

PHIL 1305

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

Tuesday/Thursday, 11:00PM-12:20PM; Hyer Hall, Room 111.

Professor Justin Fisher

Office: Hyer Hall, room 210D.

Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 2:00-3:20 or by appointment.

Email: fisher@smu.edu (This is the best way to reach me.)

Course Description:

This course will help make you familiar with some great problems of philosophy and the concepts and methods that philosophers use to address them. We will consider the following questions:

- What is the nature of knowledge? Is knowledge possible?
- Are our minds just our brains, or are they something separate? Can computers think?
- Should we believe that God exists?

We will examine writings on these questions and try to understand some of the answers that philosophers have offered. Most importantly, we will try to understand and critically evaluate the *reasons* for particular positions on philosophical issues. Even if we don't find and agree upon answers to all these questions, the attempt may improve our minds by teaching us about *reasoning*. The ability to think and write clearly and critically about a problem, whether in science or business or law, is a valuable skill and the only way to acquire that skill is to practice it. We probably can't expect to solve all of the great problems of philosophy this semester, but you may expect to be a better thinker and a better writer by the time it is done.

This course will meet the following criteria in the new university curriculum:

Philosophy, Religious Inquiry and Ethics Pillar

1. Students will be able to describe and explain some of the general features and principal theoretical methods of philosophy. (In addition, we'll touch on issues involving religion and bio-ethics.)
2. Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to critically reflect on or apply the theoretical methods of philosophy.

Oral Communication Proficiency

3. Students will be able to select and use appropriate forms of evidence in a public presentation.
4. Students will be able to design verbal messages to suit particular audiences and purposes.
5. Students will be able to use visual cues (such as presentation software, staging, props, costumes, makeup, and gesture) to enhance a public presentation.

Readings:

Various readings will be made available electronically or on paper.

Evaluation:

Homework, Quizzes, and Activities (20%)
Debates and WriteUps (20%)
Creative Project (20%)
Midterm Exam (20%)
Final Exam (20%)

Homework, Quizzes, and Classroom Participation.

You are expected to attend class regularly, and to contribute regularly to in-class activities and discussions. It is essential that you come to each class meeting having carefully read the assigned material. If you do not attend regularly, it would be virtually impossible to do well in the course, so **if you have five or more unexcused absences I will drop you from the course.** That will be doing both of us a favor.

For some meetings, I will give a short (usually less than one page) homework assignment to ensure that you will be will prepared for that class. Sometimes the homework may involve preparing a short presentation to give in class. I may also have you turn in quizzes or work from other in-class activities. At the end of the semester, I will drop your lowest grade for these homeworks/quizzes/activities.

Debates:

I will assign you to a team of 2-4 students. You will be given a claim before each debate. At the time of the debate, a coin-flip will determine whether you will be PRO (arguing for that claim), or CON (arguing against it). The two sides (starting with PRO) will make 2-minute introductory statements, then each will make a 2-minute argument, and then each will make a 2-minute concluding statement. This will be followed by a Q&A discussion with the audience.

Debate grades will reflect the understanding you display regarding the relevant material, and your capacity to muster effective arguments for your side of the debate. A portion of the debate grade may be determined on the basis of ratings by the audience.

The total number of debates that your team will participate in (2-4) will be determined once the final enrollment for the course is determined.

On the day of the debate, your team will turn in a **debate write-up**. These will typically be between 4 and 6 pages, and will describe the sorts of arguments that are available to each side of the debate. Detailed instructions for these write-ups will be distributed beforehand.

At the end of the semester, each group will submit a report regarding the division of labor within the group (e.g., that two members each did 30% of the work, while the third member did 40% of the work). These reports will be used to allocate grades to individuals for group work. I encourage your group to talk about your division of labor throughout the semester, and then to reach a final consensus regarding what your report will say. In the event where no consensus can be reached, individuals may submit their own reports.

Exams:

The exams may involve a variety of formats, including multiple choice, matching, short answer, and essay. Sample questions will be distributed prior to the exams.

Creative Project:

One suitable project would be to write an (approximately) 6-page paper developing a clear argument for a position regarding one of the topics we've discussed. However, many other creative projects (in various media) could be appropriate as well, so long as they can serve to show off your understanding of course material. I encourage you to contact me with project ideas. You will need to submit a brief (1-2 page) proposal describing your project to help ensure that you start out on a good path, and you will make an in-class presentation of your project to show others what you're working on and to get additional feedback.

Projects may be done individually or in groups, though group projects will be expected to be larger so that each person will be making a contribution comparable to an individual project.

Grade Appeals:

Grade appeals must be submitted in writing within two weeks of the return of graded material and within 3 weeks of the final exam, whichever comes first. Your written appeal should include a clear explanation for why what you submitted merits a higher grade. (That you have gotten high grades in other courses and/or that it would please your parents or a scholarship committee to have a higher grade are generally not reasons that your work in this course merits a higher grade.)

Academic misconduct:

Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct (e.g., cheating on exams) will not be tolerated. Be sure to acknowledge other people's words and ideas, whenever you use them!

Disabilities, Religious Commitments, and Extracurricular Activities:


Please let me know right away if I can help to accommodate your disabilities or religious commitments. Here are some relevant university policies:

- **Disability Accommodations:** Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first be registered with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS) to verify the disability and to establish eligibility for accommodations. Students may call 214-768-1470 or visit <http://www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements.
- **Religious Observance:** Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)
- **Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities:** Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity should be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalogue)

Tentative Schedule – (subject to revision):

What follows is subject to revision. Any changes will be announced in class and published on the course Blackboard page.

Date	Topic	Readings
INTRODUCTION		
Jan 22	Introduction.	
THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE (EPISTEMOLOGY)		
Jan 24	Descartes' Method of Doubt	Descartes' 1 st Meditation
Jan 29	What can we know for sure?	Descartes' 2 nd Meditation
Jan 31	Escaping the pit of doubt?	Sober 156-69.
Feb 5	<u>Do we</u> live in the Matrix?	Bostrom.
Feb 7	Wrap up, Debate Workshop	--
Feb 12	DEBATE #1.	--
PHILOSOPHY OF MIND		
Feb 14	The problem of other minds.	Russell 333-36, Sober 266-68.
Feb 19	The Mind/Body Problem.	Clark.
Feb 21	TBA – away at conference	--
Feb 26	Can Computers Think?	Bisson, Searle.
Feb 28	Extended minds?	Clark&Chalmers.
Mar 5	Wrap-Up and Review.	--
Mar 7	DEBATE #2.	--
Mar 12		--
Mar 14	No class – Happy spring break!	--
Mar 19	MIDTERM EXAM.	--

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION.		
Mar 21	How did the universe begin?	Reichenbach.
Mar 26	The Design Argument	Paley.
Mar 28	Evolution & Creationism	Sober 61-75.
Apr 2	Evolution & Creationism (cont) <i>Proposals for creative projects due.</i>	--
Apr 4	The Problem of Evil	Alter & Howell.
Apr 9	Pascal's Wager	Fisher.
Apr 11	Are most people closet atheists?	Rey.
Apr 16	 <i>Review, Project Presentations and remaining Debates</i>	--
Apr 18		--
Apr 23		--
Apr 25		--
Apr 30		--
May 2	Creative Projects due Apr 28 or TBA A final homework may be due May 2	--

FINAL EXAM ----- Check registrar's list for time and place.

Three quick tips for doing well in this course:

- 1. Come to class (when you must miss, talk to a classmate about what happened – get their lecture notes)*
- 2. Do the readings ahead of time, and read 'actively' – pay attention to what you're reading, ask yourself what points the author is trying to make, why this matters, and so on*
- 3. If you're having trouble with any of the course material, speak to the professor right away. This course will get a lot harder if you fall behind, so don't.*