

Midwestern State University

Professor: Dr. Kyle Thomsen
Office Hours (Zoom): Monday 11 AM CST
Email: kyle.thomsen@msutexas.edu

Introduction to Philosophy

Phil 1033- X10

Online

1. Course Description

Course focuses on the most fundamental questions that human beings have always asked. Topics include a critical examination of theories about reality and truth, moral values and social justice, personal identity and free will, aesthetic values, and systems of religious beliefs.

2. Learning Objectives

How does this course promote the learning goals of the General Education Program?

As a philosophy course that is part of the inner core of the general education curriculum:

Objective 1: Understand the complexities underlying moral and ethical questions and the consequences of choices we make as individuals and as members of communities.

Regarding learning objective 1, after completing this course the student should be able to better comprehend and navigate the complexities of the ethical sphere and the many layers of moral reflection that arise in ethical decision making.

Objective 6: Develop critical reasoning skills and abilities.

Regarding learning objective 6, philosophy is a discipline that depends heavily on critical thinking, and the primary learning outcome of this course is to improve upon your critical reasoning skills. You will work on these skills through engaging in a dialectical analysis of several philosophical issues and problems.

-God, religion, and spirituality: Does God exist? What is the nature of God? What is the relationship between reason and faith? What is the nature of evil? If God exists, why does evil exist?

-Self, soul, and personhood: What is the foundation of personhood, personality, and identity? Does a soul exist? What is the relationship between the brain and the mind/soul? What is the relationship between the body, mind, and soul? Is the human person mortal or immortal?

-Fate, freedom, and responsibility: Is the individual capable of choosing his or her own destiny and future, or is it all decided beforehand by nature, fate, or God? To what degree are we responsible for our actions? To what degree are we responsible for our character?

-Ethics and Morality: What is the foundation of morality? How (and to what end) ought I to live? What is happiness? What is the good life? What is virtue?

-What is the meaning of life?

How does this course promote the goals of the Philosophy Department?

In addition to the above objectives, the course also seeks to meet the following objectives per the objectives of the MSU Philosophy Department.

1. To understand the basic principles of logic and critical reasoning: the ability to construct, analyze, and assess arguments with regard to validity, soundness, and cogency; the ability to construct counterarguments; the ability to examine philosophical problems from a multiplicity of perspectives; the ability to both articulate in both in writing and speech the practice of good argumentation.
2. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the history of philosophy and the relationship of modern ideas to both medieval and ancient schools of thought.

3. To learn how to isolate and philosophically analyze the meta-ethical, normative, and applied elements of moral issues and problems.
4. To understand how to critically evaluate the arguments and ideas of the significant philosophical figures.
5. To be able to read, comprehend, and critically examine primary texts in philosophy.

At the conclusion of this course, the student should be able to display the following skills:

-Demonstrate knowledge of the major questions in philosophy.

-Better articulate his or her philosophical worldview through demonstration of rational and logical argumentation.

-Come to a better understanding of one's self through a deep analysis of his or her personal values.

-Comprehend the importance of philosophy as an academic discipline as well as a necessary component to a meaningful life.

3. *Academic Integrity*

MSU expects all members of the University community to act in a responsible and ethical manner and to uphold the values, rules, and regulations of the University. The principles of individual honor, integrity, responsibility, and respect for the rights of others are essential to student conduct in both academic and co-curricular life.

A student must always submit work that represents his or her original words or ideas. If any words or ideas are used that do not represent the student's original words or ideas, the student must cite all relevant sources. The student should also make clear the extent to which such sources were used. Words or ideas that require citations include but are not limited to all hard-copy or electronic publications, whether copyrighted or not, and all verbal or visual

communication when the content of such communication clearly originates from an identifiable source. The Student Handbook defines the standards of academic conduct as:

- Intentional or accidental plagiarism in an academic exercise, which includes:
 - Direct or literal copying of a source without proper attribution
 - Paraphrasing of a source without proper attribution
 - Resubmission of one's work in another academic exercise without the knowledge of both instructors
 - Submission of another's work in whole or part with intent to deceive

- Giving or receiving unacknowledged, inappropriate, or unauthorized aid in an academic exercise.

- Intentional falsification of data, sources, or information in an academic exercise.

- Deceiving or lying to a faculty member or administrator in matters relating to an academic requirement, policy, or procedure.

- Acting in a disorderly or discourteous manner in an academic exercise or to a faculty member or students during an academic exercise.

Any work that violates these principles will receive an automatic "0".

For more information, refer to the student handbook at <https://msutexas.edu/student-life/assets/files/handbook.pdf>

4. *Class Schedule*

Week 1: Introduction. Logic Discussion. Plato, Apology. Epictetus, Enchiridion. **First Argument Evaluation Assigned.**

Week 2: Augustine, On Free Will. Anselm and Gaunilo (445-447).

Week 3: Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy (489-495, 506-516). Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (725-740). **First Argument Evaluation Due. First Reflection Paper Assigned.**

Week 4: Kant, Foundation for the Metaphysics of Morals (872-878, 883-884, 886-888, 890-891). Mill, Utilitarianism (957-975). Nietzsche, Joyful Wisdom and Beyond Good and Evil (1044-1050). **First Reflection Paper Due.**

Week 5: James, The Will to Believe (1085-1093). Russell, A Free Man's Worship (1144-1149). Philippa Foot, Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives (1256-1261). **Second Reflection Paper Assigned.**

Week 6: Martin Luther King Jr., Letter from Birmingham Jail (handout). Peter Singer, Famine, Affluence, and Morality (handout). **Second Reflection Paper Due. Second Argument Evaluation Assigned**

Week 7: Videos. Review. **Second Argument Evaluation Due.**

5. *Methods of Instruction*

Lectures and discussion

Small group work

Video

6. *Course Practices Required*

- Two reflection papers will be assigned. These papers will be typed, double spaced, and no less than 1000 words. The purpose of these papers will be for you to critically evaluate assigned texts. You will also complete two 1000 word argument evaluation projects, in which you will break down and evaluate a common argument in today's culture. Work is due at 11:59 PM on the date listed. All work is to be submitted via Canvas. Late work will be docked one half letter grade (5 points) per 24 hour period late.

- Each week you will respond to two discussion questions I post. You will also respond to one other student's answer (4 posts total per week). All discussion is to be respectful. I will not tolerate insults or derogatory comments of any kind. Posts are due at the end of the assigned week.

- In unusual circumstances such as hospitalization or compulsory military service, I will work with students to determine alternative ways to complete course requirements.

7. *Instructional Materials*

Classics of Philosophy, Third Edition

Louis Pojman and Lewis Vaughn

ISBN: 918-0-19-973729-1

8. *Methods of Evaluating Student Progress*

Papers: 70%, Discussion: 30%

Grading scale: 100-93, A... 92-90, A-... 89-87, B+... 86-83, B... 82-80, B-... 79-77, C+... 76-73, C... 72-70, C-... 69-67, D+... 66-63, D... 62-60, D-... 59-below, F

9. *Other Course Information*

1. Accommodations and Support Services

Students who request accommodations based on a disability, in this or any other course, must contact Disability Support Services at 940-397-4140 or disabilityservices@msutexas.edu, before the semester begins or as soon as possible after the semester begins. After the proper documentation is approved by that office, students must then schedule individual meetings with individual faculty in their offices to discuss the specific needs for courses.

1. Discrimination

In keeping with a general policy of tolerance and non-discrimination, all of us (myself included) should strive to listen and give careful consideration to all ideas expressed in class, especially those that are different from our own. We should also strive to avoid using insulting terms or telling offensive jokes when talking to or about individuals or groups. Failure to hold to these principles will result in prompt removal from class.

III. Communication

I am available by email. When I send you an email message or call your telephone number, I expect a response within **48 hours**. I will do the same. Often I will only contact you to let you know class has been canceled or to help you be successful in the course.