

# Philosophy 1305: Philosophy and Critical Thinking

**Academic Semester/Term:** Spring 2017

**Course description (from catalog):** A study of universal philosophical problems and their solutions with a view toward developing clear thinking about knowledge, belief, and value. Approximately one half of this course will focus on the student's critical thinking skills.

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**Instructor:** Anthony Cross

**Course section numbers, classrooms & meeting times:**

- 1305.300 MWF 8:00 am - 8:50 am, Comal 103
- 1305.301 MWF 9:00 am - 9:50 am, Comal 103
- 1305.310 MWF 10:00 am - 10:50 am, Derrick 241

**Instructor's Office:** 220 Derrick Hall

**Departmental Phone:** (512)245-6505

**Email:** anthony.cross@txstate.edu

**Office hours:** MW 11am-1:30pm, 220 Derrick Hall, or by appointment

## *General Education Core Curriculum (Code 040)*

### **Language, Philosophy and Culture Component Outcomes**

Students will explore behavior and interactions among individuals, groups, institutions, and events, examining their impact on the individual, society, and culture.

### **Core Objectives/Competencies Outcomes:**

- **Critical Thinking:** Students will demonstrate creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information.
- **Communication:** Students will effectively develop, interpret and express ideas through written, oral and visual communication.
- **Social Responsibility:** Students will demonstrate intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities.
- **Personal Responsibility:** Students will relate choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making.

### **Departmental Learning Outcomes for PHIL 1305:**

1. After completion of PHIL 1305, students will be able to demonstrate improvement in their critical and moral thinking skills.
2. After completion of PHIL 1305, students will be able to demonstrate the foundational and synoptic nature of philosophical inquiry.

## *Course Description*

The ancient philosopher Aristotle claimed that philosophy begins in wonder—although to put it more precisely, you might say that philosophy begins in *wondering*. Philosophy starts at the moment that you begin wondering about the world around you and your place in it. It begins when you start to ask questions like the following: How do I know anything? Does God exist? Who am I? How should I treat other people? What is the meaning of life?

This course presents an introduction to philosophy structured around the questions above. Our goal will be to develop a toolkit for critical thinking that allows us to think clearly and systematically about the issues that these questions raise. We'll learn to understand, construct, and evaluate logical arguments. We'll learn how to avoid common argumentative fallacies. We'll learn how

to read—and how to write—philosophical texts. But our goal isn't just to learn *about* these methods; we'll put them into practice right away by diving into substantive issues in philosophy.

After a brief introduction to philosophy and critical thinking, the first half of the course will focus on what there is and what we can know about it; we'll ask questions about knowledge, reality, God, the mind, and personal identity. The second half of the course will focus on the core issues of ethics: how we should treat one another and, more generally, how we should live.

### *Texts*

There is one required textbook for the course: Rosen, Byrne, Cohen, Shiffrin eds. *The Norton Introduction to Philosophy*. WW Norton & Co, 2015. ISBN: 0393932206. (Abbreviated as NITP below.) Additional readings will be posted on TRACS.

### *Course Expectations*

You will complete a set of short writing assignments, a midterm exams, a paper, and a final exam. Final grades will be calculated according to the following distribution:

1. Short Writing Assignments- 30%
2. Midterm Exam - 15%
3. Paper - 20%
4. Final Exam - 25%
5. Participation - 10%

### **Readings**

You are responsible for completing course readings *before* coming to class. You should also plan to have a copy of the readings with you in class—either the NITP, or a printout of the readings posted on TRACS—as we will often discuss specific passages of the readings in detail. The readings are generally quite difficult; be sure to give yourself plenty of time to complete them.

### **Short Writing Assignments**

Each week, I will post a worksheet containing several questions concerning the week's readings on TRACS. These will usually be straightforward questions about content, asking you to (for example) identify the main claims of a philosophical argument, explain some aspect of the reading in your own words, or provide an example illustrating some distinction. Completing each worksheet should require about a page of writing. You will be responsible for completing **eight** of these worksheets; you will upload your completed responses via TRACS. (You do not need to submit a physical copy.) The worksheets will be due each Sunday before midnight. The responses will not be graded individually; completing eight will result in an A; seven an A-; six a B+; and so on. Completing no responses will result in an F. Late assignments and email submissions will not be accepted under any circumstances. Turning in anything other than your own good-faith attempt to answer the questions will earn an F for the category (and may result in further disciplinary action).

### **Paper**

You will complete one 3-5 page paper in response to one of a set of prompts that I will distribute via the course website. Papers are to be submitted electronically through TRACS; you do not need to submit a physical copy. Unexcused late papers will be penalized one-third of a letter grade for each day late. Papers will be graded according to a rubric that I will distribute in class.

### **Midterm and final exam**

Both the midterm and final exams will consist of multiple choice, true/false, short-answer questions and/or mini-essays. The midterm exam will be an in-class exam, held on 2/24/17. The schedule for the final exam is as follows:

- 1305.300: 05/10/2017, from 8-10:30am.
- 1305.301: 05/05/2017, from 8am-10:30am.
- 1305.310: 05/05/2017, from 11am-1:30pm..

### **Participation**

Your participation grade will be determined by your attendance and participation in class. I will take attendance every class via a sign-in sheet. Attendance is mandatory; however, you are each allowed three no-questions-asked absences per semester. Each unexcused absence *beyond the third absence* will result in a letter-grade deduction from your participation grade. If for some legitimate reason you cannot attend class, please notify me about it as soon as possible; you will be able to make up your attendance requirement by e.g. attending office hours. (You may be asked to provide appropriate documentation of your reason for missing class.)

## Course Policies

### Communication

The best way to reach me is by email at the address listed on the first page of this syllabus. Please be sure to include your course number and section in the subject line of your email. I will do my best to respond to all student emails within 48 hours of receipt; if I have not acknowledged your email within 48 hours of your sending it, please follow up. You can also meet with me in person during office hours at the time listed on the first page of the syllabus, or by appointment.

### Classroom Civility

In this course, we'll be discussing a range of difficult and often controversial topics; as partners in learning, our success will depend on a shared and ongoing commitment to classroom civility. This means that all of our behavior should demonstrate respect and tolerance both for one another, and for the shared project of philosophical inquiry. Please refrain from behavior that is disruptive or disrespectful.

### Religious Holy Days

If you must miss class or an examination for a religious holy day, please notify me in writing prior to your absence. You will be responsible for making up any material or assignments that you've missed within a reasonable time window. The full statement of university policy is available on-line: <http://www.txstate.edu/effective/UPPS/UPPS-02-06-01.HTML>

### Academic Integrity

You are expected to abide by Texas State's Honor Code. This means that any work you submit in this class must be your own—using other people's ideas or words (even if you make changes to them) without giving them credit is a violation of the code and may lead to severe punishment, including failing either the assignment or the course. It is your responsibility to know precisely what counts as a violation of the Honor Code. If you are unsure whether some behavior violates the Code, please read the Code. If you are unsure, ask me. The Honor Code is here: <http://www.txstate.edu/honorcodecouncil/Academic-Integrity.html>  
The following guide to avoiding plagiarism may also be helpful: <http://guides.library.txstate.edu/c.php?g=184035&p=1215349>

### Students with Disabilities

Your well-being and success in this course is important to me. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in this class or complete course requirements, please notify me as soon as possible. To receive academic accommodations, you must be appropriately registered with the Office of Disability Services. You can contact the ODS by phone at (512) 245-3451 or via their website: <http://www.ods.txstate.edu/>

### Student Resources

Philosophy can be challenging. Many of the readings for this course are difficult; they may involve dense argumentation and unfamiliar terminology. Philosophical writing may be quite different from the writing you've done previously. I'd encourage you to consult the glossary in NITP, as well as the section titled "Some Guidelines for Writing Philosophy Papers." I have also posted several philosophy-specific online resources on TRACS. Beyond this, I encourage you to make use of the following university academic resources:

- Student Learning and Assistance Center (SLAC) - SLAC is a multi-faceted academic support program for all Texas State students. They provide tutoring services (individual, group, online), Supplemental Instruction (collaborative group study for specific courses), learning and study skills workshops, and learning specialist consultations free of charge. For more information, visit their website: <http://www.txstate.edu/slac/>
- The Writing Center can work with you to improve your writing skills and help you become a better editor of your own papers. If you choose to consult them about your writing, you will leave with an improved paper. To learn more, visit their website: <http://www.writingcenter.txstate.edu/>

## Course Outline

### Week 1: The What and the Why of Philosophy; Intro to Critical Thinking

**01/18/17** Course introduction; syllabus overview. *Reading:* None.

**01/20/17** What is philosophy about? *Reading:* Plato, Apology, selections, TRACS.

### Week 2: Knowledge, Belief, and Justification

**01/23/17** What is knowledge? *Reading:* Jennifer Nagel, "Introduction" from *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*. TRACS.

- 01/25/17** Do we have a right to believe whatever we want? *Reading:* Mark Rowlands, “A Right To Believe?”, TRACS.  
**01/27/17** Arguments vs. Assertions. *Reading:* “What is an argument?” NITP p. 1069-1071; “How to reconstruct an argument: An Example” NITP p. 1075-1078.

Week 3: How do we know anything?

- 01/30/17** Arguments gone bad: Recognizing Baloney. *Reading:* Carl Sagan, “The Fine Art of Baloney Detection” TRACS.  
**02/01/17** Can we trust our senses? *Reading:* Descartes, *Meditation I*, NITP, p. 299-303.  
**02/03/17** A case for perceptual knowledge. *Reading:* Jonathan Vogel, “Skepticism and Inference to the Best Explanation,” NITP, p. 328-335.

Week 4: Can we trust other people?

- 02/06/17** The problem of Testimony. *Reading:* Jennifer Nagel, “Testimony” from *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*. TRACS.  
**02/08/17** Fake news, the internet, and knowledge. *Reading:* Lyz Lenz, “Fact Checking Grandma”, TRACS; Michael P. Lynch, “Fake News and the Internet Shell Game”, TRACS.  
**02/10/17** Sorting Truth from Fiction Online. *Reading:* Paul Herrick, “The Internet, News Media, and Advertising,” TRACS.

Week 5: Does God exist?

- 02/13/17** Arguments for God’s existence. *Reading:* “Does God Exist?” NITP, p. 3-8; Anselm of Canterbury, “The Ontological Argument”, NITP, p. 08-10. Thomas Aquinas, “The Five Ways,” NITP, p. 11-14.  
**02/15/17** The Problem of Evil. *Reading:* William Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” NITP, p. 15-23.  
**02/17/17** **NO LECTURE.** (Podcast/Online class activities.) Arguments for God’s existence, continued. *Reading:* Haley, “The Argument from Design”, NITP p. 24-32.

Week 6: Who am I?

- 02/20/17** Are we material beings? Or non-material minds? *Reading:* “Is Mind Material?” NITP, p. 351-355; René Descartes, *Meditation II* and *Meditation VI*, NITP, p. 356-363.  
**02/22/17** Problems for Descartes. *Reading:* Gilbert Ryle, “Descartes’ Myth”, NITP, p. 364-370.  
**02/24/17** **MIDTERM EXAM**

Week 7: What is it like to be me?

- 02/27/17** The Functionalist response to Descartes. *Reading:* David Anderson, “Introduction to Functionalism”, TRACS.  
**03/01/17** Is consciousness something that we can understand scientifically? *Reading:* “What is consciousness?” NITP p. 397-402; Thomas Nagel, “What is it Like to Be a Bat?” NITP, p. 402-411.  
**03/03/17** Can consciousness be explained by neuroscience? *Reading:* Patricia Smith Churchland, from *Neurophilosophy*, “Are Mental States Irreducible to Neurobiological States?” NITP, p. 424-430

Week 8: Who am I? (continued)

- 03/06/17** What makes me, me?! *Reading:* “What is Personal Identity?”, NITP p. 538-544; John Locke, “Of Identity and Diversity,” NITP, p. 544-551.  
**03/08/17** What matters in persistence?. *Reading:* Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, selections, NITP p. 558-570.  
**03/10/17** Personal identity, concluded. *Reading:* No additional reading.

**Week 9: SPRING BREAK - 03/11 - 03/19**

Week 10: Do I have free will?

- 03/20/17** Is our will free? *Reading:* “Do we possess free will?” NITP, p. 583-587; Galen Strawson, “Free Will”, NITP p. 588-597.  
**03/22/17** Free will and constraint. *Reading:* A.J. Ayer, “Freedom and Necessity”, NITP p. 605-611.  
**03/24/17** Does responsibility depend upon free will? *Reading:* Harry Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,” NITP p. 612-619.

Week 11: Is morality objective? And why should I care about it?

- 03/27/16** Is morality objective? *Reading:* David Enoch, “Why I Am an Objectivist about Ethics (And Why You Are, Too)”

TRACS.

**03/29/16** Why be moral? *Reading:* Plato, "The Ring of Gyges," NITP, p. 704-710

**03/31/16** Utilitarianism. *Reading:* John Stuart Mill, from *Utilitarianism*. NITP p. 751-760.

Week 12: What kinds of actions are morally right?

**04/03/16** Kantian Ethics. *Reading:* Immanuel Kant, from *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, NITP p. 732-741.

**04/05/16** Virtue Ethics. *Reading:* Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics," NITP, p. 781-787.

**04/07/16** **NO CLASS - WORK on PAPERS**

**05/09/16** **PAPERS DUE**

Week 13: What's the right thing to do?

**04/10/16** What should we do about global poverty? *Reading:* Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality," NITP, p. 865-871.

**04/12/16** Global Poverty pt. 2. *Reading:* Onora O'Neill, "The Moral Perplexities of Famine Relief," NITP, p. 873-883.

**04/14/16** Is abortion morally permissible? *Reading:* Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion," NITP, p. 884-891.

Week 14: What's the right thing to do? (cont.)

**04/17/16** Abortion, pt. 2. *Reading:* Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral," NITP, p. 892-900.

**04/19/16** Killing in War. *Reading:* Thomas Nagel, "War and Massacre," NITP, p. 901-910.

**04/21/16** Killing in War pt. 2. *Reading:* John Rawls, "On the Killing of Civilians in Wartime," NITP, p. 911-918.

Week 15: What's the right thing to do? (cont.)

**04/24/16** Is it OK to eat animals? *Reading:* Alastair Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs, and People", TRACS

**04/26/16** Eating animals pt. 2. *Reading:* Roger Scruton, "Conscientious Carnivorism", TRACS.

**04/28/16** Morality wrap-up. *Reading:* No additional reading.

Week 16: Life, Meaning, and Philosophy

**05/01/16** The value of Philosophy; Course Wrap Up *Reading:* Bertrand Russell, "The Value of Philosophy" TRACS.

**FINAL EXAMS:**

- 1305.300: **05/10/2017**, from 8-10:30am.
- 1305.301: **05/05/2017**, from 8am-10:30am.
- 1305.310: **05/05/2017**, from 11am-1:30pm..