

Introduction to Philosophy

Prof. Robert Howell

May Term 2015

Introduction to Philosophy is a study of the basic puzzles and paradoxes that give rise to philosophical thought. The class is discussion based, interweaving in-class debates with lecture. Questions discussed include:

Do humans have free will?

Does God Exist?

Can we know we aren't in the Matrix?

What makes a good life good?

What do we owe to other people?

Though students will be introduced to the most influential positions philosophers have traditionally taken on these issues, the emphasis will be on developing our own ability to think more clearly about them. Course take-away's therefore include:

- An improved ability to make arguments.
- An improved ability to spot logical holes in arguments
- An understanding of different sides of controversial issues.
- An ability to recognize both good and bad logical forms.
- A sense of how science and philosophy interact.

Robert Howell is Professor of Philosophy at Southern Methodist University. He is the author of *Consciousness and the Limits of Objectivity* (Oxford University Press) and co-authored *The God Dialogues* (Oxford University Press), which will be used as one of the texts of this class. He is the recipient of the SMU President's Associates Award, the Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Award and is a member of SMU's Academy of Distinguished Teachers.

Office: Hyer 211F

Office Phone: 768-3063

Email: Rhowell@smu.edu

Office Hours: TBA

Texts: Alter & Howell: *The God Dialogues*

Cahn: *Exploring Philosophy*

2 Exams (20/25)%

Participation 25%

3 Short Assignments 30%

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. Four unexcused absences will result in your being dropped from the class. (If it is too late in the term for an administrative drop, you will receive an F.) You have one free absence, but subsequent absences will lower your participation by a letter grade.

Participation: Philosophical learning is not a passive activity. Discussion inside and outside of class will increase your understanding significantly, and so it will impact your grade significantly. The following factors contribute to your participation grade:

In class participation--asking questions, discussion, etc.

Office hours and meetings--If you prefer to discuss one on one or in small groups, please come to office hours or make an appointment. Four points of the participation grade (out of the possible twenty) can be earned automatically by coming to office hours or meeting with me during the first three weeks of class.

Exam Forums--Prior to the exams, forums will be on blackboard in which you can ask or answer questions. Participation credit will be given for both.

Short Assignments: The short assignments will be assigned during class and posted on Blackboard at least a week before they are due. Typically they will be short papers of about 2 pages.

Exams: The exams will be part short answer and part essay questions. More details will be given when the exams approach.

NO COMPUTERS ALLOWED—This includes laptops and smartphones.

Academic Dishonesty: Violation of SMU's honor code will not be tolerated. Every piece of work you turn in must be entirely your own. Writing a paper or assignment means both expressing your own thoughts, and expressing them in your own words. You may not copy passages from any text: from articles, books, textbooks, or pages on the internet. Even if the passages are brief, you must cite them. In a typical case (for example, a student turns in a paper mostly cut-and-pasted from several web sites), the penalty for violating the honor code will be an "F" in the course, and will involve referral to the honor council which may take further disciplinary action. If you have any questions, or wonder whether you are crossing any lines of acceptable use or collaboration, please ask me.

This Course Satisfies UC requirements for PREI I:

PREI I Course Student Learning Outcomes: Students will be able to describe and explain some of the general features and principal theoretical methods of one of the fields of philosophy, religious studies, or ethics.

Syllabus

Unless otherwise indicated, readings are in Cahn.

May 14: Logic and Free Will

To Be Pre-read for the first class.

Salmon: The Scope of Logic

Nagel: The Problem of Free Will

Stace: Free Will and Determinism

May 15: Free Will, Science and Punishment

Mele: On Blackboard

In class debate

May 18: God, Morality and Design

Alter and Howell: The God Dialogues (GD) Chapters 1, 2 and 4

Assignment I Due

May 19: Miracles, Evil and Eagers

Alter and Howell: GD Chs 6-8

May 20: Problems of Knowledge

Midterm Exam (1 hour exam)

Descartes, Meditations I and II

May 21: Knowledge continued

Russell: The Problem of Induction

Nozick: Conditions for Knowledge

May 22: Well-Being and The Good

Selections from Shafer-Landau (Blackboard)

Selection from Kazez (Blackboard)

Assignment II Due

May 26: Ethical Foundations

Selection from Rachels (Blackboard)

Selections from Rand (Blackboard)

Mill: Utilitarianism

Kant: Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals

May 27: Theories of Justice

Rawls: A Theory of Justice

Nozick: Distributive Justice

May 28: Applied Ethics

Singer: Famine, Affluence and Morality
Arthur: World Hunger and Moral Obligation
Thompson: A Defense of Abortion
Marquis: Why Abortion is Immoral
Assignment III Due

May 29: Final Exam

Fine Print

- **Disability Accommodations:** Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS). Students can call [214-768-1470](tel:214-768-1470) or visit <http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible, present a DASS Accommodation Letter, and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement.
- **Religious Observance:** Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)
- **Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities:** Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity should be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalogue)