

Loren E. Lomasky
Office: 124 Kerchof
Office Phone: 434-924-6925
lel3f@virginia.edu.

PHIL 1000
M, W 2 - 2:50 Clark Hall 108
Fall 2016
Office hours: M 3 - 4:30 and by appointment

SYLLABUS: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

I. TEXTS

Plato, *Five Dialogues*
Descartes, *Meditations*
Hume, *Enquiry*
Mill, *On Liberty*
Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*
Thomas Nagel, *What Does it All Mean? A Very Short Introduction to Philosophy*

Each of these books is published in a very inexpensive paperback. Please make sure to acquire these at your earliest convenience.

II. SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

Philosophy is the discipline that deals with the most fundamental and enduring questions that human beings have asked themselves since we first began to substitute reason for myth. The concerns of philosophy are *not* specialized bodies of data. Rather, philosophy deals with issues that are likely to confront any inquiring mind trying to understand better the nature of the world and one's place within it. For that reason, philosophy is accessible to anyone willing to examine what may previously have been taken for granted and to think seriously and deeply about vital human concerns.

Among the sorts of issues with which philosophers concern themselves are:

What is it to *know* something?

What kinds of *evidence* do we have concerning the nature of the world around us? Which mental faculties can reliably guide us to truth?

How can we tell when a conclusion *logically follows* from some premises?

Does the way things *appear* to us accurately mirror their *reality*?

How are people's *bodies* related to their *minds*? Are body and mind one thing or two? Is it possible that the mind survives the death of the body?

Are people essentially *computers* made out of protoplasm instead of silicon? Or are there things that we can do but no computer can?

Is everything that we do *causally determined*? If so, does that mean that *human freedom* is illusory?

Do we have any good reason to *believe that there is a God*? That there is not a God?

What is the nature of the good life? And how can we live well in society?

There are many other problems included within philosophy, but in order not to toss too much at you all at once I have mentioned only a few of the questions that will be looked at this semester. I hope that each will seem inherently interesting. I don't expect that we will arrive at any final, definitive answers. But there is a great deal to be gained from thinking about precisely those issues where we *don't* have all the answers:

- (1) Awareness that there is a great deal we simply don't know concerning fundamental topics;
- (2) Identifying the presuppositions of common sense and science;
- (3) Achieving facility in constructing and analyzing logical arguments;
- (4) Enhanced tolerance for opposed viewpoints;
- (5) Aptitude for critical thinking;
- (6) Becoming filthy rich before the age of thirty (this one is *not* guaranteed!).

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES

A. *Readings, Lectures and Discussion sections*

Students are expected to have read – seriously, as opposed to “skimming over” – each assignment in advance of the class in which it is discussed. Because the problems with which philosophers concern themselves are among the most fundamental that human beings have ever pondered, our texts aren't light reading. Frankly, more often than not you can expect them to stretch your head a good bit. In order to cope you will probably find it advisable to read and then *reread*. Believe it or not, this isn't all bad. By way of compensation for the energy invested, you will be introduced to some of the smartest and most interesting thinkers who ever lived and be afforded the privilege of looking over their shoulders as they tackle some extraordinarily intriguing puzzles.

Class sessions are devised to help, but they will not be nor are they meant to be an alternative to doing the readings. It would be a waste of your time as well as mine if I simply gave you a canned version of the material in our texts. It would also be exceedingly boring. Rather, lectures will be aimed at explicating difficulties in the selections, determining the strong and not-so-strong points of arguments under consideration, and exploring related issues. My role and that of the TAs is to help you begin to engage the arguments and to philosophize yourself. This absolutely presupposes your conscientious advance reading of all assigned material. Don't do it and the lectures will fly over your head, the discussion sections will be of much less use to you than they could be.

Although this is a lecture class with a rather enormous number of bodies in the room, I'm actually going to try to bring a little bit of discussion into the lecture hall. (Our reading of Plato's dialogues will show philosophy's beginning as face-to-face discussion.) I'll begin each class by devoting a few minutes to taking questions you might have. I also like to ask questions from time to time, so here's fair warning: I claim the right to ask you what you think. If you hate this idea, sit near the back of the room and you're probably safe. (Try not to snore though.) Why these attempts to simulate a conversation? Personally I can think of nothing duller than a class in which one person (me) does all the talking. I hope you agree and that you will contribute your own ideas.

Attendance won't be taken for lectures. You are adults, so if you miss a class, that's your business. You are, however, responsible for whatever transpires during all sessions, including any assignments or quizzes (see below) that are given out. Your TA will announce discussion section attendance policy at the first meeting. Although participation is not formally graded, the quality of your participation will be a tie-breaker for tipping borderline grades one way or the other. For several reasons, therefore, it is a good idea to make a habit of regular attendance.

B. *Tests and Quizzes.*

The only exam that will be given is a final exam. It will count for approximately 40% of your course grade. It will involve some form of short answer and essay questions. Further information concerning the nature of the exam will be supplied in class.

Occasional unannounced quizzes will be given. These will involve very specific questions requiring short answers. **Quizzes cannot be made up**; once missed it's eternally gone. I shall, however, drop your lowest quiz result. (If more than eight quizzes are given, your two lowest scores will be dropped.) This means that if you must miss a class or two during the semester there should not be any significant impact on your course performance even if you happen to be unlucky with regard to quiz timing; more than occasional absences are another story. These quizzes will count cumulatively for approximately 30% of your course grade.

C. *Papers*

I shall ask you at irregular intervals to write short (4-7 pages) papers in response to particular questions I'll toss your way. You are required to write any 2 of them, and you may submit 3, with the 2 best counting toward your course grade. Thus, if one (or perhaps two) of the assignment topics or times doesn't suit you, then you should feel free to skip it. There will be at least 4 papers assigned. These may either address the writings of one of the authors we are reading or involve comparison between two or more. Unless you have received explicit permission to the contrary, all submissions must be hard copy. Please retain the digital file just in case something goes awry. Cumulatively, they will determine approximately 30% of your PHIL 1000 grade.

All paper assignments will involve working through some problem suggested by the assigned readings. Although you are entirely at liberty to consult any sources written or human that you think might help you to write a better paper, it is imperative that any borrowings of ideas or language be credited via a citation. You may use whatever style of footnote or endnote you please just so long as full attribution information is provided. Failures to do so, even if not malicious, risk putting you on the wrong side of the plagiarism divide. That is definitely not a place you want to be!

Paper grades will be based on "content" rather than style or grammatical correctness (although it should be noted that your ability to express yourself accurately in written English prose very definitely affects the content as it appears to your reader). However, any paper that comes to us with more than a very few errors in spelling, grammar, etc. will either be rejected as failing to meet minimal standards of acceptability or, if we're feeling especially generous, handed back to you for revision and resubmission. This means that you ought to proofread carefully anything you will be submitting. I very much care about the quality of your writing – and so should you! One final caution: *Late papers will not be accepted.*

D. *Study hint.*

Philosophy, as you'll soon find out, is very much a *dialogic* business. That is, philosophical inquiry involves putting questions, trying out answers, criticizing those answers, and moving on to yet better answers – and better questions. It's possible to replicate this dialogic process in your own head: possible but not easy. Far better to conduct actual dialogue with another person who has his or her own ideas to contribute. In the classroom I'll be one such person. But outside the classroom I'll be just a memory. (A pleasant one I hope!) I strongly encourage you to get together on a regular basis with one or more other PHIL 1000 students to study together. Students who do so tend to perform conspicuously better than those who don't. I encourage you to find compatible study partners and make this a genuinely cooperative enterprise.

E. Computers, Phones, etc.

21st Century electronics are wonderful! I love them as much as you do – well, almost as much. I must tell you, however, that they don't have a place in PHIL 1000. If you're carrying a phone, please make sure you turn it off and put it out of sight (and possibly out of mind) before the start of class. If your ringer goes off, or if you are observed staring intently into a display, you owe a 500-word essay on the topic of the day, due at the next class meeting. If it happens a second time you will be asked to withdraw from the course. With some reluctance I also ask you not to open a computer during class. These machines have wonderful utility, but they also offer powerful temptations, not only to the user but to those nearby. Try taking notes the old-fashioned way: pen in hand. Or you may record class sessions for later review and transcription.

IV. READINGS

WEEK 1

Aug 24 Plato, *Euthyphro*

WEEK 2

Aug 29 *Euthyphro*

Aug 31 *Apology*

WEEK 3

Sep 5 *Apology*

Sep 7 Nagel, Chaps 1,2; pp. 3-18

WEEK 4

Sep 12 Descartes, *Meditation I*

Sep 14 *Meditation I*

WEEK 5

Sep 19 *Meditation II*

Sep 21 *Meditation II*

WEEK 6

Sep 26 Nagel, Chaps. 3, 4; pp. 19-37

Sep 28 *Meditation III*

WEEK 7

Oct 3 READING DAY: NO CLASS

Oct 5 Nagel, Chaps. 5,6; pp. 38-58

WEEK 8

Oct 10 Hume, *Enquiry*
Oct 12 *Enquiry*

WEEK 9

Oct 17 *Enquiry*
Oct 19 *Enquiry*

WEEK 10

Oct 24 Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*, roughly first half
Oct 26 “

WEEK 11

Oct 31 *A Clockwork Orange*, roughly second half
Nov 2 Nagel, Chs. 7, 8; pp. 59-75

WEEK 12

Nov 7 Mill, *On Liberty*, Chs. 1, 2
Nov 9 “

WEEK 13

Nov 14 Mill, *On Liberty*, Ch. 3
Nov 16 *On Liberty*, Ch. 4

WEEK 14

Nov 21 *On Liberty*, Ch. 5
Nov 23 NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING

WEEK 15

Nov 28 Plato, *Crito*
Nov 30 *Crito*

WEEK 16

Dec 4 Nagel, Chs. 9, 10; pp. 87-101

FINAL EXAM: FRIDAY, DEC 16, 2-5 p.m.