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Format: We will meet Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 8:30-9:20 in VSB 130.

Office Hours: Mondays 12:15-1:15, Friday 11:30-12:30, or by appointment.

Undergraduate Teaching Fellows: Emily Farnsworth, Taylor Wyatt, Bradley Zynda, + an additional TBA

UTF Weekly Recitation Session: To be announced (see Canvas)

### General Objectives of the Course

At the end of the course, you will be asked to evaluate the course's success at meeting these objectives:

- 2. Learning fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories
- 8. Developing skills in expressing oneself orally or in writing
- 11. Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.

### Specific Objectives of the Course

The purpose of this course is to provide students with an introduction to the task of philosophy through close readings of ancient, medieval, and modern philosophical texts. The course will focus on questions relating to metaphysics and epistemology that are representative of the issues that have motivated philosophers over the years. Along the way we shall consider, amongst others, these questions: What is it to be real or substantial? What is the nature of knowledge? Can anything be known about the ever-changing world of sense-experience? What is the relationship between the mind or soul and the body? Can I know myself? What is the purpose or meaning of life?

Our approach will be historical and focused on great books, but that should *not* lead the student to believe that these are questions that have been completely resolved or that these questions do not matter. On the contrary, these are live questions that call for considered reflection by all human persons blessed with the necessary capacity and leisure (which includes all of you).

This course has two main outcome goals. The first has to do with content. The task here is to understand the philosophical questions and to know what these philosophers have said and why they have said it, to evaluate whether or not they have good reasons for making their claims, and to ask about the significance of all of it for us.

The second main objective has to do with intellectual virtue ("critical thinking skills" in the shallow, contemporary parlance). The goal is to improve your ability to reason. This includes understanding a difficult reading, reflecting and thinking clearly and rigorously on its truth and significance, and the ability to communicate your understanding and thoughts to others clearly and concisely.

It is the hope of the instructor that students leave the class with an understanding of the philosophical issues as well as with an enlarged sense of wonder and curiosity with respect to those issues. But it is also a hope that students leave the class having cultivated intellectual virtues such as wonder, intelligence, "attunement" (an ability to enter other minds to see what they have to offer), equanimity, studiousness, clarity, rigor, and reasonability.

### Required Texts

- Kleiner, Harrison. *The Perennial Conversation: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Kendall Hunt 2012)
- Percy, Walker. *Lost in the Cosmos* (Picador, 2000) (*Optional text, not available at bookstore*)

### Required Work

- \* Note: Failure to submit any assignment will constitute a sufficient though not necessary condition for failing the course \*
- \* Note: Failure to follow assignment instructions (prompt, formatting, submission, etc.) may result in consequences ranging from a grade reduction to failure for the assignment.

#### • Papers (80%):

- 3 Short Papers: There will be 3 Short Papers on assigned topics. Assignment information will be distributed on Canvas. See the course schedule for assignment distribution and submission dates.
- Final Paper: This will be a mid-length paper asking you to demonstrate both an understanding of course material as well as sustained personal reflection on that material. Assignment information will be distributed on Canvas. See the course schedule for assignment distribution and submission dates.

- Directed Reading Questions (20%): There are “Directed Reading Questions” embedded in our text. I expect that you will submit, via Canvas, answers to the “DRQs” for every reading in the text with DRQs. These are due by the beginning of class; late submissions will not be accepted. Each will be checked to see if a complete and adequate submission was turned in on time.
  - Please mark your answers with at least the question numbers. Answers *must be in your own words*; do not simply retype the text. I do not want you to rely on secondary sources as the DRQs are meant to be the outcome of your engagement with the primary text. Evidence that you have used outside (including online) sources will be considered cheating.
  - These will be graded (adequate/inadequate on a 0 to 1 scale) and a DRQ grade given based on your percentage of received/possible points. Since I know things come up, I have set the grade scale so that a student can miss up some number of these (assuming they complete the ones they do submit adequately) and still get an A. The grade scale for these is as follows:
    - 89% or more = A    86-88% = A-
    - 82-85% = B+    79-81% = B    75-78% = B-
    - 72-74% = C+    68-71% = C    65-67% = C-
    - 62-64% = D    61 and lower = F
- Writing Competency Requirement (not a part of the grade but required to pass the class): The primary goal of this exercise is to train you to produce written work that is grammatically and mechanically sound. In addition, you can make progress toward producing writing that is rhetorically compelling and even beautiful. To those ends, you will be assigned a short summary and analysis paper and will be tasked with writing and then editing that paper until it is grammatically and mechanically sound. (This includes: sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, usage, and flow).
  - You will submit your paper and then have three chances to submit a revised version. See the schedule for dates. On each occasion the UTFs and I will be giving you ungraded feedback by marking up your paper with numbers. Look up those numbers in the Writing Guide to figure out your errors and then make the needed corrections. Submit again by the following revision deadline. By the end of the term, every student must have produced a paper that is grammatically and mechanically sound. The UTFs will help you, though the professor will make the final judgment on competence. Once deemed competent, you will have satisfied this requirement and need not continue with any further revisions. *If you have not demonstrated competence on the stated objectives of this assignment by the end of the term, you will fail the course no matter what your other grades in the class have been.*

**Note on Grades:** Aristotle correctly notes that, “precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions.” It is my view that papers do not admit of the same level of grading precision as, say, multiple choice exams. As such, I grade using letter grades rather than points. However, there is a value for both students and professors to express grades in numerical form. So while I use letter grades, I will give percentages as numerical place holders. ‘A’s are 95%, ‘A-’s 91%, ‘B+’s 88%, ‘B’s 85%, etc. *I do not negotiate on the percentage grade* (say, entertain an argument for an 86% instead of an 85% on a paper). Course grades are then based on the following scale:

- 93-100 = A    90-92 = A-    87-89 = B+    83-86 = B    80-82 = B-
- 77-79 = C+    73-76 = C    70-72 = C-    67-69 = D+    63-66 = D    62 and lower = F

## Canvas

Canvas is a user friendly (even for people like me with limited digital competency) web-based course management program. I encourage you to thoroughly explore Canvas on your own so you are familiar with its features. Keep in mind - it is *your responsibility* to make sure you understand how to access course information and submit Canvas administered assignments. Go to [canvas.usu.edu](http://canvas.usu.edu) to see various tutorials as well as to log in using your A# and Banner password. Make sure you properly set up your notification preferences (see tutorials) so that you receive with regularity any class announcements or messages. If you have problems logging in or other technical difficulties, please do not contact me - I am a philosophy professor, not an IT guy. Call the USU Help Desk (797-HELP).

**Policies**

1. Syllabus/Schedule changes: The syllabus and schedule are subject to change. I will notify the class of any and all changes. In the event of a discrepancy between this syllabus/schedule and Canvas (the Canvas syllabus or calendar), *the information on Canvas will take precedence.*
2. Unless otherwise indicated, my policy with late work is that it will be accepted only with a reasonable excuse (of which I am the judge). Expect the criteria for “reasonable” to be quite high (like a hospital-worthy illness).
3. If you have a disability or any circumstance that requires any sort of special consideration, please come and see me as soon as possible so you can be accommodated.
4. University regulations are enforced concerning any kind of dishonesty. Of note, the USU Academic Policies defines plagiarism as: “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 . . . .” If I suspect plagiarism on an assignment, due to style or content, I will tell you so and challenge you. If you admit it, the assignment receives a zero and that is all. If you deny the charge and I can prove the charge is true, you get not only a zero for the assignment but will fail the course and will be reported to the Dean’s Office.
5. Though not all grammatical errors will be corrected, I do have a guiding policy on these: Any page of a paper that has two or more errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. will result in a loss of  $\frac{1}{3}$  of a letter grade. This effect will be cumulative, so three pages with two or more errors will result in a full letter grade penalty.
6. Technology policy: Students today have incredible access to information. But do they know what to do with all of that information, can they summarize it and then synthesize it into understanding? Can they communicate it clearly? Can they mentally juggle the various streams of content with any clarity? Many students think they can “multitask”, but studies suggest that multitasking just means doing multiple things poorly at the same time. Studies also show that students retain more information when they take notes with a pen and paper rather than on an electronic device. I want you to be present in class and in the best position to learn. *So all electronic devices (phones, tablets, laptops, etc) are prohibited in my classroom.* No pictures of the board, no audio or video recording, no taking notes on any electronic device. Rare exceptions will be made only if you ask the instructor for an exemption. If you wish to have notes on a computer, it is a very good idea to rewrite your notes a few hours after class.
7. If I demonstrate a lack of attentiveness in class (I fall asleep, text message, play minesweeper, etc.) you may kick me out of class. I reserve the right to do the same to you.

**Advice and some information on the “culture” of my courses**

1. No one has a “right” to a “good” grade. No one gets extra credit for “effort,” which is invisible.
2. Please feel free to ask any question about anything at any time, in or out of class; that’s what philosophy is.
3. Expect to be challenged, to work, to find some of the course material “over your head” at first. If it isn’t, you can’t move up, only sideways.
4. I expect around 2 hours of out-of-class time for every hour of class time, though depending on your reading speed and focus that may be more or less. This is why taking 5 classes makes you a “full-time” student:  $(5 \times 3 \text{ class hours}) + (5 \times 6 \text{ study hours}) = 45 \text{ hours a week}$ . This is actually a federal standard. The DOE federal guidelines define one credit hour as “one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out of class student work” (34 CFR-Part 600.2). Classes that ask less than this are not giving you your money’s worth. Don’t pine for easier classes; don’t envy your friends who are in less demanding courses. Rather, do yourself a favor and demand that your professors demand more of you.
5. Not a policy matter but of great importance for getting good grades: All studies show that the single most accurate predictor of grades is this: the more TV, the lower the grades; the less TV, the higher.

6. Another important good grade producer is scheduling, time management. Specifically, don't cram, do work ahead of time. And work first, then play – you get in more of both that way.

7. Students today are incredibly distracted - text messages, cell phones, social media, game consoles, glowing screens everywhere. While many celebrate these new technologies and even perceive themselves to be dependent on them, studies show that these gadgets and glowing screens are making us dumber. One study found that students who are distracted by gadgets scored 20% lower on cognitive tests. Another study found that typical students can focus for less than 2 minutes before being distracted. Don't become a slave to a tool. When you study: shut down your email, turn off your phone, shut down your computer or at least disable the internet. You will be a better student and a wiser person for it. Remember what most social media interactions amount to: the ability to express every idea you have except the ones that are well thought through.

8. I will assume everyone has done the reading BEFORE the class during which we go over it (otherwise half of what goes on in class passes you by). Also, bring your text to class.

9. Do not be afraid to argue with me. I do not raise your grade for agreeing with me and my favorite philosophers or lower it for disagreeing.

10. Logistical and educational point: Email has made for considerably easier communication between students and teachers. However, the medium can be abused. I prefer that you raise questions in class or come to my office hours when you have questions. It is beneficial for you too – the human contact allows for a more intimate and natural mode of discourse, and it is my belief that students learn more from dialogue than from monologue (which is the necessary form of email).

11. How we dress matters since our dress is a visible sign that we recognize the appropriate dignity and seriousness of whatever activity it is we are engaged in. Getting an education is a more dignified activity than lounging around with your friends, so your dress should suggest as much. So I encourage students to dress in a way that is proportionate to the dignity of a university education. In addition, there is something to that old saw that you should “dress for success.” Though there is a well-established and timeless costume of the college student, I make no specific recommendations.

12. Many problems in philosophy are really problems in English communication. If you cannot communicate what you are thinking clearly, no one can know what you think. What to do about it? Read great books. Learn how to write by imitation.

13. A word about the philosophical temperament. Aquinas defines the virtue of studiousness as the “keen application of the mind to something”. Philosophers are among the most studious of people in this sense - they seek to clarify terms and propositions, and then follow the arguments wherever they go. This entails a great trust in reason, trusting that the *logos* will not steer you astray. Development of this studious capacity to keenly apply the mind to something is one mark of being an educated person. This capacity allows a person to engage people and ideas of all stripes, rather than being confined to one's own thoughts. As Aristotle says, “It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.” This habit of mind is useful in all walks of life (business, family, etc). But this habit of mind also means you can expect me to push ideas and arguments to explore them and to challenge students, an exercise that may make some students feel uncomfortable.

## Philosophy Department Grading Guidelines

A or A-

The essay is **excellent**. The writing is clear and concise, using proper sentence structure, grammar, and spelling. The essay stays firmly on topic. The writer has accurately and thoroughly described the relevant philosophical positions and arguments. The essay demonstrates that the student has engaged the topic with intellectual curiosity and seriousness, going beyond classroom discussions and readings, and demonstrating a thorough understanding of the material.

B+

The essay is **very good**. The writing is clear and concise, using proper sentence structure, grammar, and spelling. The essay stays firmly on topic. The writer has accurately described the relevant philosophical positions and arguments, except perhaps with a few very minor errors, omissions, or some lack of thoroughness of explanation. The essay shows intellectual engagement with the topic, but there is little in the essay which goes beyond classroom discussions and readings.

B or B-

The essay is **good**. The writing is clear and concise, using proper sentence structure, grammar, and spelling. The essay stays on topic. The writer has provided a broadly accurate account of the relevant philosophical positions and arguments. There are some errors or omissions, but they do not detract from the central aim of the essay. There is little in the essay which goes beyond classroom discussions and readings.

C+ or C or C-

The essay is **adequate** in meeting the assignment's requirements. The writing is generally clear and is acceptable in terms of grammar, spelling, and sentence structure, though there are errors or the writing is at times awkward and confusing. The writer has provided an adequate account of relevant philosophical positions and arguments, but with some important errors or omissions. Perhaps the essay wanders from the topic, introducing needless examples or pursuing tangents.

D+ or D

This essay is **not adequate** in quality. The writing is frequently awkward and confusing, with serious problems in spelling, grammar, and sentence structure. It is not clear that the writer has grasped the relevant philosophical positions or arguments, though there may be hints of some minimally adequate understanding of some relevant material. The organization of the essay is unclear, or nonexistent. Nevertheless, it is clear that some attempt has been made to meet the assignment's requirements; but the result does not demonstrate an adequate mastery of the material.

F

This essay is a **failure**. Writing errors abound, and there is no indication of an understanding of the material, or even that any serious effort has been made.