

**INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY
(PHIL 100)
Fall 2007**

Instructor: Eric Wilson

E-mail: ewilso@learnlink.emory.edu

Office Hours: Tues & Thurs: 2:30-3:30 and Mon & Wed: 12:00-1:45

Office Location: 711 Emory Street

Course Description:

“Philosophy,” as Ludwig Wittgenstein once wrote, “is not a doctrine, but rather an activity.” This means that philosophy is a *way of thinking* about things, rather than a fixed body of knowledge. In this course you will learn how to participate in this strange and difficult yet often exhilarating activity. Much of it will baffle you, and some of it may even bore you. But if you allow it to seep in and do its work, a good deal of it will sharpen your mind and ignite your imagination like nothing else. In the first part of the course, we shall investigate the nature of the mind and the scope of our knowledge—both of our selves and the world around us. During the second part of the course, we shall focus our attention on moral issues. We shall explore the foundation of our attempts to draw distinctions between “right” and “wrong,” “good” and “evil.” We shall also examine the ethical dimension of more concrete issues such as poverty, abortion, euthanasia, and animal welfare.

Required Texts:

Descartes, *Mediations on First Philosophy* (Hackett)

Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Hackett)

Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality* (Hackett)

Singer, *Writings on an Ethical Life* (Harper Collins)

A note about the texts: Successful class discussion will require that we stay, literally, on the same page. So you must purchase the editions I have selected. Descartes, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Singer are available from the campus bookstore. All other readings will be on reserve at the library, and may be downloaded from the “Course Reserves” link at the library’s web page.

Course Requirements:

Three 350 to 500-word essays (20% each)

One Final Exam (20%)

Daily quizzes (20%)

The Fine Print:

Classroom

- You can't learn how to swim without getting wet. By analogy, you can't learn how to *do* philosophy without getting involved in the activity itself. So this will not be one of those courses in which you come to class, quietly take notes, and then go home to commit the facts to memory for the sake of the next exam. Most of our classes will be dominated by discussion, and I expect you to actively involve yourself. I am counting on you to be engaged. So are your classmates. We will all learn more if we engage in this activity together.
- Our discussions should be open, friendly and respectful, yet, at the same time, honest and rigorous. I hope they will also be fun.
- Since our conversations will focus on the assigned reading, everyone must bring the relevant text to class each day (whether it's a book or an essay downloaded from the library's web page).

Outside the Classroom

- My office hours are **Tues & Thurs: 2:30-3:30** and **Mon & Wed: 12:00-1:45**.
- My office is located at **711 Emory Street**. Of course, it's never a bad idea to let me know ahead of time that you'll be stopping by. But please feel free to drop in unannounced. You don't need an appointment. I'll be happy to answer questions, discuss assignments, or just have a conversation about anything related to the course.
- You may also contact me via e-mail (Learnlink address above). I'll be checking my e-mail from 9:00 AM until 6:30 PM on weekdays. Normally, I'll be able to reply to any message within 24 hours. But don't expect a prompt reply at 10:00 PM or 2:00 AM, for example. And if you send me something over the weekend, I won't see it until the following Monday. So bear all that in mind.
- As with most things, so too with philosophy: practice makes perfect. I encourage you to discuss the material together, outside the classroom. I also encourage you to work

together on your papers. (But beware of plagiarism! See below.) The more you learn how to do philosophy on your own terms, the more you'll enjoy it, and the easier it'll become.

Daily Quizzes

- There will be a short quiz at the beginning of (almost) every class. The quizzes will be drawn directly from the preceding class's assignment, and will, in most cases, consist of two multiple-choice or "true/false" questions. Quizzes will last between two and five minutes. I will announce the allotted time at the beginning of each class. Don't be late!
- You will be permitted to drop your three lowest quiz grades at the end of the semester.
- Graded quizzes will be returned once a week. That way you'll know where you stand.
- You are obligated to abide by the Student Honor Code of Oxford College. Cheating will not be tolerated.

Papers

- The remainder of the grade will be determined by the writing assignments. You will be required to write a total of three take-home essays. I will assign all paper topics. You will have one week to complete each of the short essays. Please include a word count with each paper.
- You will be *required* to rewrite one of the three papers. You may choose to rewrite the one that most interests you, or you may choose the one with the lowest grade. It's entirely up to you. The rewrite will be due at the end of the semester. It will be graded on its own merits, and then that grade will be averaged together with the grade you received on the original version of the paper. The outcome will be the official grade for the paper (20%).
- Once again, you are obligated to abide by the Student Honor Code of Oxford College. I encourage you to work together and discuss your ideas, but *plagiarism will not be tolerated*. Whenever you use another person's words or ideas, you must give them credit. This applies to conversations with friends and class discussion, as well as anything you read (whether in print or on the Internet). Unfortunately, it is sometimes easy to fall into plagiarism without realizing it. As a general rule, if you worry that you're sliding in that direction, you probably are. When in doubt, cite the work that is influencing you. But if you have questions about a particular case, please ask me before it is too late (that is, *before* you hand in your paper).

Exams

- There will be one final exam. It will be “cumulative” in the sense that you will be asked to write an essay that reflects what you have learned throughout the whole semester.
- The final will be administered on the last day of class.

Grading

- Each quiz will be worth five points. (They will be totaled up into one score at the end of the semester.)
- All assignments will receive a letter grade. Points are assigned to the letters in the following fashion: A+ = 98, A = 95, A- = 92; B+ = 88, B = 85, B- = 82; etc. etc. (Note that, although it is possible to receive an “A+” on a written assignment, this grade is not recognized by the college as an official grade. So it is not possible to receive an “A+” for the course.)
- Length requirements must be observed. Papers that exceed the word limit will be penalized. Spend your words wisely.
- Grammar and style will factor into the grades on all written assignments. Clarity of expression and clarity of thought go hand in hand. So you are strongly encouraged to work hard on your writing throughout the semester. To this end, it would be smart to buy a good writing guide. I would strongly recommend either of these short and accessible books:
 - Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*
 - Christopher Lasch, *Plain Style: A Guide To Written English*
- Producing good written work has its own rewards. But if you need further incentive, consider what happened in 2004 to Philadelphia lawyer Brian Puricelli. In a civil rights suit against the city (*Devore v. City of Philadelphia*), Puricelli won a \$340,000 verdict for his client. The judge in the case, Jacob P. Hart, awarded Puricelli \$300 an hour for his courtroom performance, which he praised. But Judge Hart was less pleased with Puricelli’s written work. “Mr. Puricelli’s complete lack of care in his written product shows disrespect for the court,” Hart complained. “His errors, not just typographical, caused the court a considerable amount of work.” As punishment, Judge Hart slashed Puricelli’s fees in half for the time he spent on his written work, awarding him 210 hours at \$150 an hour. In total, the lawyer’s sloppy writing cost him \$31,450 in attorney’s fees.

Absence & Tardiness

- There is no attendance requirement. However, students who miss class will receive an “F” (= 0) on that day’s quiz. (By contrast, if you take the quiz and get both questions wrong, you will receive 1 point just for showing up.)
- There are no make-up quizzes. Exceptions to this rule will be made only for cases of documented medical or family emergency.
- Students who fail to come to class punctually will miss the quiz, and therefore receive an “F” for that day’s quiz.
- Papers must be turned in right at the beginning of class on the due date. If you turn your paper in after that day’s quiz is over, it counts as late.
- Late papers will be penalized. Your grade drops by one letter for each day it is late. Since the highest possible grade is “A+,” that means that highest possible grade for a paper that is one day late is a “B+.” The highest possible grade for a paper that is two days late is a “C+.” Turn it in three days late and you start with a “D+.” Papers more than three days late will not be accepted.
- As with the quizzes, exceptions to this rule will be made only in cases of documented medical or family emergency.

Grade changes

- You are free to contest grades you feel are unjust. However, you must do so in accordance with the following policy. All complaints must be registered in writing. Complaints must be typewritten and may not exceed 250 words. They must take the form of an argument designed to persuade the teacher that his evaluation of your work is mistaken. I will respond to the complaint either in writing or by discussing the grade directly with you. Under no circumstances will I discuss grades before the above procedure has been followed.
- The same goes for complaints about quiz grades. However, complaints about these grades will be accepted only *at the end of the semester*, once they have been averaged together. The reason for this is simple: there is no point in discussing a grade that you may end up dropping anyway

Semester Schedule

- We will be reading the following texts in the following order. The pace will be determined by the progress of the class as a whole. It is your responsibility to stay on top of the assignments.
 - Thomas Nagel, “How Do We Know Anything?” & “Other Minds” (Download from “Course Reserves” link at library’s web site)
 - René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*
 - First Paper
 - Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (On Reserve)
 - Thomas Nagel, “Right and Wrong” & “Justice” (On Reserve)
 - James Rachels, “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism” (On Reserve)
 - Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*
 - Second Paper
 - Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*
 - Peter Singer, *Writings on an Ethical Life*
 - Richard Poser vs. Peter Singer, “Animal Rights” (On Reserve)
 - Third Paper
- **FIRST ASSIGNMENT:** Download and read Thomas Nagel’s “How Do We Know Anything?” & “Other Minds” for next class.