

**Phil 140, 3 credits, Fall 2015, Harborside 210.**

# **The Examined Life**

**Dr. Scott O'Connor**

<http://scoconno.github.io/Teaching/ExaminedMAIN>

09/01/2015–12/15/2015

## **Copyright**

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## **Catalog Description**

This course teaches students to identify and evaluate those beliefs that guide their thoughts and actions. Reflecting on different sources, students identify those philosophical beliefs that play a role in their own lives. By developing their critical thinking skills, they learn how to clarify, systematize, and assess these beliefs.

## Course Description

Does God exist? Are you free? Why live? What should you do with your life? In this course, we'll be asking some of these deep philosophical questions. We begin by discussing the meaning of life, especially why some philosophers have connected a meaningful life with God's existence. This raises the question as to whether God exists. We will examine some classic arguments for the existence of God as well as concerns that God's existence is incompatible with the existence of evil. Many respond to the problem of evil by claiming that evil is a by-product of our free-will, a gift endowed by God to use as we see fit. But are we free? We will discuss why some think our actions are completely pre-determined by causal factors outside of our control. If they are right, free-will is a mere illusion. This raises deep questions about the nature of moral responsibility; can you be held responsible for an action that was out of your control? In the final part of the course, we will ask what determines the moral character of our actions. Do the ends justify the means? After studying the main ethical theories, you will get a chance to work in groups to apply them to a current controversy of your choosing, e.g., the death penalty, euthanasia, abortion, etc.

## Learning Objectives

Upon completing this course, students will be able to (i) read philosophical texts, (ii) clearly and charitably explain viewpoints that are not their own, (iii) think critically and philosophically, (iv) write well-structured prose in which they clearly state a thesis and persuasively defend it, (v) demonstrate an understanding of several core philosophical topics, (vi) manage their studies in a responsible and timely manner.

## Required Textbook

By 09/08/2015, the following textbook must be purchased or rented:

- [Philosophy Here and Now: Powerful Ideas in Everyday Life](#), by Lewis Vaughn  
(Available in the campus book store and online retailers)

## Course Website

There is both a Blackboard site and website for this course. Clicking the first link on the left panel within the Blackboard site will bring you to the course website. The direct address, which is also listed at the top of the syllabus:

<http://scoconno.github.io/Teaching/ExaminedMAIN>

All assignments will be submitted through Blackboard. Readings, notes, etc. will be posted at the course website.

- Taking any course at NJCU requires some computer literacy, e.g., the ability to check, send, and receive e-mail; access websites; upload and download documents, etc. If these tasks are difficult for you, please find some resources here: Technical difficulties are no excuse for missed or late work.

## Requirements

- *Workload:* You are expected to attend every class meeting fully prepared to discuss each assigned reading and to submit written work punctually. This should take, on average, two hour of work outside lecture for reading for every hour spent in lecture, i.e., c. 5 hours per week outside class. If you spend considerably more or less, please contact me.
- *Attendance:* Roll call will be taken from Week 1. 1 point per class up to a maximum of 10 points. Excludes Weeks 1 & 2.
- *1 Critical Thinking Quiz* administered in class.
- *2 Short Writing Assignments* submitted through Blackboard.
- *2 Essays* submitted through Blackboard. 1000 and 1500 words respectively.
- *Final Presentation:* One group oral presentation and written submission. Each member must present at least one slide. Groups will grade their member's participation.
- *Grade Distribution:* Quiz—5 points, Attendance—1 point per class (10 total), Short Writing Assignments—10 points each (20 total); Essays—20 points (40 points total); Presentation—10 oral, 20 points written, 5 points peer evaluation (35 points total).
- *Grade Breakdown:*

96–110	A		77–79	C+
90–95	A-		73–76	C
87–89	B+		70–72	C-
83–86	B		60–69	D
80–82	B -		0–59	F

## Policies

- *Student Responsibility:* This syllabus outlines the required text, assignments, requirements, and policies for this course. By taking this course, you agree to read this syllabus and be bound by those requirements and policies.
- *Late work & Make-up Policy:*
  - All assignments must be submitted through Blackboard by 1:00 pm on the due date (see assignment schedule below).
  - No make-ups or late work accepted under any circumstances. No exceptions. But note that there are 110 points available with 96+ being required for an A.
  - Blackboard difficulties are rare and automatically reported to instructors. Under no circumstance will a student's report of a Blackboard difficulty be reason for an extension. It is your responsibility to contact blackboard support for help: [dlsupport@njcu.edu](mailto:dlsupport@njcu.edu).
- *Attendance:* You are considered absent if you are (i) not present during roll call, or (ii) leave early, or (iii) leave without permission, or (iv) leave for an extended period of time.
- *Conduct:* Distracting and disrespectful behavior, including but not limited to eating, leaving your seat, talking out of turn, aggression is prohibited. Penalties include, but are not limited to, a lost of attendance grade for the day of violation. Repeat offenders will be reported to the Dean of Students.
- *Communication:* To comply with Federal Privacy Laws (FERPA) and NJCU policies, all communication will be through Blackboard and/or official NJCU e-mail. Since I cannot verify personal e-mail addresses, I will not respond to a non NJCU e-mail address. Check both your NJCU e-mail and Blackboard daily. Most questions can be answered by reading the syllabus and website. Messages that cannot be answered by reading the syllabus and website will be responded to within two days of receiving them.
- *Electronic devices:* Use of electronic device, including, but not limited, to smartphones, dictaphones, tablets, laptops, is prohibited. Recording a lecture is in violation of Copyright. Penalties include, but are not limited to, a lost of attendance grade for the day of violation. Repeat offenders will be reported to the Dean of Students.

- *Grading:* Grades will be available within 1 week of an assignment being submitted. For grading information see <http://scoconno.github.io/Teaching/Rubric>
- *Format for Papers:* Submit work either as a rich text or Microsoft Word file. All work must be typed. Your papers should be in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced with margins set to one inch on all sides. Your name, my name, the date and assignment should appear in the top left hand corner of the first page. Your last name and page number must appear in the top right hand corner on each subsequent page. If hard copies are requested, please staple or paperclip copies of papers and drafts. You are responsible for the presentation of your papers.
- *Statement for students with disabilities:* If you are a student with a disability and wish to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, please register with the Office of Specialized Services and Supplemental Instruction (OSS/SI). To begin this process, complete the registration form available on the OSS/SI website at [www.njcu.edu/Specialized\\_Services.aspx](http://www.njcu.edu/Specialized_Services.aspx) (listed under Student Resources-Forms). Contact OSS/SI at 201-200-2091 or visit the office in Karnoutsos Hall, Room 102 for additional information.
- *Academic Integrity:* All the work you turn in (including papers, drafts, and discussion board posts) must be written by you specifically for this course. It must originate with you in form and content with all contributory sources fully and specifically acknowledged. Being a student at NJCU requires you to follow [NJCU's Academic Integrity Policy](#). Penalties for violations:
  - 1st infraction: 0 for the assignment.
  - 2nd infraction: 0 for the entire course & application for permanent record on student's transcript. (Repeated violations can lead to expulsion from NJCU).

## Further Resources

### Weekly Course Schedule

Dates refer to the first day of the week. Complete the readings before the first class of the week. Readings marked with a “\*\*” can be found on the course website. Changes to the syllabus will be announced in class and by *via* your NJCU email address.

1. 09/01/2015, Introduction
  - a) Ch.1.1–1.2.
2. 09/08/2015, Critical Thinking: Logical Tools
  - a) Ch.1.3
  - b) <http://scoconno.github.io/Teaching/ExaminedMAIN/Worksheet>
3. 09/15/2015, The Meaning of Life: Pessimism
  - a) 'The Good Brahmin', Voltaire, pp.381–382
  - b) Ch.8.1–8.2
  - c) <http://scoconno.github.io/Teaching/ExaminedMAIN/Tolstoy.pdf>\*
4. 09/22/2015, The Meaning of Life: Optimism
  - a) Ch.8.3
  - b) TBD
5. 09/29/2015, God: The Design Argument
  - a) Ch.2.1-2.2.
  - b) \*\*\*'Intelligent Design Has No Place in the Science Curriculum', Harold Morowitz, Robert Hazen, and James Trefil
  - c) \*\*\*'Design for Living', Michael J. Behe
6. 10/06/2015, God: Further Arguments for God's Existence
  - a) Ch.2.2
  - b) 'The Star', Arthur C. Clarke, pp.118–120
7. 10/13/2015, God: The Problem of Evil
  - a) Ch.2.3.
  - b) "A Little Omniscience Goes a Long Way", Thomas Davis, pp.248–250
  - c) New Report TBD
8. 10/20/2015, Free Will: Causal Determinism
  - a) Ch.5.1–5.2
  - b) \*\*\*'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep', Philip, K. Dick (extract TBD)

9. 10/27/2015, Free Will: Compatibilism
  - a) Ch.5.3
  - b) 'Science and Free Will', p.234
10. 11/03/2015, Ethics: Relativism,
  - a) Ch.3.1–3.2.
  - b) TBD
11. 11/10/2015, Ethics: Consequentialism & Deontology
  - a) Ch.3.3–3.4
  - b) 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas', Ursula Le Guin, pp.181–184
12. 11/17/2015, Ethics: Deontology & Virtue Ethics
  - a) Ch.3.4–3.5
  - b) \*\*'Billy Budd', Herman Melville (extract)
13. 11/24/2015, Applied Ethics
  - a) TBD
14. 12/01/2015, Applied Ethics: Group Projects
15. 12/08/2015, Applied Ethics: Group Projects

## Assignment Schedule

Dates refer to the due date. All assignments must be submitted through Blackboard by 1:00pm. No late work accepted. No make-ups. No exceptions.

1. 09/15/2015, Critical Thinking Quiz
2. 09/29/2015, SW1–Meaning of Life
3. 10/13/2015, SW2–God's Existence.
4. 11/03/2015, Essay 1–The Problem of Evil
5. 11/24/2015, Essay 2–Free will
6. 12/04/2015, Group Project–Literature Review Due

7. *12/08/2015*, Group Project–Presentation
8. *12/15/2015*, Group Project–written submission due