# INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

# THE BASICS

**Course Instructor**: Dr. Robert Kirkman. Please address me as either ‘Doctor Kirkman’ or ‘Professor Kirkman.’

#### Office Hours: Wednesdays 10:00am-12:00pm in 301 DM Smith. If you cannot meet with me during my scheduled office hours, please contact me to make an appointment. Also, I have an open door policy: whenever I am in my office with the door open, you are welcome to stop in.

I encourage you to use my office hours as an opportunity to clarify points you don’t understand, to get additional readings, to talk about the subject matter in relation to your own interests, to go over work in progress, or to address problems you may be having in the course.

Visit early and often.

**Phone**: (404) 385-4258.

**Email**: robert.kirkman@gatech.edu

**Web Site**: I will be maintaining the course website through T-Square, including updates to the schedule and utilities for email, discussion, and chat.

**Books:** The main text for the course is available at Engineers Bookstore and at the Georgia Tech Bookstore: Robert J. Mulvaney, ed., *Classic Philosophical Questions.* Additional readings will be available through the Resources page of the T-Square workspace.

# THE COURSE

# Overview

Philosophy is an endeavor with ancient roots. In its history may be found the origins of the natural sciences, the social sciences, and other fields of inquiry that have taken on lives of their own. Yet philosophy persists as a vital tradition, raising and exploring fundamental questions about human experience, human choice, and the meaning of human life in the cosmos . . . and even questions about the character and limits of the natural and social sciences.

What is less often appreciated is that philosophy can be a *practical* endeavor, providing tools and skills that help us to make sense of situations in which we find ourselves and to make responsible decisions, as individuals and in communities. Philosophy provides ways of *paying attention* to our lives in the world that are distinct from those of the sciences. Theory of knowledge, philosophy of science, and ethical and political theory all have something to offer us but, as they are less familiar than the tools of the natural and social sciences, they require some practice.

The goal of this course, then, is to gain some familiarity and facility with a wider array of tools for understanding and decision making, through reading, writing, and discussion of original sources drawn from the philosophical tradition.

**Objectives**

By the time you finish this course, you should be able to:

* offer a concise and nuanced answer, in your own words, to the question: What is philosophy?
* carry on an intelligent conversation about a wide range of philosophical questions and the connections among them;
* analyze complex contemporary issues, both personal and public, in philosophical terms;
* write clear and well structured short essays in a variety of forms;
* begin to display independent, critical thought about philosophical questions that arise in practical contexts.

# SCHEDULE

This schedule is subject to change with advance notice. Please check the Schedule page on T-Square for updates.

**1. Introduction and Warm-Ups**

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| 1/11 | Introductions  *sign up for two provocation dates* |
| 1/13 | Warm-Up Exercises |

**2. What Is Philosophy?**

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| --- | --- |
| 1/18 | CPQ 1 |
| 1/20 | CPQ 2  Write: *first very short essay*: summarize the main point |

**3. Philosophy and Religion**

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| --- | --- |
| 1/25 | CPQ 3-7 (proof) |
| 1/27 | CPQ 8-9 (problem of evil)  Write: *second very short essay*: summarize the main point |

**4. Ethics I**

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| --- | --- |
| 2/1 | CPQ 10-11 (relativism) |
| 2/3 | CPQ 12-13 (selfishness)  Write: *third very short essay*: critical review |

**5. Ethics II**

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| --- | --- |
| 2/8 | CPQ 14-16 (the big three!) |
| 2/10 | CPQ 17-19 (alternatives)  Write: *fourth very short essay*: critical review |

**6. Ethics III**

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| --- | --- |
| 2/15 | CPQ 20 (abortion) |
| 2/17 | CPQ 21 (animals)  Write: *fifth very short essay*: analysis of decision |

**7. Knowledge I**

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| --- | --- |
| 2/22 | CPQ 22-23 (what is knowledge?) |
| 2/24 | CPQ 24-25 (reason and senses)  Write: *sixth very short essay*: analysis of a decision |

**8. Knowledge II**

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| --- | --- |
| 3/1 | CPQ 27-29 (truth) |
| 3/3 | CPQ 30-31 (causality)  Write: *seventh very short essay*: original thesis  Note: guest instructor TBA |

**9. Metaphysics I**

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| --- | --- |
| 3/8 | CPQ 32-33 (being and non-being) |
| 3/10 | CPQ 34-35 (universal and particular) |

**10. Metaphysics II**

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| --- | --- |
| 3/15 | CPQ 36-39 (mind and matter) |
| 3/17 | \*Kant, excerpt from *Critique of Pure Reason* |

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|  | **SPRING BREAK** |

**11. Metaphysics III**

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| --- | --- |
| 3/29 | CPQ 40-41 (free will and determinism) |
| 3/31 | \*Kant, excerpt from *Critique of Practical Reason*; \*Kirkman, *Darwinian Humanism*  Write: *eighth very short essay*: thesis and argument |

**12. Social and Political Philosophy I**

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| --- | --- |
| 4/5 | CPQ 42-43 (liberty and authority) |
| 4/7 | CPQ 44; \*TBA (prejudice)  Write: *ninth very short essay*: thesis and argument |

**13. Social and Political Philosophy II**

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| --- | --- |
| 4/12 | CPQ 45-46 (monarchy and democracy) |
| 4/14 | CPQ 47-49 |

**14. Aesthetics**

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| --- | --- |
| 4/19 | CPQ 50 (beauty) |
| 4/21 | CPQ 51-52 (function of art)  Write: *tenth very short essay*: thesis, counter-argument, and reply |

**15. The Good Life**

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| 4/26 | CPQ 53-54 (good life) |
| 4/29 | CPQ 55-56 (meaning) |

#### POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

**Policy on Preparation**: A course like this works best as a discussion in which all students can participate. In order to do that, though, you will need to prepare carefully for every class. At minimum, you should: 1) read each assignment carefully (*at least* once), making note of ideas or claims that interest you, any questions that arise, and elements of a critical response; 2) be sure to bring the book or other assigned reading to class; and 3) complete all written homework assignments before class.

**Policy on Electronic Media**: No computers, smart phones, dumb phones, or any other electronic devices may be used in the classroom unless explicitly called for as part of an in-class activity. Take-off and landing rules apply: electronic devices are to be turned off and stowed for the duration of each class session.

Since this policy cuts across the grain of current trends in education, let me explain. One of the goals of a course like this is to foster ways of thinking and communicating that require attention and concentration; participation in a course like this requires that you be fully present in the classroom, listening and responding to what is and is not said. As currently employed, electronic media are inimical to those requirements.

Students using electronic devices in class without express permission will be asked to leave the classroom for the remainder of the class session.

#### Policy on Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is a precondition for intellectual maturity. The most basic requirement for integrity is that you make a clear distinction between your own work and that of others.

In general, unless you are explicitly instructed to collaborate with other students, any written work you as an individual hand in for a grade *must be your own work, expressed in your own words, informed by your own judgment, and carefully documented if it includes any material quoted or paraphrased from other sources.*

In this course, it is especially important to avoid the form of academic dishonesty known as plagiarism. When you use other people’s ideas, words, or research findings to inform your own writing, whether in direct quotation or paraphrase, you must provide complete and accurate documentation. In addition, you must distinguish between direct quotation and paraphrase by the appropriate use of quotation marks.

Whatever form it takes, academic dishonesty hurts everyone: among other things, it is unfair to other students and it diminishes the reputation of the Institute and the value of the degrees it confers. Accordingly, academic dishonesty can result in serious disciplinary action, up to and including expulsion from the Institute. All suspected cases of academic dishonesty in this course shall be reported to the Office of Student Integrity for investigation.

You should familiarize yourself with your rights and responsibilities under Institute regulations as expressed in the Academic Honor Code, and keep in mind that you have signed the Honor Agreement. See <http://www.honor.gatech.edu/index.php> for more information.

**Grades:** Your work for this course will be graded on a “criterion-referenced” or “absolute” grading system, which means that your work will be measured against an explicit and unvarying standard that will be made clear before each assignment. In other words, grades will not be assigned on a curve (i.e. a “norm-referenced” system). It is theoretically possible for everyone to earn an ‘A’, as long as everyone’s work meets the performance standards for that grade.

In general, the emphasis of the course will be acquiring skill in using the tools of philosophical analysis; you should be concerned with thinking critically and expressing yourself clearly rather than with memorizing a lot of details.

Final grades will be based on your performance on the following assignments:

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| * Provocation (10%) in which you will start off class discussion following a plan developed ahead of time and submitted for approval; you may collaborate with other students signed up for the same class session. You will do this twice during the semester, and each provocation will be graded on a 10-point scale. * Very Short Essays (80%), generally a page or two in length. There are 10 of these currently scheduled, in a variety of formats. Each will be graded on a 10-point scale. * In-Class Activities (10%) of various kinds, including individual writing and group activities. These will be graded on a 2-point scale (credit/half credit/no credit). * Extra Credit (limit two per student) will be entered as an extra Very Short Essay, to be averaged in with the rest. There are two possibilities here:   + submit a critical reflection on a lecture or other event of philosophical interest at which you can demonstrate you were present; get approval in advance;   + submit a “tangent” essay, which is a Very Short Essay on some topic of philosophical interest not covered directly in class or in the readings; get approval in advance. |

The final grade will be calculated as a weighted average. Numerical grades will correspond to letter grades according to the following scale:

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| --- | --- |
| 90-100 | = A |
| 80-89 | = B |
| 70-79 | = C |
| 60-69 | = D |
| 0-59 | = F |

I do not round up when assigning letter grades for the semester. For example, if your final weighted average is 82.5, 85.7, or 89.6, your final grade will be a ‘B.’

**Policy on Timeliness**: Homework assignments are due in class at the beginning of the scheduled meeting time. In-class assignments are due during the class period for which they are assigned. I will not accept assignments after that time unless they are accompanied by written documentation of a legitimate excuse. Documentation should consist of a note or form signed by someone in authority (a physician, for example, or another Georgia Tech faculty member); a note written by yourself or a peer is not acceptable. Legitimate excuses include illness or injury, family or personal emergency, and academic or other Institute-related obligations beyond the ordinary work of your other courses.

If you know ahead of time that you are going to miss an important deadline for a legitimate reason, it’s usually a good idea to see me or your TA beforehand to arrange an extension.