 = -12%

8 = -14% 9 = -50%

Participation

The primary competency of this class is philosophical dialogue. Hence, you must attend and participate. Class time is primarily focused on discussion of the material for which I expect you to be fully engaged.

We do dialogue for five main reasons: (1) You must take responsibility for your own learning. (2) We can actually get to know each other. (3) I learn best in discussion. (4) Most people learn (and retain) best in discussion. (5) Philosophy is dialogical.

You are responsible to talk in class. Even if you are confused, tired, or unmotivated, I expect you to make yourself participate and engage. Get out of your comfort zone into your growth zone. Come *prepared*. Read, take notes, reflect, and come ready to share your viewpoint, defend it, listen to others' viewpoints, and critique theirs.

To earn participation points, you will voluntarily share your thoughts in discussion at least once per week, and/or respond when called upon. You are not required to write posts on the discussion board online. By default, everyone is an "external processor". "*Internal processors*": Some may wish to opt out of speaking in class and emphasize writing. To earn participation points, you will post class reflections online every week. You may elect to speak in class as well, and may be called upon.

Everyone starts at an 80% (B-) for the participation grade. You will move up or down depending on whether you pay attention and speak at least once per week. (I prohibit the use of electronic devices in class, although laptop users may request permission to sit in the front of class with their computers.)

What are the “ground rules” for discussion? The rules are hard to articulate. I give you a few rules that I have found to help, but the real rules are bigger and deeper. In fact, you can break my little rules and you’re still OK. I can criticize your opinion and you’re still OK. You can criticize my opinions and we’re still OK. You can say something “mean” or politically incorrect and we’re all OK. You can ask people to be nicer, and we’re OK. You can even criticize my teaching, and I’m OK. Trust the process. We’re going to try, *together* to make something of our discussions.

Other discussion ground rules are posted online.

Tests

There are two quarter exams: one at the end of the first quarter, and one at the end of the third quarter. (No midterm or final). These exams will assess your knowledge of historical facts, philosophical definitions, and the ability to synthesize and apply concepts. The Study Guide is posted online.

Disputation Papers

Every 2-4 weeks, you will write a Philosophical Disputation paper. Each disputation is pass/fail and worth approximately 4% of the semester grade. The instructions are posted online.

Extra Credit

Those who opt for extra credit may do so. Instructions are posted online.

Miscellany

1. **Bring your textbook** to every class.
2. **Participate.** Participation is your responsibility; I may or may not call on you. Challenge yourself!
3. **Stay focused.** Do not distract yourself with side conversations, texting, Facebook, or doing anything else in class. Take a short mental break or bathroom break if you need to, but come back. (If you have an important phone call or text, please step outside the class for a moment, then return.)
4. **No smart phones.** No other electronics, laptops, iPhones, or iPads, iPods, smartphones, etc. Unplug, listen and engage.
5. **Laptop/tablet users:** You must request permission, and if approved, sit in the front row.
6. **Be respectful of others:** Pay attention when a neighbor is talking. No teasing. Don’t pack up early.
7. **Contact me.** Best method is to chat after class. I read every email but may not respond to every email. You need a response, and I haven’t responded within three (3) business days, email again with the subject “nudge”. Please use keith.buhler@uky.edu rather than my Asbury email.
8. **Contact.** For short, quick questions, use Twitter (keith_buhler)

9. **Email.** You are expected to have an active e-mail account that you check regularly, and to check Discovery “news”. Section related announcements will be made on Discovery “news” and/or via e-mail (e.g. if I am sick, pointers for home work, change in due dates).
10. I can accommodate you: If you have a documented disability that might require academic accommodation, please make sure you are registered with the Academic Support Program. Contact Pam Downing (pamela.downing@asbury.edu / (859) 858-3511 x2283).
11. Make up work is not accepted after the due date, unless you obtain prior (email) permission.
12. **Plagiarism.** Do not plagiarize. Intentional or unintentional plagiarism will result in a zero for the assignment, and jeopardizes your standing in the class. Do not intentionally take anyone else’s work nor provide your work to anyone else (under whatever auspices). Academic integrity, the embodiment of the moral and spiritual principles to which we adhere, is the essential basis of the Asbury University academic community. Cite your sources. See also the Asbury academic integrity appendix.
13. **Enjoy philosophy.** We are not merely solving abstract puzzles here, but digging deeply into human thinking in a way that could change your life forever. The more you and your fellows allow yourselves to acquire a “taste” for the material, the more inclined you will be to give it the real effort required to master it.

Course Outline A draft

The outline tells you the reading due and the topic for each day. It also provides detailed notes to help you prepare your thoughts. Subject to revisions due to snow days, instructor sickness, academic conferences, etc.

II. ### Course Outline B draft

T Jan 12 – Syllabus

Class preview: This class will be awesome. It’s a lot of reading, so you have to work hard. But more importantly, you have to think hard. Today we’ll get to know each other and our expectations, how to get an A, etc.. I’ll give you three personal problems philosophy can (maybe) help you with.

R Jan 14 – *Sophie’s World*, Garden of Eden, Top Hat, the Myths, Natural Philosophers, Democritus, and Fate: Time and Cause

Sophie is asked by a mysterious stranger two key questions: who are you? Where did the world come from? We will do our best to begin answering those questions by examining two big ideas: Time and causes. Causes answer the question “why?” And time is a condition of all life on earth.

T Jan 19 – Genesis 1-5: Mythology

A myth is not a false story but a likely story. In that sense, Genesis is a myth. We’ll analyze it for its presentation of freedom, humanity, goodness, God, sin, and redemption. (Today, we assign groups and “internal/external” processors today as well.)

R Jan 21 – “Truth” and “Goodness” Handouts: Are truth and goodness objective?

All semester we will be seeking truth. To be successful, we have to know whether truth exists. We’ll examine

arguments for and against the proposition that truth and goodness are real. We will also discuss the “Tao” to see examples of universal, common morality. (We’ll also go over how to do papers.)

Disputation Paper 1 will be due next Tuesday by 11:55pm. Please carefully review the “Disputation Paper” instructions online.

T Jan 26: Plato, *Euthyphro*; *Sophie’s World*, Socrates, Athens, Plato: What is Holiness?

The best way to be introduced to philosophy is to be introduced to Socrates, his character, his conversation, his way of life. How do you react to him? Socrates begs a priest, Euthyphro, to explain what piety is. Socrates is on trial for impiety, so his life is on the line. Euthyphro can’t answer. Can you?

R Jan 28 – Plato, *Apology*: Is Socrates Guilty?

Is Socrates’ way of life meaningful or meaningless – obedient to God or dangerous? Socrates does not “apologize” but “defends” himself (*apologia*, like apologetics). All of Athens, and all of history, is the jury. Is he guilty? Is philosophy a great subversive evil for the city or a great good?

T Feb 2 – Plato, *Phaedo* 116-143: The soul is immortal because opposites come from opposites

Plato’s *Phaedo* shows Socrates’ last days. Should we grieve when our friends die? Is the soul immortal? Socrates argues that the soul lives on when the body dies. The first of three arguments builds off the natural opposites, cold from hot, big from small, life from death. Is this a good argument? Why or why not?

R Feb 4 – *Phaedo* 143-199: The soul is immortal because we existed before we were born

Without the help of Scripture or revelation, Socrates argues the soul is immortal. He also warns against “misology” a hatred of argument that leads to skepticism and laziness. Hating the logos is perhaps a danger we begin facing at this point in the semester, too. Is the “argument from recollection” a good one? Why or why not?

T Feb 9 – *Phaedo* (all): The soul is immortal because it is more like forms than matter.

Socrates introduces “forms”, real beings like equality or goodness, that explain properties. Forms are contrasted with individuals, like chairs or horses. The soul is supposed to be more like forms than particulars. Is this a good argument? Why or why not?

R Feb 11 – “Forms” handout

“Equality itself” is a form. Forms are also called “universals”. Universals contrast with individuals. They explain how the same property exists in multiple things, places and times. Forms cause individuals to be what they are. “The third man” and ‘queerness’ objections will be discussed. Important forms include the

One, the Good, and Soul. Are forms real entities in the world (platonic realism) or just concepts in the mind (conceptualism)?

Disputation 2 Prompt: Does the soul live on after bodily death?

T Feb 16 – “Aristotle” Handout; Sophie’s World, Aristotle: Aristotle and his Four Causes.

Aristotle was a “meticulous organizer.” He categorized thoughts into logic, knowledge into sciences, and reality into ten categories of beings. His influence extends even to today. The “four causes” of an entity are the four properties that make it what it is. For example, think about a piece of bronze (material) made into a statue of a soldier (form), by a sculptor (efficient), that marks the entrance of the city (final). What are the four causes of a human being?

R Feb 18 – “Material Causes” Handout (10 pages): Material and Final Causes

The material cause is what a thing is made of; the formal cause, its configuration. The final cause is its purpose, function, or end. Aristotle would say that scientific explanations need to give all four causes. But Bacon and Lucretius say that “scientific” explanations only give one or two causes. Descartes caused a massive change in thinking by his famous wax experiment. Are a thing’s form and purpose incidental or essential to what it is?

T Feb 23 – (No reading): Logic

Logic is the science of inference. We need data to make inferences. The sources of data are observation, memory, testimony, and authority. These data are the premises of arguments. Solid inferences become principles. Principles are the premises of new arguments. The most common kind of argument is a “syllogism.” Syllogisms have three statements: a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. There are three kinds of major premise: categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive. Dilemmas and other forms of argument compound syllogisms. How does logic relate to science?

R Feb 25 – Bertrand Russell, “Free Man’s Worship” Handout: Christianity and Nihilism as worldviews

Christ as the Logos is at once creator, redeemer, and our goal. Substitutes for Christ include other gods, worldly pleasures, humans, or nothingness itself. But other gods, pleasure, and other humans are all consumed by nothingness in the end. So there are only two options: Logos or nothingness. Nothingness is mistaken by some as the origin of all things, and the conclusion — the alpha and omega — that which was, is, and ever shall be.

Watch Toy Story 3!

T Mar 1 – Toy Story 3 (Pixar Film): How do we survive devouring time?

This is a movie about devouring time. How is Andy's relationship to Woody and Buzz changing. Also, Lotso is clearly evil. But what is his vice, or his sin? Does it have to do with his rejection of devouring time?

R Mar 3 – MIDTERM EXAM & Toy Story 3 Discussion

After the midterm, we will discuss the salvation of the toys. Who saves them, and why? Is it salvation from devouring time? What do you make of this salvation? How does Andy's relationship to Woody and Buzz change and how does it remain?

T Mar 8 – Aquinas Handout: Can God's existence be proven? (26 pages): Does God exist?

Aquinas is the most influential medieval philosopher. He cites Aristotle (and Plato) and Augustine almost as much as the Bible. He wrote numerous books, but his *Summa Theologica* is his masterpiece. He argues, in a little over 600 topics, about 3,000 disputations. The questions cover God, man, creation, evil, angels, theology, church, and the end of the world. In this first discussion we will look at his arguments for whether God's existence can be proven – he thinks so – and the five ways of doing so.

R Mar 10 – **Aquinas Handout: Is happiness the beatific vision?** Today we examine Aquinas' definition of happiness, which is the vision of the divine essence. Aristotle argued that human happiness is one object for the whole species, even though people are very different. Aquinas builds on this argument.

T Mar 15 – Spring Break**R Mar 17 – Spring Break**

T Mar 22 – Augustine, *Confessions* chapter 1, 2, 4; Sophie's World "Two Cultures", "Middle Ages"

We continue our transition to medieval philosophy. The union of Athens and Jerusalem after the resurrection of Jesus created a new civilization: Christendom. Augustine was a key leader in this civilization. The *Confessions* details Augustine's personal and intellectual struggles. It tells his conversion story and honors his mom, Monica. It concludes with philosophical explorations of time, memory, and creation. Augustine's early error was thinking God was physical. What does this mean? Why is it an error? And how did he get corrected?

R Mar 24 – Augustine, *Confessions* Chapter 6, 7, 9: Does evil exist?

A major theme of the *Confessions* is sin and evil. Evil for both platonists and Christians and atheists is an essential component of their worldview. What is evil? Augustine's presuppositions make this question difficult. They force him into a dilemma. God made everything that exists. Evil exists. Therefore God made it. Or Evil exists. God did not make evil. Therefore God did not make everything. Those options are intolerable.

He settles on the view that evil does not actually exist. What does this mean? What is a “privation” of good? Does this notion make sense and does it make sense of active evil and suffering in our world?

Disputation 3 Prompt: Does evil existence as a substance or only as a property?

T Mar 29 – Confessions, 10, 11: Time

Augustine says he knows what time is as long as you don’t ask him what it is. When you ask him, he doesn’t know. What is the relation of time to eternity? What is time? Also, how are we to interpret Genesis in light of our philosophical understanding of time? Time is a big idea. What exactly is it? Three notions of time from Augustine, Plato, Kant. Also some poems on time.

R Mar 31 – Sophie’s World, Renaissance, Baroque, Hume, Enlightenment: The Enlightenment

Now we transition to the modern world. The Enlightenment defines America and through the U.S. much of the developed world. The core idea to help you understand the Enlightenment and counter-enlightenment is a tradition. Alasdair MacIntyre defines a tradition as “a socially-embedded argument extended through time”. Modernity is a tradition of empiricism, rationalism, skepticism, increasing atheism. Today we will work on distinguishing the Enlightenment tradition from the medieval tradition (which resembles the counter-Enlightenment) What makes Hume a modern?

T Apr 5 – Hume, Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding Sections 1-3: Impressions

The foundation of Hume’s work is that knowledge is either impressions (from the present) or impressions from the past (ideas). The source of all knowledge is impressions, sensory, empirical, input from the world through our five senses, then modified by the mind and imagination in various ways to result in all our thoughts. Any thought that does not originate directly from a sensory impression is nonsense, fantasy. The upshot of this view is radical – much of our supposed knowledge is fantasy.

R Apr 7 – Hume, Enquiry Sections 5-6: Cause and Effect

Relations of ideas (necessary, analytic truths) and matters of fact (contingent, synthetic truths) are all the kinds of truth there is. Cause and effect is contingent. We do not observe causation itself, but only the constant conjunction of A and B. Our supposed “knowledge” of cause-effect, including science and everyday matters, rests on a custom, a habit, an imaginary connection. It turns out that the notion of causation – so important to Plato and Aristotle – does not come from an impression. We only see the conjunction of two events, not the cause of one by the other.

Disputation 4 Prompt: Choose: Does the idea of God arise from impressions, or recollection? OR If a miracle occurred, could we ever know it?

T Apr 12 – Hume, Enquiry Sections 7, 8, 10: Miracles

Hume's famous argument concludes that even if miracles ever occur, we can never know that they occur. How does this argument work, and is it true? What kind of testimony (against our experience) would be sufficient to overturn our experience? Do we have experience of miracles?

R Apr 14 – Dawkins Handout: There is almost certainly no god.

Dawkins argues that everything god might be invoked to explain can be explained by a combination of the anthropic principle and natural selection. He also argues that religion and science aren't "separate spheres" of inquiry, each sovereign with their domain. Religion and science have overlapping questions about the origin of the world, the origin of life, the teleology (or purposiveness) of the cosmos, and human nature. What is natural selection? What is the anthropic principle? And how do these two (with luck as a third) explain everything that can be explained?

Watch 2001: A Space Odyssey!

T Apr 19 – “Defense of Slow Movies” Handout; 2001: A Space Odyssey (Stanley Kubrick Film)

Is humanity evolving into something more than human?

R Apr 21 – Disputation Workshop: Create your own question!

Disputation 5 prompt: Create your own question. See instructions.

Remember: Watch Tree of Life!

T Apr 26 – The Tree of Life (Terrence Mallick Film)

Mallick's film is, in one way, very difficult. It is not as traditional a Hollywood film. It does have a 3-act structure, but it uses poetic story-telling along with narrative storytelling. The best way to view it is to surrender to Mallick's lead. Let him show you, let him tell you, let him make you feel, let him even disturb you... You will get more out of the film if you surrender than if you try to control and understand and analyze. That said, ask yourself: "What is the way of nature?" How is it portrayed? What is the way of grace?

R Apr 28 – The Gospel of John (21 pages) The word of God recreates the cosmos and fulfills it. How does John 1:1-2:1 re-tell the story of Genesis? What's the big difference that Jesus makes?

Finals Week

T Disputation 5 Due.

R Reflection paper due; extra credit (optional) due; Final Exam TBA.
