

PHI 201-AA: Introduction to Philosophy

TR 11:00-12:15 pm, DH 204

Fall 2017

Professor: Jennifer Kling, PhD

Office Hours: MTWR 1-3pm; available by appointment (Sacred Heart Hall 312C)

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Phone (emergencies only!): 919-260-2719

Course Description:

In this course we will tackle six of life's big questions (which you might or might not already have contemplated to some degree). Throughout the class, we will be reading both historical and contemporary philosophical texts, with an eye to understanding what philosophers think about these questions and why. However, our efforts will not be merely an academic exercise where we will only study what others have thought. Instead, in this course you will be joining in an active and ongoing effort to better understand the world in all its complexity and our place in it.

This class fits into a broader program of liberal education, insofar as it seeks to question and grasp issues surrounding human nature, morality and ethics, the production of knowledge, the nature of reality, and the structure of political systems. It has no prerequisites and is designed for students with no background in philosophy, although students with a philosophy background are welcome. For students who are interested in continuing in philosophy, this course will provide a taste of the wide range of problems in philosophy, which will allow you to leave with a better understanding of which areas you would like to study in more detail in the future.

In this class, you will have to struggle with big concepts that you may not have engaged before, and you will have to work hard to succeed. Along the way you will come to better understand what philosophers do, how they do it, and why. That will entail using and refining your abilities to effectively think, argue, read, and write. In other words, in this course you are going to learn how to *do* philosophy, which is both difficult and rewarding.

Course Requirements:

Participation (10%): You will need to both do the readings and come to class in order to be successful in this course. If you don't do the readings, you'll be lost in class; if you don't come to class, you'll be lost in the readings and the assignments. While *excessive* participation is not required, some willingness to engage with both me and your fellow classmates is necessary— without this willingness on your part, we won't be able to have the sort of productive class discussions that will enable you to successfully engage in the course. So, while a lack of participation won't harm your grade very much, participation can significantly *help* your grade.

I appreciate that speaking to a classroom full of your peers can be difficult; so, there are a number of other ways to participate in class. You may speak in class, you may engage in small group work, you may visit my office hours, you may send me emails with questions, comments, and concerns, you may start online discussion threads, you may post relevant outside documents/videos/blogs, etc. to the course website, you may tweet and/or blog and/or journal about issues raised in class, etc. If you're unsure of whether some action counts as participation, please see me, and we'll discuss it.

Argument Reconstructions (5% each): You are required to submit **six** argument reconstructions throughout the semester. Argument reconstructions are due by the start of the class period on the due date. **Late argument reconstructions will not be accepted.** They should be roughly ½-1 page in length,

and should reconstruct the relevant argument. Argument reconstructions should be created in Rationale, and submitted via Canvas. If you wish to submit an argument reconstruction in some other form, please see me, and we'll discuss it. ****Collaboration is encouraged but not required.****

Papers (15% each): There are **three** required papers for this course. Each paper should be no longer than 2 pages, and should engage with some issue brought up in the course texts and class discussions. I will provide a list of topics one week in advance of each paper's due date. If you wish to write on a topic not on the list, please come see me to discuss your proposed topic. If you wish to submit a paper in some other form (podcast, video, tumblr, etc), please see me, and we'll discuss it.

Papers are due by the start of the class period on the due date. For every 24-hour period that a paper is late, I will take 5 points off. That said, I am aware that life happens; if you feel you need an extension, please ask me as soon as possible. The earlier you ask, the more likely I am to give you an extension. Failure to turn in any one of the papers will result in failing the course.

Final (15%): There is a required final exam for this course. The exam will consist of a series of short answers as well as (possibly) one longer essay. Failure to take the final exam will result in failing the course.

Grading Scale:

A (90-100): An 'A' denotes exceptional skill and ability. An 'A' student demonstrates an excellent grasp of the material (i.e., the student understands the material enough to explain it succinctly and well), and also displays the ability to engage thoughtfully with both the broad issues and finer points under discussion.

B (80-89): A 'B' denotes solid-to-impressive skill and ability. A 'B' student demonstrates a good grasp of the material (i.e., the student understands the material well enough to explain it with few mistakes), and also displays the ability to engage thoughtfully with most, if not all, of the issues and points under discussion.

C (70-79): A 'C' denotes adequate skill and ability. A 'C' student demonstrates a fair grasp of the material (i.e., the student understands the big picture, but makes some serious errors in presentation), and also displays the ability to engage thoughtfully with at least some of the issues under discussion.

D (60-69): A 'D' denotes inadequate skill and ability. A 'D' student has serious problems with grasping the material, and fails to engage thoughtfully with any of the issues under discussion.

E (0-59): An 'E' denotes catastrophic problems in fulfilling the requirements of the course. An 'E' student neither grasps the material nor engages with it critically at any level.

While hard work is correlated with success, it is not sufficient for success. To get a good grade in this course, you need to not only understand and engage with the material, but also communicate your understanding and engagement to me via your participation, projects, and papers. If you sense that you are heading towards a grade you do not want, please come see me as soon as possible (if you wait until the end of the semester, it will be too late).

Assignments:

All readings, videos, podcasts, etc can be found on this course's Canvas site.

Week 1: Introduction + What is Philosophy?

Tuesday, August 29th

Watch: "Plato's Allegory of the Cave," Phil Williams (narrated by Orson Welles)

Thursday, August 31st

Read: Plato, *Apology* (selection)

Week 2: How to do philosophy: Mapping Arguments and Writing Papers

Tuesday, Sept. 5th **Read:** Judith Jarvis Thompson, excerpt from “Self-Defense”

Thursday, Sept. 7th **Watch:** 'A Sample Philosophy Paper' by Angela Mendelovici

Week 3: Who Am I?: Questions of Personal Identity

Tuesday, Sept. 12th **ARGUMENT RECONSTRUCTION #1 DUE** and
Read: John Locke, excerpt from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

Thursday, Sept. 14th **Read:** Daniel Dennett, “Where Am I?”

Week 4: Personal Identity, continued

Tuesday, Sept. 19th **Read:** Jean-Paul Sartre, “Existentialism Is a Humanism”

Thursday, Sept. 21st **PAPER #1 DUE** and **Watch:** TEDx Talk, Amma Asante, “The power of defining yourself”

Week 5: What Should I Do?: Questions of Ethics and the Good Life

Tuesday, Sept. 26th NO CLASS: COMMON DIALOGUE DAY

Thursday, Sept. 28th **Listen:** Philosophy Bites Podcast, “David Edmonds on Trolley Problems”

Week 6: Ethics and the Good Life, continued

Tuesday, Oct. 3rd **ARGUMENT RECONSTRUCTION #2 DUE** and
Read: Ronald Dworkin, “Taking Rights Seriously”

Thursday, Oct 5th **Read:** Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality,” and
Write: 3 Questions about consequentialism
Note: Instructor Out, TBA Guest to Skype in

Week 7: Ethics and the Good Life, continued

Tuesday, Oct 10th **Listen:** Philosophy Bites Podcast, “William B Irvine on Living Stoically”

Thursday, Oct 12th **Listen:** Philosophy Bites Podcast, “Susan Wolf on Meaning in Life”

Week 8: Does God Exist?: Questions of Religion and Spirituality

Tuesday, Oct 17th **ARGUMENT RECONSTRUCTION #3 DUE** and
Read: St. Anselm, excerpt from *Proslogion*

Thursday, Oct 19th **Read:** J.L. Mackie, excerpt from *Evil and Omnipotence*

Week 9: Religion and Spirituality, continued

Tuesday, Oct 24th **PAPER #2 DUE** and **Listen:** Hi-Phi Nation podcast, “The Name of God”

Thursday, Oct 26th **Watch:** TED Talk, Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Is religion good or bad?
(This is a trick question)”

Week 10: What is the World Like?: Questions about the Nature of Reality

Tuesday, Oct 31st **ARGUMENT RECONSTRUCTION #4 DUE** and
Read: Derek Parfit, excerpt from “Why Anything? Why This?”

Thursday, Nov 2nd **Watch:** TED Talk, “Brian Greene: Is Our Universe the Only Universe?”

Week 11: The Nature of Reality, continued

Tuesday, Nov 7th **Read:** David Lewis, “The Paradoxes of Time Travel” (selections)

Thursday, Nov 9th **Read:** John Searle, “Minds, Brains, and Computers” (selections)

Week 12: How Do We Know?: Questions about the Nature and Production of Knowledge

Tuesday, Nov 14th **ARGUMENT RECONSTRUCTION #5 DUE** and
Read: Descartes, Meditations I and II, *First Philosophy*

Thursday, Nov 16th **Listen:** Examining Ethics Podcast, “Skepticism and the Skeptical Skeptics
Who Use It”

Week 13: The Nature and Production of Knowledge, continued

Tuesday, Nov 21st **PAPER #3 DUE** and **Read:** “Feminist Perspectives on Knowledge,”
Living Philosophy, edited by Lewis Vaughn

Thursday, Nov 23rd NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 14: How Should Society Be Organized?: Questions about Politics and Community

Tuesday, Nov 28th **Watch:** TED talk, “Michael Sandel: The lost art of democratic debate”

Thursday, Nov 30th **ARGUMENT RECONSTRUCTION #6 DUE** and
Read: Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Letter from Birmingham Jail”

Week 15: Politics and Community, continued

Tuesday, Dec 5th **Read:** Serena Parekh, “Beyond the Ethics of Admission: Stateless People,
Refugee Camps, and Moral Obligations”

Thursday, Dec. 7th **Review/Catch Up**

Week 16: Final Exam

Tuesday, Dec 12th

FINAL EXAM: 11:00am-1:00pm, DH 204

Code of Student Conduct:

All students at Siena Heights University are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. For more information, please see the [Code of Student Conduct](#). Please obey the spirit as well as the law of SHU's Code of Student Conduct. If you think that something is in violation of the Code, it probably is, so check before doing it. Please remember that unintentional plagiarism is still plagiarism, and that **you must cite all of your sources** for papers!

****Please note:** every assignment turned in for this class must be your own original work, produced specifically *for this class*. You may not turn in an assignment written for a previous and/or different class. To do so would constitute (self) plagiarism, and will be treated as such.**

The Writing Center:

The Writing Center at Siena Heights University is a free resource available to all CAS students. Students are encouraged to visit the writing center for writing feedback at any stage in the writing process. For information regarding their tutors, hours, location, or to utilize their online links and resources, please visit writingcenter.sienaheights.edu.

Diversity and Disability Statement:

Our institution values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. Our goal is to create learning environments that are usable, equitable, inclusive and welcoming. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment or achievement, please notify the instructor as soon as possible. Students with disabilities are also welcome to contact the Office of Accessibility (517) 264-7683 or Laura Lyall (coordinator) at lyall@sienaheights.edu to discuss a range of options to removing barriers in the course, including accommodations. This process is initiated and driven by the student. It is to your advantage to begin the process in a timely manner, since accommodations are not retroactive. Grades earned before verification of a disability by the Office of Accessibility will not be changed.

Academic Engagement Policy:

In response to federal regulations governing financial aid, faculty will report students who are absent from class for one week without explanation. These students will be contacted to determine their current status. Students who are disengaged from a class for two weeks will be administratively withdrawn from that class and given a withdrawal grade equivalent to an E in grade point calculations. In order to avoid an administrative withdrawal, students can initiate a withdrawal themselves before the deadline (November 5) and avoid negative consequences to their grade points.

Sex- and Gender-based Violence and Harassment:

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender is a Civil Rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted for **any** reason, you can find the appropriate resources here:

- The SHU Counseling Center, directed by Sandy Morley, is open M-F from 8 am to 5 pm or by appointment. Sandy Morley is a confidential resource. You can reach her at 517-264-7193 or smorley@sienaheights.edu, or stop by Ledwidge Hall 195-197. Counseling services are offered at no charge to University students.
- The SHU Public Safety Department can be reached at 517-264-7800 or by dialing 0 on campus. They are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and they offer 24-hour escort service to any location on campus. Cindy Birdwell is the Chief Public Safety Officer and she is also SHU's Title

IX Coordinator. She can be reached at 517-264-7194 or cbirdwel@sienaheights.edu and her office is in Ledwidge 179.

- Campus Ministry is another valuable resource for students, no matter their faith tradition. Father John Grace is a confidential resource on campus. He can be reached at 517-264-7198 or jgrace@sienaheights.edu, and his office is located in the Campus Ministry Lounge in Ledwidge.

Syllabus Changes:

I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus as appropriate. The odds that I'll do so during the semester are small, but if I do, I will inform you as soon as possible.