PHIL 1000-001 Intro to Philosophy

Instructor

Michael Otteson

Email: all contact with me should occur over the Canvas messaging system.
Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

The goal of this course is to work on and improve the ability of students to think about complex, difficult pieces of writing and respond to them on their own terms and in novel situations.

The medium through which we will develop ourselves as thinkers will be philosophy. Philosophy is the study of the fundamental questions of human existence. What is the nature of reality? How do we know what we know? What does it mean to live a good life? What is the difference between right and wrong, and how do we know about it? What makes something beautiful? What makes for good and bad arguments?

This course will trace the development of some key strains of philosophical thought through the beginnings of Western philosophy with Plato through its development with his student Aristotle, Aristotle’s acolyte Thomas Aquinas, and the modern turn with Descartes and Hume. It will end with a move away from Western philosophy discussion of Buddhism and highlight the potential for cross tradition similarities and development. Along the way, we will cover the subfields of metaphysics (the study of reality), epistemology (the study of knowledge), ethics (the study of human happiness and morality), and human nature. We will do this by carefully reading and examining (mainly) primary texts from these thinkers and then writing about what we have read as a way to engage in critical analysis and further comprehension.

The skills in this course, however, will be applicable in any field or discipline that you go into. No matter where you go or what you do, you will need to read, understand, and respond to what other people have said. This course will be an opportunity for you to engage with novel information and practices that you probably are not familiar with, which is exactly the kind of “fish out of water” experience you will need to learn this specific skill.
Course Objectives

By the end of this course, you should:

1. Gain a basic understanding of the subject (e.g., factual knowledge, methods, principles, generalizations, theories)
2. Develop skill in expressing yourself orally or in writing
3. Learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view

Course Resources

Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo [ISBN 9780872206335]
Meditations on First Philosophy [ISBN 9780872201927]
An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding [ISBN 9780872202290]

I have assigned reasonably priced editions/translation of each of these texts. However, they are all free online. If you have other editions of them, you are welcome to use them, but you will be responsible for figuring out how the reading assignments on the syllabus correlate to your text. The additional readings will be posted to Canvas. There is a reading question for every day of this course, so you will always be able to know what to read based on the reading question prompts. You will also need to bring the texts with you to class, so keep that in mind as well if you use an alternative method for obtaining the texts.

Evaluation Methods and Criteria

Reading Questions: 20%

The academy (including and especially the literal Academy where Plato and Aristotle studied and gave birth to the Western intellectual tradition) is about the intellect. It is about the mind’s ability to grasp and comprehend truth and goodness (and beauty). To this end, the three questions of academia are as follows:

“Huh?”
“Really?”
“So what?”

“Huh?” is about what someone has said. It is the ability or process of understanding what another person has tried to communicate. This is an act of interpretation. Whenever someone says something, it is always a separate process for the listener(s) to determine what the person said. This may seem trivial, but it is not
(especially in a field like philosophy). Interpreting what other people have said is often ambiguous, difficult, or contested. This does not mean there are not right answers, or that some answers are not better or more plausible than others. However, it does mean that a simple question like “huh” is actually an exercise or activity of the intellect, not a matter of vain or rote repetition or regurgitation.

“Really?” is about justification or reasons. That is, it is about determining why someone believes or defends something that they have said. It is the process of both understanding why another person holds the position that they do and evaluating for yourself whether or not those reasons or arguments are satisfactory. This is also an exercise of the intellect. Rationality is about the search for reasons. Why do we believe as we do? Why should we act or behave in a certain way?

“So what?” is about why something matters. It is determining the value or importance of information, concepts, ideas, or arguments within a human life. Why does something matter to us? Should we care about something? How does it make us wiser, more thoughtful, or better?

For every day that we assigned readings in class, you will need to send to me your answers to these questions in regards to the readings for the day. You will take no more than three sentences (for each question) to explain about each reading the “Huh,” the “Really,” and the “So What.” In other words, you will briefly explain what the author said, why the author said it, and why it matters or potentially matters for their larger project, ethics, or human life generally. Your answers to these questions will be due thirty minutes before the beginning of class. I will use them (as should you) to facilitate class discussion. It will prepare you to engage in a rigorous examination and consideration of the text in conjunction with myself and your classmates.

This is a lot of work. However, it is work that is essentially for developing critical thinking skills that you will use everywhere. As Aristotle and the other virtue ethicists know, any skill requires practices to master. There is no way around improving other than doing it over and over again with an eye towards improvement. Furthermore, I will not grade these responses on content. If you have made a good faith effort to do them, then you will get your points for the day. However, I will give you seven days during the semester where you don’t have to turn in questions. That is to say, of the days where we have assigned readings, if you respond to the questions above on all of those days except seven, you will get full credit for the semester.

In many cases, your answers to the reading questions will be directly relevant to topics covered by the essay prompts in this course. They will always help you to practice the key skills that this course is built around: expressing yourself in writing, gaining a basic understanding of the course subject matter, analyzing and critically evaluating other people’s ideas and arguments.

Exegetical Papers: 60%

The goal of this course is to examine and analyze complex and difficult texts about a weighty topic (philosophy) and correctly explain key concepts from them in writing. This process of interpretation is sometimes called “exegesis.” These assignments are way
to practice this skill. For each ethical theory that we cover, I will give you a prompt. It will ask you to explain a key concept or idea from each ethical theory in less than four pages. You will need to find key passages from the text where each author discusses the relevant topic, quote that author, and explain what they mean in your own words. Because I want you to improve over time, I will give special consideration to papers later in the semester if you show a lot of improvement. Your reading question responses should help you immensely when writing these papers, to the point where you may have already put down a great deal of the relevant discussion necessary for the papers.

Final Exam: 20%

There will be a final cumulative exam that covers material from all aspects of the course. Preparing for this exam will help you review and understand the material from this course. It will include material that is not directly covered by the papers. Your reading questions should help you prepare for this exam.

Grade Scheme

The following grading standards will be used in this class:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100 % to 93.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>&lt; 93.0 % to 90.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>&lt; 90.0 % to 87.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>&lt; 87.0 % to 83.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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Policies

Late Work

With few exceptions, I only accept late work in conjunction with an academic or other medical/emergency related excuse (the bar is pretty high here). Furthermore, I am far more sympathetic to requests for extensions in advance of deadlines rather than after them. If students have an emergency and/or contact me in advance, I do want to be as
accommodating as I can be with deadlines. Please reach out to me if you are going to have problems getting assignments in on time.

*Class Decorum*

It is crucial that we treat each other with respect during these class discussions. We are covering material that is both difficult to understand and that has potential bearing on some sensitive subjects. As such, we must be civil to each other if this class is to succeed. If you are disrespectful towards others, I will dock your final grade.

*Attendance Policy*

Students are expected to regularly attend class. Class discussion is a key avenue for developing a better comprehension of the texts and concepts in this course. The reading questions should help you prepare to be actively engaged in class discussion. If you had academically-excused or medical reasons for not coming to class, please let me known as soon as possible. However, this is college, and as a rule I don't think it is my job to make you come to class every day. I expect students to come to class and engage in class discussion for the benefit of their own education. If you make the choice not to come to class, that is up to you. We can all make decisions about what is best for ourselves all things considered, and we can live with the consequences of those choices. However, I will not make extensive accommodations for people who regularly miss class without a legitimate excuse. If you miss class, do not ask me what you missed over email (I will ignore such requests). Either schedule an appointment to meet with me to discuss the material and/or contact one of your classmates for the notes.

*Changes to the Syllabus*

This syllabus and the course schedule are subject to change. Please make note of any changes to it in class. I will post updated versions of the syllabus from time to time (as needed).

*Covid*

The university's Covid policy can be found below. I wanted to also add that because our course is face to face, we will need to have a seating chart. If we don't have a seating chart and someone tests positive, we will be forced to go online. I assume that you don't want that given that you signed up for a face to face course, so we will need to do our best to follow this chart throughout the semester.

*Nonattendance Policy*

**Students May Be Dropped For Nonattendance**

If a student does not attend a class during the first week of the term or by the second class meeting, whichever comes first, the instructor may submit a request to have the student dropped from the course. *(This does not remove responsibility from the student to drop courses which he or she does not plan to attend.)* This option is typically used for classes that are full and the instructor is trying to make a seat
available for another student, but may be considered for other courses. Requests must be made during the first 20 percent of the course and will be considered on an individual student basis. Students who are dropped from courses will be notified by the Registrar's Office through their preferred e-mail account (see 2018-2019 General Catalog (Links to an external site.)).

Assumption of Risk

All classes, programs, and extracurricular activities within the University involve some risk, and certain ones involve travel. The University provides opportunities to participate in these programs on a voluntary basis. Therefore, students should not participate in them if they do not care to assume the risks. Students can ask the respective program leaders/sponsors about the possible risks a program may generate, and if students are not willing to assume the risks, they should not select that program. By voluntarily participating in classes, programs, and extracurricular activities, a student does so at his or her own risk. General information about University Risk Management policies, insurance coverage, vehicle use policies, and risk management forms can be found at: http://www.usu.edu/riskmgt/ (Links to an external site.)

Library Services

All USU students attending classes in Logan, at our Regional Campuses, or online can access all databases, e-journals, and e-books regardless of location. Additionally, the library will mail printed books to students, at no charge to them. Students can also borrow books from any Utah academic library. Take advantage of all library services and learn more at libguides.usu.edu/rc. (Links to an external site.)

Online Course Fee

A fee of $15 per credit is applied to all online courses to sustain current digital technologies and support services required for engaging and effective online learning.

Classroom Civility

Utah State University supports the principle of freedom of expression for both faculty and students. The University respects the rights of faculty to teach and students to learn. Maintenance of these rights requires classroom conditions that do not impede the learning process. Disruptive classroom behavior will not be tolerated. An individual engaging in such behavior may be subject to disciplinary action. Read Student Code Article V Section V-3 (Links to an external site.) for more information.

University Policies & Procedures
COVID-19 Classroom Accommodations

To ensure that you receive the appropriate accommodation for COVID-19 related challenges, the University requires you to fill out the COVID-19 Questionnaire (Links to an external site.). Upon doing so, the University COVID CARE Team (Links to an external site.) will contact you to determine your needs and how to support you. The CARE Team will also contact your instructors and provide important direction on how best to accommodate your needs. For additional reference, please see USU’s Attendance and Excused Absence (Links to an external site.) policy and the COVID-19 Classroom Accommodations (Links to an external site.) page.

Reducing COVID-19 Risk

You can help keep classes, events, and activities happening in person this semester by following these steps:

1. **Get vaccinated if you’re able.** Vaccines are the best available tool to help stop the spread of COVID-19. They are safe, free, and easy to access.
2. **If you are vaccinated, let USU know.** Please upload your proof of full vaccination (Links to an external site.) to AggieHealth. If you are exposed to COVID-19, USU’s case containment will not require you to quarantine if they know you are vaccinated and you do not have symptoms.
3. **Stay home if you’re sick** and get tested for COVID-19 if you have symptoms or have been exposed. It’s important to not bring any illness to campus.
4. **Wear a mask indoors.** Public health experts recommend that even vaccinated people wear masks indoors in high COVID-19 transmission areas, which includes most of Utah.

If USU’s COVID Case Containment team identifies an uncontained situation in the classroom, you will be notified of any temporary changes to your course delivery method through a Canvas announcement. Please make sure you are receiving immediate notifications of new Canvas announcements. The situation will be handled according to protocols on the COVID Classroom Exposure (Links to an external site.) page.

Class Seating Charts (For In-Person Classes)

In classes with more than 10 students, a seating chart will be used to track where you are sitting. After the first week of classes, your instructor will tell you how to enter your seat number in Canvas. **You must sit in the same seat for the rest of the semester.** This is extremely important for tracking cases of COVID-19 and helping classes remain in person.

Academic Freedom and Professional Responsibilities

Academic freedom is the right to teach, study, discuss, investigate, discover, create, and publish freely. Academic freedom protects the rights of faculty members in teaching and of students in learning. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Faculty members are entitled to full freedom in teaching, research, and creative activities, subject to the limitations imposed by professional responsibility. Faculty Code
Policy #403 (Links to an external site.) further defines academic freedom and professional responsibilities.

**Academic Integrity – ”The Honor System”**

Each student has the right and duty to pursue his or her academic experience free of dishonesty. To enhance the learning environment at Utah State University and to develop student academic integrity, each student agrees to the following Honor Pledge: "I pledge, on my honor, to conduct myself with the foremost level of academic integrity."

A student who lives by the Honor Pledge is a student who does more than not cheat, falsify, or plagiarize. A student who lives by the Honor Pledge:

- Espouses academic integrity as an underlying and essential principle of the Utah State University community;
- Understands that each act of academic dishonesty devalues every degree that is awarded by this institution; and
- Is a welcomed and valued member of Utah State University.

**Academic Dishonesty**

The instructor of this course will take appropriate actions in response to Academic Dishonesty, as defined the University’s Student Code. Acts of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to:

- **Cheating**: using, attempting to use, or providing others with any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, examinations, or in any other academic exercise or activity. Unauthorized assistance includes:
  - Working in a group when the instructor has designated that the quiz, test, examination, or any other academic exercise or activity be done “individually;”
  - Depending on the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments;
  - Substituting for another student, or permitting another student to substitute for oneself, in taking an examination or preparing academic work;
  - Acquiring tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty member, staff member, or another student without express permission;
  - Continuing to write after time has been called on a quiz, test, examination, or any other academic exercise or activity;
  - Submitting substantially the same work for credit in more than one class, except with prior approval of the instructor; or engaging in any form of research fraud.
- **Falsification**: altering or fabricating any information or citation in an academic exercise or activity.
- **Plagiarism**: representing, by paraphrase or direct quotation, the published or unpublished work of another person as one’s own in any academic exercise or activity without full and clear acknowledgment. It also includes using materials prepared by another person or by an agency engaged in the sale of term papers or other academic materials.
Sexual Harassment/Title IX

Utah State University is committed to creating and maintaining an environment free from acts of sexual misconduct and discrimination and to fostering respect and dignity for all members of the USU community. Title IX and USU Policy 339 (Links to an external site.) address sexual harassment in the workplace and academic setting. The university responds promptly upon learning of any form of possible discrimination or sexual misconduct. Any individual may contact USU’s Office of Equity (Links to an external site.) for available options and resources or clarification. The university has established a complaint procedure to handle all types of discrimination complaints, including sexual harassment (USU Policy 305 (Links to an external site.)), and has designated the Office of Equity Director/Title IX Coordinator as the official responsible for receiving and investigating complaints of sexual harassment.

Withdrawal Policy and "I" Grade Policy

Students are required to complete all courses for which they are registered by the end of the semester. In some cases, a student may be unable to complete all of the coursework because of extenuating circumstances, but not due to poor performance or to retain financial aid. The term ‘extenuating’ circumstances includes: (1) incapacitating illness which prevents a student from attending classes for a minimum period of two weeks, (2) a death in the immediate family, (3) financial responsibilities requiring a student to alter a work schedule to secure employment, (4) change in work schedule as required by an employer, or (5) other emergencies deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Students with Disabilities

USU welcomes students with disabilities. If you have, or suspect you may have, a physical, mental health, or learning disability that may require accommodations in this course, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) (Links to an external site.) as early in the semester as possible (University Inn # 101, (435) 797-2444, drc@usu.edu). All disability related accommodations must be approved by the DRC. Once approved, the DRC will coordinate with faculty to provide accommodations.

Students who are at a higher risk for complications from COVID-19 or who contract COVID-19 may also be eligible for accommodations.

Diversity Statement

Regardless of intent, careless or ill-informed remarks can be offensive and hurtful to others and detract from the learning climate. If you feel uncomfortable in a classroom due to offensive language or actions by an instructor or student(s) regarding ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, contact:

- Division of Student Affairs: https://studentaffairs.usu.edu (Links to an external site.), (435) 797-1712, studentservices@usu.edu, TSC 220
You can learn about your student rights by visiting:
The Code of Policies and Procedures for Students at Utah State University: https://studentconduct.usu.edu/studentcode (Links to an external site.)

Grievance Process

Students who feel they have been unfairly treated may file a grievance through the channels and procedures described in the Student Code: Article VII (Links to an external site.).

Full details for USU Academic Policies and Procedures can be found at:

- Student Conduct (Links to an external site.)
- Student Code (Links to an external site.)
- Academic Integrity (Links to an external site.)
- USU Academic Policies and Procedures (Links to an external site.)
- Academic Freedom and Professional Responsibility Policy (Links to an external site.)

Emergency Procedures

In the case of a drill or real emergency, classes will be notified to evacuate the building by the sound of the fire/emergency alarm system or by a building representative. In the event of a disaster that may interfere with either notification, evacuate as the situation dictates (i.e., in an earthquake when shaking ceases or immediately when a fire is discovered). Turn off computers and take any personal items with you. Elevators should not be used; instead, use the closest stairs.

Mental Health

Mental health is critically important for the success of USU students. As a student, you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. Utah State University provides free services for students to assist them with addressing these and other concerns. You can learn more about the
broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus at Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) (Links to an external site.). Students are also encouraged to download the “SafeUT App” (Links to an external site,) to their smartphones. The SafeUT application is a 24/7 statewide crisis text and tip service that provides real-time crisis intervention to students through texting and a confidential tip program that can help anyone with emotional crises, bullying, relationship problems, mental health, or suicide related issues.