

Introduction to Philosophical Problems

Philosophy 101.501

Fall 2018

Information

Instructor:	Zachary T. Shank (he/him, they/them)	Office hours:	T 8-9 p.m. and by appointment
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Course Description

"All human beings by nature desire to know," Aristotle wrote. But what do we know, and how do we know it? Philosophy seeks an answer to these, and other, questions. Though honest philosophers will concede that the discipline has few concrete answers, each series of stories that philosophers tell fills in the picture. This course will introduce students to Western philosophy's basic questions and encourage them to explore these questions through reading, writing, and discussion. Though we might not discover definite answers, by the end of the course, we will be closer to realizing why philosophy is the love of wisdom and not simply the study of it.

Textbook

Chaffee, John. *The Philosopher's Way: Thinking Critically About Profound Ideas*, 5th ed.
Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2016.

Supplemental essays and handouts to be distributed by the instructor.

Course Objectives

Students will:

1. Explain five problems/issues of the history of Philosophy that have shaped contemporary thought.
2. Define the main areas of philosophy: metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, etc.; follow the development of at least one of these sub-fields in the history of philosophy.
3. Analyze a philosophical argument: Identify the thesis that the author is trying to establish. Identify the premises and intermediate statements that allegedly entail the conclusion.
4. Evaluate a philosophical argument in terms of the rigor of its logic and the plausibility of its premises (i.e., in terms of validity and soundness). Develop and effectively present a counterargument, taking into account other perspectives that find expression in contemporary society/the history of Philosophy.

In order to meet these broader objectives, students will focus on these specific outcomes. That is, at the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify fundamental questions peculiar to philosophy as a discipline in Western thought — including questions of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics — through the reading of primary and commentary texts.
2. Describe various responses to these fundamental questions and how they change through time.
3. Explain the difference between rationalist and empiricist conceptions of knowledge and reality.
4. Explain the difference between consequentialist and rights-based theories of ethics.
5. Demonstrate critical reading skills, including summarizing, assessing plausibility, and critical response.
6. Demonstrate aspects of philosophical thinking, including argument analysis and construction.

Policies

Regular participation is expected; students should plan to access the course at least three times per week and complete various activities to maintain attendance. Mere logging is insufficient to count as attendance in the course.

Grading Policies

- ◆ Letter grades are assigned according to the following scale:

100-98= A+	89.99-88= B+	79.99-78= C+	69.99-68= D+	Below 60= F
97.99-93= A	87.99-83= B	77.99-73= C	67.99-63= D	
92.99-90= A-	82.99-80= B-	72.99-70= C-	62.99-60= D-	

- ◆ Your grade is based on your performance on a variety of assignments:

	Allotted	My points
Success portrait:	20	_____
Syllabus annotation:	20	_____
Progress reports (4 x 20):	80	_____
Weekly questions (15 x 10):	150	_____
Small discussions (15 x 4):	60	_____
Big discussions (4 x 20):	80	_____
Exams (3x50):	150	_____
Papers (2 x 50):	100	_____
Annotations (4 x 30):	120	_____
Exercises (8 x 10):	80	_____
Final reflection:	50	_____
Total:	850	_____

Note: The total points possible is actually 910, but I've built in a small cushion because students sometimes miss a small weekly assignment. If that happens to you, please don't ask to make it up; just recognize I've already compensated for it.

- ◆ Students can pass the class in 1 of 2 ways. Any student who reaches 621 points (73 percent) will pass the class and earn the letter grade based on the percentage of points earned of the 850 total points possible
- ◆ The “fail-safe” method:
 - Students who do not have at least 621 points at the end of the term but who meet the following conditions will pass the class with a grade of C.
 - All three exams complete, with an average score of at least 32
 - Submitted the final reflection with a score of at least 35
 - Submitted both papers with an average score of at least 35
 - Completed 25 of 49 “Engagement assignments” (discussions, weekly questions, etc.)

The main thing to know is that I expect students to be present on a weekly basis and to demonstrate some mastery of the issues. But I understand that sometimes it's difficult to hit all the deadlines all of the time. If you're present and active in the course, you will pass.

- ◆ Major assignments such as exams and papers may be accepted late, with varying penalties. Other assignments may not be accepted late. Weekly questions and small discussions are not accepted late. See the course FAQ for more info.

- ◆ **See the academic calendar for dates regarding enrollment policies, grading options, and drop options, particularly dates and information concerning refunds and dropping courses.**
 - Last day to change grade mode on LoboWeb: Aug. 31
 - Last day to withdraw without a “W” and with 100 percent refund: Sept. 7
 - Last day to drop without Dean’s permission: Nov. 9
 - Last day to change grade mode with form or drop with Dean’s permission with form: Dec. 7.
- ◆ **Online course:** Please review the following information very carefully – your grade could depend on it.
 1. As noted above, students are expected to log on frequently and complete a variety of tasks each week on multiple deadlines. *You will not be successful in this course if you log in only once per week or put off all work until the weekend.* Do not wait until the last minute. It’s best to budget the same amount of time as spent in a face-to-face class to perform the online activities and to plan on additional time for reading the textbook and other assigned materials. For this class, that would mean 1.5 hours twice per week for the time we’d be in class, plus up to 6 hours for reading and note-taking etc. Students who want to earn a high score in this class should plan to find at least 9 hours per week, ***scattered throughout the week***, to complete course tasks.
 2. This course requires basic computer applications that will support audio files, streamed video clips, PowerPoint slides, PDF files, and low- to medium-intensity Web pages. Some of this material will be covered on quizzes or other assignments, so students are responsible for accessing all course content provided by the instructor.
 3. I will provide most assignments as Word documents and course files for printing as PDF documents to work across all platforms and devices. *If you ever have trouble viewing an assignment, contact me immediately.*
 4. All assignments are to be submitted by the deadline according to the Blackboard clock. See course FAQ for more information. That’s the official clock of the course and the determinant of whether a given assignment is late. If you are participating in the course from another time zone whether because of travel or you live somewhere other than New Mexico, the governing Mountain time zone (we’ll start in daylight time and end in standard time) is the appropriate clock to watch.
 5. I can open almost any electronic file format. The easiest, however, are Microsoft Word documents (extension .doc or .docx). If I cannot open your document because of an inappropriate format, I will contact you to send it to me in an appropriate format via e-mail, and you will lose up to 5 points. If you are unsure how to change formats or your default format, stop by a campus computer lab for assistance.
 6. Correct files. Students sometimes submit the incorrect file. Please double check that you are submitting the correct version of the correct assignment. If you notice that you submitted the wrong file, you may correct the problem by sending the appropriate file via the Messages feature in Learn. If I start grading and notice that the incorrect file was submitted, I will contact you to send it to me in an appropriate format via e-mail, and you will lose up to 5 points.
 7. *Plan carefully.* **This course requires significant participation.** If you are involved in the discussions and thinking about these issues, this should be a breeze. If you’re putting off reading until the last minute, you will find it difficult to stay engaged with the material and therefore earn all of the points each week.

Classroom policies

- ◆ **Attendance:** Students enrolled for credit or audit are expected to attend this course, by which I mean complete at least some weekly course tasks. As noted above, mere logging in is not sufficient to establish attendance. If I need to report your attendance at any point of the term, I will use completed work as my guide, per federal guidelines and practice.
- ◆ **Dropping:** I try to reach out to students who are falling off the radar, and prefer we work out a strategy for you to be successful rather than dropping you for nonattendance. Any student who has not completed at least one course task over a period of two weeks may be dropped for nonattendance.
- ◆ Weekly tasks such as the small discussions and weekly questions: Completing these tasks by stated deadlines is analogous to attending class. You either did it or you didn’t. Most tasks cannot be submitted late or made up, just like activities that happen in a class you miss cannot be made up. In general, your grade can withstand missing some of these, but don’t make it a habit.

- ◆ **Students who have not completed at least three course tasks or assignments by Wednesday evening, Aug. 29, will be dropped by Friday, Aug. 31. This is before the deadline to drop without a “W” on Sept. 7. This decision shall be final.**

Student/Instructor Expectations

You may reasonably expect me to:

- be available, except in the case of an emergency, during my scheduled office hours online. We can make appointments to communicate synchronously, either in person or via some kind of video chat tool if necessary, though face-to-face appointments will likely be rare unless you live in Albuquerque.
- return phone calls and e-mails that need response within 36 hours during the school week; it’s unlikely that I will check e-mail or be online most Saturdays, so do not expect correspondence on that day.
- return graded exercises, exams and papers within a week to 10 days after you have submitted an assignment.
- provide reasonable, thoughtful, and at times provocative feedback; criticism will be constructive for the purposes of improvement and shouldn’t be interpreted as mean-spirited.
- ask you “why” or other questions for the purpose of digging deeper; again, this shouldn’t be interpreted as mean-spirited.
- create meaningful, challenging, and positive learning activities and experiences to deepen your understanding of the material.
- treat you with the same respect and consideration that I would want to receive from you.

In turn, I expect you to:

- ask questions when you have them. These can be about concepts in the text, the week’s topic, or philosophy in general. (In fact, I’m bribing you to ask questions about the ideas in the course.)
- log on frequently and regularly to discuss these topics, having thoughtfully considered the assigned material.
- treat this class with the same level of importance as any other course.
- treat your classmates and instructor with the respect and consideration that you would want to receive from them.
- submit assignments on time and having followed directions.

E-mail: I tend to communicate via the announcement feature, including copies to student email addresses. I will not conduct correspondence about your performance in the course unless it is initiated from a UNM e-mail account or the messages feature in Learn.

Learning statement: I seek excellence from my students and have high standards for their performance. I will provide various forms of support during the term (lecture notes, audio or video files related to course content, office hours, etc.) that engage different kinds of student learning and empower students to construct their knowledge and to demonstrate their mastery of the material. I encourage students to think of me as an aide rather than as an obstacle to be overcome. Prior to a student earning an A in this or any other class, there is no such thing as an A student. If a high grade is part of your goal for this course, I expect that it will be foremost in your mind and that you will take the kind of time and care needed to accomplish this goal.

This course has a great deal of reading — *much of it difficult*. While course activities should help illuminate the text, these cannot substitute for sitting in a quiet place and wrestling with the material on your own. **This is not an easy course and every point counts.** Students who wish to earn an A should consider the material carefully, take notes about the text and online activities, ask questions either via the discussion board, the chat room, the course e-mail tool, in class or during office hours, and take their time with assignments. Informal study or discussion groups also could be valuable. If this class met face-to-face, we would spend 3 hours in class together, and you would need to spend an additional 3-6 hours per week (depending on your reading speed) reading the textbook and completing assignments. Students should plan at least that amount of time each week, although those hours can be spread across that week in the way most convenient to you and consistent with meeting weekly deadlines.

Warning: I am not a certified member of any tech support team, so if you are having trouble with your computer or Internet connection, you should have a backup plan in place in order to ensure I receive your assignments on time. Faulty connections, computer crashes and disk errors are not acceptable excuses for late work – unless the problem is with the university’s Blackboard server.

Academic honesty: I expect that all work you submit for a grade in this class is your own and that any outside sources you might use will be cited appropriately. Collaboration is useful for getting started and finding the path, but letting someone else do your thinking goes beyond that. Assignments and exams, unless otherwise specified, are to be the work of the individual student.

Plagiarism is not only illegal but also morally wrong. From the legal perspective, it is the theft of intellectual property of another individual and often a violation of copyright laws. Morally, it is a lie both to yourself and to the instructor. Further, using the work of another and pretending it is your own robs you of the very opportunity you are here to pursue: your education. Finally, philosophy’s task is to force us to wrestle with our own ideas, so any attempt to short-circuit this process is a gross disregard for the foundation of this discipline. Any student caught plagiarizing – this includes self-plagiarism, which is resubmitting work you created for either this class if you took it previously or another class with similar content – or other form of cheating in this course faces an immediate penalty of a zero for the assignment and is subject to further sanctions per relevant university policies.

Here is the link to the UNM Academic Dishonesty Policy: <https://policy.unm.edu/regents-policies/section-4/4-8.html>.

In short, submit your own work. If you need help citing a source or any other aspect of an assignment, please discuss it with me. If you are tempted to cheat, please make an appointment with me instead. It’s just not necessary.

Americans with Disabilities Act: Participants desiring a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act contact the Equal Access Services office immediately to discuss their needs. If you have a documented disability, that office will provide me with a letter outlining your accommodations. I will then discuss the accommodations with you to determine the best learning environment. If you feel that you need accommodations, but have not documented your disability, please contact Jeanne Lujan, the coordinator for Equal Access Services at 925-8910 or jmlujan@unm.edu.

Failure to notify that office in a timely manner may hinder the university’s ability to assist participants successfully complete the course.

Catastrophic circumstance: In the event that systemwide outages occur that prevent the timely submission of the final paper, students will be awarded grades based on points earned to date, scaled to the available points possible.

Title IX: In an effort to meet obligations under Title IX, UNM faculty, Teaching Assistants, and Graduate Assistants are considered responsible employees, (see pg 15 - <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/qa-201404-title-ix.pdf>). This designation requires that any report of gender discrimination which includes sexual harassment, sexual misconduct and sexual violence made to a faculty member, TA, or GA must be reported to the Title IX Coordinator at the Office of Equal Opportunity (oeo.unm.edu). For more information on the campus policy regarding sexual misconduct, see: <https://policy.unm.edu/university-policies/2000/2740.html>.

Further, as a Safe Zone-certified faculty member, I take issues of equity seriously, and I expect that students will treat one another respectfully and as equals. If I see or hear language that is derogatory in nature against another person or group, I’ll have a conversation about it with the student. I may ask students to revise their language to be more neutral and consistent with constructive academic discourse. Further, persistent, or more serious derogatory language may face additional consequences, consistent with University policies.

About philosophy: The nature and purpose of philosophy is to provide us the skills needed for critical reflection about all aspects of our lives. This implies that we be open to new ideas and ways of thinking, and that the worldviews we have currently are open to critique and revision. Rarely is it the case that the answer we have ready at hand to a given question or an attitude that we've held for some time is the final word on a given topic. Sometimes, this process is uncomfortable, but when we get beyond our initial assumptions, it's definitely rewarding.

We will discuss some interesting and deep issues in this class, including the nature of knowledge, morality, freedom of the will, and the soul/personal identity. You've heard about some of these issues in other related classes, and chances are they were presented as though the problem is solved. It's not, so be open to that. Some topics will push buttons, and that's OK and to be expected. When working with these topics, however, keep in mind norms of constructive academic discourse: challenge ideas, not people; avoid character attacks; be open to learning more about new topics or positions; give people the benefit of the doubt and ask for clarification.

Assignments/Readings for Phil 101, SHANK

Below is the first and default calendar for the course (subject to revision); detailed weekly calendars will be available online in the unit modules. We'll pretty much cover the entire chapter for each section we're discussing.

Each week of new material begins Monday, although deadlines related to certain chapters may go into the next week. Each chapter or unit has various associated online activities, generally with regular due dates. In general, I'll try to keep the workload predictable and consistent so that you can form a routine, but keep a close eye on the calendar and plan accordingly. More information about assignments and due dates will appear in the weekly learning modules and as announcements from time to time.

Week / Date	Topic	Reading	Big assignments
1. Aug. 20	Course overview What is Philosophy?	Course documents Ch. 1 (sections)	Success portrait
2. Aug. 27	Ch. 2: What is the Philosopher's Way	Ch. 2	Exercise 1
3. Sept. 3	Logic and the nature of arguments	Ch. 1 (sections) Course documents	Exercise 2
4. Sept. 10	Logic and ways arguments fail	Ch. 1 (sections) Course documents	Logic assignment
5. Sept. 17	Ch. 5: How can we know the nature of reality?	pg 227-279	Exercise 3
6. Sept. 24	Ch. 6: What is real? What is true?	pg 281-315	Paper 1
7. Oct. 1	Ch. 6: What is real? What is true?	pg 315-349	Exercise 4
8. Oct. 8	Truth and not	Course documents	Exam 1
-- Fall break Oct 11-14 --			
9. Oct. 15	Ch. 8: Are there moral truths?	pg 427-478	Exercise 5
10. Oct. 22	Ch. 9: What are right actions?	pg 481-522	Exercise 6
11. Oct. 29	Ch. 3: Who are you?	pg 101-131	Exam 2
12. Nov. 5	Ch. 3: Who are you?	pg 131-168	Exercise 7
13. Nov. 12	Ch. 4: Are you free?	pg 171-224	Exercise 8
14. Nov. 19	Contemporary issues: Existentialism	Course documents	Exam 3
15. Nov. 26	Contemporary issues: Existentialism	Course documents	
16. Dec. 3	Living a thoughtful life	Course content	Paper 2
Finals week	Final assignment due Dec. 12		Final reflection