

## **PHILO 100: Introduction to Philosophical Problems**

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**Course Description:** Philosophy is everywhere. It's in religion and in science. It's in your grocery store, your mail, and your schools. In addition to addressing the deepest parts of your lives, it addresses the most lighthearted parts as well. In this course, we will learn a bit about what philosophy is, what its methods are, what some philosophical problems are, and what some prominent philosophers have had to say about these problems. Topics we'll discuss include: Humor, The Existence of God, The Epistemology of Error, Morality, and Racial Justice.

**Big Ideas:** In addition to the specific philosophical topics we'll discuss, there are six big ideas I want you to take away from the course:

1. Even when your beliefs are mistaken, it can seem like they're correct. So, seeming correct isn't a good guide to believing truly.
2. To have reliably true beliefs, we need to reason well. And we can reason well (or poorly) about anything because there are philosophical questions everywhere!
3. Reasoning well involves noticing what isn't there as much as what is.
4. Sometimes we fail. Instead of treating that as the end, we should learn from our own and others' failures.
5. To reason well, we need to do more than rely solely on culture (which can be mistaken) or religion (which requires interpretation). We need to begin reasoning with our most confident beliefs, testing them for plausibility and consistency.
6. How we should behave in an imperfect world can differ from how we should behave in a perfect world.

**Learning Objectives:** In this course, you will:

- Search for complexity and plausibility where you expect simplicity and implausibility.
- Question arguments for conclusions with which you agree.
- Develop a disposition for finding the philosophical in the familiar.
- Uncover philosophical questions about your own discipline.
- Come to appreciate the interdisciplinary nature of philosophy.
- Experience the social side of philosophical inquiry.
- Reflect on the origin and justification of your beliefs.
- Develop important intellectual virtues (e.g., humility and honesty).
- Learn what philosophers have said about some important philosophical problems.

**Texts:** All readings will be available on Canvas. You should bring hard copies to class.

**Some of my thoughts on grades:** Concern for grades interferes with learning. There's lots of evidence that students who care primarily about learning – about raising questions, discovering answers to those questions, making connections, and so on – do much better in college than those who focus primarily on grades. There's also lots of evidence that students who have control over their education do better in college than those who don't. If I were sure that you would learn without the promise or threat of certain grades, I would give you all A's and we could dedicate our time and energy in this class solely to learning philosophy without the distraction of grades. Unfortunately, for all sorts of reasons, that's not how things are. Many students care more about grades than about learning, especially in a required, low-level gen ed course like this one. If I were to give you all A's right from the start, many of you would learn very little in this class. So, I won't give you all A's right from the start. I wish I could. But I won't.

Instead, I've created a more realistic, but unusual grading policy that has some of the benefits of the "everyone gets an A from the start" policy. I've mixed traditional assignments (like exams and reading quizzes) with less traditional ones. The point of these assignments isn't to sort you into A-, B-, and C-students. That's not my job. My job is to help you learn. And that's what I think my grading policy does. It also gives you quite a bit of choice, as you'll see. This is your education. You will get out of it what you put into it. If you take the assignments seriously, you can learn a lot in this class, and you'll get an A. If you don't take the assignments seriously, you might not learn much. Even then, if you pass the assignments, you'll pass the class.

This policy will stress some of you out. It's different. But trust me. This difference is good. Failing the class will be very difficult. Getting an A will be challenging, but doable for everyone, if you focus on the learning. However, if you really feel uncomfortable with this way of grading, feel free to discuss it with me or enroll in a different class. Without further ado...

### **Grade Policy**

You will receive an **A** (before grade reducers are taken into account) exactly if you:

1. Pass both Exam 1 and Exam 2.
2. Pass both Philosophy in Life Post 1 and Philosophy in Life Post 2.
3. Pass the Philosophy of X assignment.
4. Pass the Presentation.
5. Pass the Cave Project.

6. Participate regularly.
7. Pass 3 or more "Additional Assignments."
8. Receive 2 "Exceptional" marks.

You will receive a **B** (before grade reducers are taken into account) in this class exactly if you:

1. Pass both Exam 1 and Exam 2.
2. Pass both Philosophy in Life Post 1 and Philosophy in Life Post 2.
3. Pass the Philosophy of X assignment.
4. Pass the Presentation.
5. Pass the Cave Project.

6. Participate regularly.
7. Pass only 2 "Additional Assignments."
8. Receive 1 "Exceptional" mark.

You will receive a **C** (before grade reducers are taken into account) exactly if:

1. Pass both Exam 1 and Exam 2.
2. Pass both Philosophy in Life Post 1 and Philosophy in Life Post 2.
3. Pass the Philosophy of X assignment.
4. Pass the Presentation.
5. Pass the Cave Project.

6. Pass only 1 "Additional Assignment."

You will receive a **D** (before grade reducers are taken into account) exactly if:

- You don't meet one or two of 1-5 or you don't pass any Additional Assignments.

You will receive an **F** if:

- You don't meet three or more of 1-5.

### **Grade Reducers**

- If you have 5 more or more absences, your grade will be reduced by one letter grade.
- If you fail 3 or more quiz pairs, your grade will be reduced by one letter grade.

### **Brief Assignment Descriptions**

*\*More details can be found in the "Assignment Guide" in the Introductory Material Folder on Canvas.\**

### **Required Assignments**

**Attendance:** You won't do well in this course if you don't attend. So, attendance is required. To find out what you missed when you miss class, come to office hours or ask:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Exams:** You will take two exams in this course. Most students have never taken a philosophy class before. This can translate into anxiety about the nature of a philosophy exam. The exams will not be based on your opinions, rather they test your understanding of the philosophers, positions, and readings we discuss in class. They will be mixtures of true/false questions and short answer questions. They are meant to provide you with more incentive to reflect on the material, to assess your grasp of the readings and in-class discussions, and to allow you to demonstrate what you've learned.

**Reading Quizzes:** *6 quiz-pairs.* Reading is required for this course. Most of the readings will be short. I will outline the important points from the readings in class, but to understand what's going on you'll need to understand the articles. To help you keep up with the readings, there will be six reading "quiz-pairs."

You will be expected to read each article twice. As you read it, come to class, and read it again, you will develop a deeper understanding of the article. During the second reading, you will be able to draw on the discussion we have in class on the previous day. You will have to take each quiz twice: the day we discuss the reading in class and the next day of class. (Hence, "quiz-pair.") There will be four questions on each quiz. My goal in using quizzes this way is to help you get the most out of the readings: You can use the quiz you take on one day to help guide you as you re-read the material in preparation for the next class. And since you already know the questions that will be on the second

quiz – they will be the **same questions** that were on the first quiz – you can read carefully the second time around to ensure that you get a perfect score.<sup>1</sup>

**Participation:** I think of a college class like a team. I'm the coach or the captain, but we're all members of the team trying to achieve the same goal: critical engagement with the course material. As with other teams, we must all do our part. If any of us regularly fails to do their part, the whole team will suffer. You expect me to come to class every day prepared to teach. Likewise, I expect you to come to class every day prepared to learn. As members of this class, we owe each other the fulfillment of these expectations. Sometimes you will need motivation and I will do my best to provide it. If I am failing to meet your expectations, please tell me (respectfully).

#### Ways to Participate

1. Ask questions about the readings or lectures.
2. Answer questions when asked.
3. Contribute your perspective to a discussion.
4. Raise objections to arguments.
5. Mention a relevant life experience at an appropriate time.
6. Discuss course material with me after class or during office hours.
7. Do the Podcast Assignment.

**Philosophy in Life Posts:** Philosophy is everywhere. These assignments are meant to help you notice it. You will complete two “philosophy in life” posts in the discussion forums on Canvas. For these assignments, you will write about how what you've learned or thought about in this course connects up with some aspect of your life. You will also read and comment on some of your peers' posts.

**Philosophy of X Assignment:** Whatever your major, there are philosophical questions in your field. For this assignment, you will attempt to uncover some of those questions and informally report your findings back to the class.

**Presentation:** At the end of the semester, there will be 10 group presentations. Each presentation will be about 15 minutes long. Your group will read a paper on some moral issue and then teach that paper to the class. You will have some opportunities to work on the presentations in class and to meet with me to discuss your plans for the presentations.

**Cave Project:** This is your final project. You will work on it the entire semester. It is due during finals week. There will be several steps to the project. But, in outline, you will consider some philosophical, political, or moral issue that you care deeply about, examining some belief or stance on this issue that others have that you find very implausible. This assignment is meant to give you an opportunity to reflect on something that interests you, while attempting to understand as far as possible the position of people with whom you strongly disagree.

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<sup>1</sup> **A Note on Reading Philosophy:** Reading philosophy is difficult. Unlike many texts you'll read in college, most philosophical texts are not written for students. Comprehending difficult texts is a skill. It's not one I expect you to have already, but it is one I want you to develop during this course. Over the semester, if you put in the effort, you will find that it will be easier to understand the readings. And if you can understand philosophical texts, you can understand just about anything. The Reading Quizzes will help you develop this skill because they will force you to think about the reading material. For tips on reading philosophy, see these links:

- <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>
- <https://www4.uwsp.edu/philosophy/dwarren/IntroBook/GettingStarted%5CReadingWritingPhilosophy%5CReading%20philosophy.htm>

### Additional Assignments

**Agree with the Conclusion, Disagree with the Argument:** One very important lesson I want you to learn about logical reasoning is that there are bad arguments for true conclusions. This means even if we agree with an argument's conclusion, we must still scrutinize the argument itself. For this assignment, you will talk with likeminded people about some belief you share. You will ask these people why they think this belief is true. Once you hear an argument you disagree with, you'll explain that argument in writing and explain why you think the argument is flawed even though you think the conclusion is true.

**What's Missing?:** There's always another side to the story, another piece of relevant evidence, or another consideration that makes a difference to the truth. These assignments ask you to look for those other sides, pieces of evidence, and considerations. Find something in the media, in class, in the course readings, that you think is missing something. It fails to take some relevant consideration into account. Explain the issue, explain what it fails to take into account, explain how it makes a difference.

**Your Culture and Your Beliefs:** What is some philosophical, political, or moral belief you have that differs from your parents? What made you think differently? What is some philosophical belief you have that is the same as your parents? Do you believe it just because they raised you to believe it or for some other reason? For this assignment, you'll answer these questions in detail.

**Philosophy in Art:** Find a passage in a poem, novel, play, song, or some visual piece of art that relates to course material. Provide the passage, a link to the song, a picture of the visual art, etc., and explain how it relates to the course. (Submitting your own art as part of this assignment is welcome!)

**Podcast Discussion:** Throughout the semester, we will have seven brief discussions of podcasts that bear on philosophical issues. I invite everyone to listen to these podcasts, but each week five students may sign up to lead a brief discussion of the podcast.

**Other:** You may propose other "Additional Assignments" throughout the semester. If you want to do this, you'll need to explain to me how it helps meet one of the course learning objectives.

### Communication

**Office Hours:** I will have regular office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays throughout the semester. This means I will be available in my office to discuss course material (or other issues). If my scheduled office hours aren't convenient, feel free to schedule a different time to meet.

You can benefit from discussing course material outside of class. **True story:** During the first half of last semester, one of my students – call him Al – never came to office hours. He earned one of the lowest grades on the midterm. Then he started coming to office hours regularly. Right before the final, Al said to me, "I wish I had come to office hours all semester." He ended up getting one of the highest grades on the final. Don't be like Al! Don't wait! The course material is difficult to grasp. Don't expect to understand everything right away. Don't be shy about talking to me about something you don't understand. And don't overestimate how well you understand the material!

**Contact Policy:** Aside from my office hours, I'm most easily reached at the email address above. I check my email frequently and will respond promptly within 24 hours to most inquiries. **If you have a question about the course mechanics or schedule, please check the syllabus before emailing me.** While I will most likely read your email within a couple hours of its being sent, I may not reply immediately. If you do not receive a reply within 24 hours, please talk to me in class or send another email as a reminder.

### **Electronic Devices**

Laptops are permitted in class, but must be used solely for class purposes. Browsing Facebook, catching all of the Pokemon, playing poker, and commenting on animal pictures are not allowed. You may use them to take notes and look at the readings. That's it! I will prohibit laptops if they are not being used for class purposes. Phones should not be used during class.

### **Conduct**

All student activities in the University, including this course, are governed by the Student Judicial Conduct Code as outlined in the Student Governing Association By Laws, Article V, Section 3, number 2. Students who engage in behavior that disrupts the learning environment may be asked to leave the class.

### **Cheating and Plagiarism**

If you are caught cheating or plagiarizing in this course, you will receive an XF as your final grade for the course. You'll also be required to take the K-State Development and Integrity Course.

Completing this course will remove the X from your record, but not the F. Here is the university's official statement on Academic Honesty:

Kansas State University has an Honor and Integrity System based on personal integrity, which is presumed to be sufficient assurance that, in academic matters, one's work is performed honestly and without unauthorized assistance. Undergraduate and graduate students, by registration, acknowledge the jurisdiction of the Honor and Integrity System. The policies and procedures of the Honor and Integrity System apply to all full and part-time students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate courses on-campus, off-campus, and via distance learning. The Honor and Integrity System website can be reached via the following URL: [www.k-state.edu/honor](http://www.k-state.edu/honor). A component vital to the Honor and Integrity System is the inclusion of the Honor Pledge which applies to all assignments, examinations, or other course work undertaken by students. The Honor Pledge is implied, whether or not it is stated: "On my honor, as a student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this academic work." A grade of XF can result from a breach of academic honesty. The F indicates failure in the course; the X indicates the reason is an Honor Pledge violation.

Feel free to ask before completing assignments whether some behavior counts as cheating or plagiarism.

### **Disabilities**

I will do my best to help students with disabilities or learning challenges succeed in this course. Students with disabilities who need classroom accommodations, access to technology, or information about emergency building/campus evacuation processes should contact the Student Access Center and/or their instructor. Services are available to students with a wide range of disabilities including, but not limited to, physical disabilities, medical conditions, learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, depression, and anxiety. If you are a student enrolled in campus/online courses through the Manhattan or Olathe campuses, contact the Student Access Center at [accesscenter@k-state.edu](mailto:accesscenter@k-state.edu), 785-532-6441; for K-State Polytechnic campus, contact Academic and Student Services at [polytechnicadvising@ksu.edu](mailto:polytechnicadvising@ksu.edu) or call 785-826-2974.

## Tentative Schedule

### **Week 1: Big Idea 1**

8/22: Introduction: Getting to Know Each Other

8/24: Allegory of the Cave

Plato's Republic, Start logic lecture

### **Weeks 2-3: Big Idea 2**

8/29: Humor, Conceptual Analysis, and Arguments

Logic Lecture, Morreall 1-9

8/31: Humor

Morreall 15-25

9/5: Humor and Others

Morreall 25-36

9/7: Philosophy of X Discussion Day

No Reading

#### **Assignments**

8/31: RQ1a

9/5: RQ1b

9/7: Philosophy of X

### **Weeks 4-5: Big Idea 3**

9/12: God and Design

Paley

9/14: The Other Side (part 1)

Sober

9/19: The Other Side (part 2)

Lewis; Watch Video: Crash Course: Evil

9/21: Exam 1

No Reading

#### **Assignments**

9/14: RQ2a

9/14: Podcast Discussion 1: Hi-Phi Nation: "The Name of God"

9/19: RQ2b

9/21: Exam 1

### **Weeks 6-7: Big Idea 4**

9/26: Coping with Error

Descartes

9/28: Disagreement, Upbringing, and Error

Sher

10/3: Embracing Failure

Bain

10/5: Cave Project Discussion Day

No Reading

#### **Assignments**

9/28: Podcast Discussion 2: Hidden Brain: "I'm Right, You're Wrong."

9/29: What's Missing?

10/3: RQ3a

10/5: RQ3b

10/5: Philosophy in Life 1

### **Weeks 8-9: Big Idea 5**

10/10: Moral Relativism

Pojman

10/12: Religion and Morality

Shafer-Landau

10/17: Moral Reasoning

Berg

10/19: Moral Reasoning: Factory Farming

Norcross

**Assignments**

10/12: RQ4a  
10/12: Podcast Discussion 3: Hi-Phi Nation: “Soldier Philosophers, Part 1: Moral Exploitation”  
10/13: Your Culture and Your Beliefs  
10/17: RQ4b  
10/19: Podcast Discussion 4: Radiolab: “Blame”  
10/20: Philosophy in Art

**Weeks 10-12: Big Idea 6**

10/24: Doing our Fair Share	Singer
10/26: Doing our Fair Share	Singer
10/31: Colorblindness and Categorical Inequality	Massey
11/2: Colorblindness and Segregation	No Reading
11/7: Segregation, Capital, and Education	Anderson, Willingham
11/9: Exam 2	

**Assignments**

10/24: RQ5a  
10/26: RQ5b  
10/26: Podcast Discussion 5: On The Media: “Busted #2: Who Deserves to Be Poor?”  
10/31: RQ6a  
11/2: RQ6b  
11/2: Podcast Discussion 6: Freakonomics: “Is the American Dream Really Dead?”  
11/3: Philosophy in Life 2  
11/9: Exam 2

**Week 13**

11/14: Presentations  
11/16: Presentations

**Assignment**

11/16: Podcast Discussion 7: More Perfect: “Object Anyway”

**Week 14 Fall Break**

11/21: FALL BREAK  
11/23: FALL BREAK

**Week 15**

11/28: Presentations  
11/30: Presentations

**Assignment**

12/1: Agree with the Conclusion, Disagree with the Argument

**Week 16 Dead Week**

12/5: Class is optional, held in my office: Cave Project Discussion  
12/7: Class is optional, held in my office: Cave Project Discussion

**Week 17 Finals Week**

Cave Project Due.