

Philosophy 1000 (section 004)

Introduction to Philosophy

Fall semester, 2018

Utah State University

Charlie Huenemann, Professor

T/Th 10:30-11:45, ENG 104

Congratulations! You are in an introductory philosophy class. This is your opportunity to engage with the biggest ideas and questions a human being can ask. We'll only scratch the surface, but with any luck you'll have plenty of opportunity to dig further into the meaning of human existence in the coming years and decades of your life. While this course will not provide you with answers - on the contrary, it should only complicate matters further - it should help you to read, think, and communicate more accurately and precisely, which will make you a valuable colleague, a worthy citizen, and someone who is ready to begin leading an examined life, which (someone once said) is the only kind worth living.

Our course will have four units. The first is focused on the **meaning of life**: is there a way to live that makes a human life meaningful? Are there facts about this, or does everyone decide for themselves? The second has to do with **ethics and social existence** - our obligations to others, and ways we can all best live together. The third explores **knowledge and consciousness** - who are we, and what can we know? The fourth is a set of questions about living with **technology** - specifically, how computers affect jobs, knowledge, and friendships.

In terms of **learning outcomes** (as stated in the most bland and boring fashion conceivable by the geniuses behind IDEA student evaluations), this course will help you with:

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

Contact information for the instructor: Charlie Huenemann, office Main 208, office hours 1-3 on Wednesday, but also generally available on T/W/Th, and by appointment, email charlie.huenemann@usu.edu. I'm always happy to meet with you - really, I'm a friendly and encouraging fellow who enjoys talking with students - so please feel welcome to knock on my door. I have a blog if you are interested: huenemanni.com. Also, on the subject of blogs, you may wish to check out usphilosophy.com to stay abreast of local philosophical happenings and Philosophy Club events.

Being prepared for class: You should come to class everyday ready to THINK, LISTEN, and TALK. Study all the readings until you feel you know them frontward, backward, and sideways. The instructor reserves the right to surprise you with questions and objections you haven't had time to think about it, and you'll be expected to deal with it. While in class, don't spit on the rare and noble privilege of learning in an American university by distracting yourself with social media. You are better than that: you are smarter, and capable of ruling your attention. *Bring the texts under discussion with you to class*; on this, see "Books," below.

Papers. You will write **short papers about every two weeks**. The first one is an answer to the question "What is philosophy?", and it is due *almost immediately*, on Thursday, August 30th. Everyone has to do it. After that, the class will be divided into two sections, the *Athenians* and the *Spartans*, and these

sections will take turns turning in short papers (five papers for each group). Then everyone will be assigned a short final paper, due on the last day, which will also be an answer to the question “What is philosophy?”. So, in all, that will be **seven short papers**. More details will be given on Canvas. The papers will be around 500 words (around two pages), and they should be turned in on Canvas. I expect you to do your utmost in making these papers technically flawless in matters of grammar and spelling.

Papers should be submitted on Canvas, as either a Word document or a Google doc. (If you absolutely must use some other word processor, talk to me.) Please use double space. Those formats allow me to insert comments and corrections.

Reading quizzes. To help you get more from the reading, there are short quizzes (three multiple-choice questions) attached to nearly every reading assignment (21 in all).

Exams. No exams.

Grades. The papers altogether will deliver about 75% of the final grade; the short reading quizzes will contribute 25%. The instructor reserves the right to also factor in further considerations such as overall improvement, class participation, and how much philosophical trouble you stir up in class (which is a good thing).

Here’s what I’m thinking when I’m assigning grades to papers:

C: This is a basically *competent* paper. It covers about everything it needs to, but minimally so: it could be better written, and could include more interesting observations.

B: This paper is not only competent, but *good*. It’s well-written, on the whole - could be better - and there are some good and interesting points made in it.

A: This paper is *excellent!* Really, I couldn’t ask for anything better from a college freshman. It’s well-written, interesting, and perceptive. Wow!

D: Well, no. Sorry. I can’t even say this paper is minimally competent. If you don’t see that, we need to meet and discuss it.

F: Either this paper is not a serious attempt, or the student needs to see me to get a better idea of what these papers should be.

Cheating. In class - as in life - never try to pass off someone else’s work as your own. Don’t take something from another student or some website and put your name on it as if you did it. If you want to make use of someone else’s idea or words, fine; just find a way to give them proper credit. I’m completely intolerant of this kind of intellectual theft; it’s a cardinal sin of the academy.

Lateness in turning in work: generally there should be none, but life packs surprises, and sometimes work has to be delayed. *Be mature about this, and talk to me about it.* If you need an alternative exam time, or need some alternative exam arrangement due to disability, please let me know, and we’ll work something out.

Books: You need to buy three books: *Justice* by Michael Sandel (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009); *Mortal Questions* by Thomas Nagel (Canto, 1991); and *Five Dialogues* by Plato (Hackett, 1981). Other readings will be made available on Canvas. They include selections from Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and some contemporary philosophers. *You will need to have access to the readings while you are in class:*so

either bring your book(s), or your electronic device to class, or bring printouts of the readings and mark up the margins with your pen or pencil. Those caught without access to the readings will be publicly shamed and then sent away to get them.

Date	What we will discuss in class	Questions to think through for class:
8.28	Introduction, part 1	What is philosophy? Why am I taking this class? What's the point?
8.30	Introduction, part 2 First paper due (everyone): "What is philosophy?"	What is important in life? Why is it important? <i>And:</i> do I have any questions about the syllabus?
9.4	Thomas Nagel, "Death" and "The Absurd" (chaps 1 & 2)	Why might I think life is absurd? Why isn't the life of a mouse absurd?
9.6	Plato, <i>The Euthyphro</i> ; plus "How to Write Like a Philosopher"	What's wrong with defining "piety" with "what all the gods love"?
9.11	Plato, <i>The Apology</i> Paper due, Athenians	What is the meaning of life, according to Socrates? Why does Socrates think a just man cannot be harmed?
9.13	Plato, <i>Republic</i> (selections)	What does Socrates have to do in order to answer Glaucon's challenges?
9.18	Plato, <i>Republic</i> (selections) (again) Paper due, Spartans	Why would a just person remain just, even with the ring of Gyges?
9.20	Aristotle (<i>ethics</i>)	What is Aristotle's strategy for happiness?
9.25	<i>Justice</i> , chapters 1 & 2 Paper due, Athenians	What questions do we ask when we think about <i>welfare</i> , <i>freedom</i> , and <i>virtue</i> ? What question does a utilitarian ask when trying to make a moral decision?
9.27	<i>Justice</i> , chapters 3 & 4	What is the libertarian objection to taxes? What is "tainted consent"?
10.2	<i>Justice</i> , chapter 5, plus Nagel, "Moral Luck" Paper due, Spartans	For Kant, what is the connection between <i>autonomy</i> (and what is that, anyway?) and being moral?
10.4	<i>Justice</i> , chapters 6 & 7	What is the fundamental difference between Rawlsian justice and libertarianism? How does this difference affect judgments about affirmative action?
10.9	<i>Justice</i> , chapter 8 Paper due, Athenians	What important question does Aristotle raise about social institutions?
10.11	In-class debate: What is the meaning of life?	See if you can articulate your own view of what your life should be about - and give reasons!
10.16	Descartes, Meditation 1	What does it take to doubt something, according to

		Descartes?
10.18	Descartes, Meditation 2 Paper due, Spartans	Why can't Descartes possibly be wrong about his own existence?
10.23	Descartes, Meditation 3	Why couldn't Descartes gained his idea of God through religious instruction?
10.25	Descartes, Meditation 6 Paper due, Athenians	Why does Descartes think we can know the material worlds exists?
10.30	The mind-body problem; read Huenemann, "If I teleport from Mars,...."	Would you select "Save" or "Destroy"? Why?
11.1	Nagel, "Brain bisection..."	What problems does Nagel find with the five interpretations he considers?
11.6	Nagel, "What is it like to be a bat?" Paper due, Spartans	Why is it hard to discover what it is like to be a bat?
11.8	Plato, <i>The Phaedo</i> ; plus, "Questions about an afterlife"	What are Socrates's replies to Simmias's and Cebes's objections?
11.13	In-class debate: What is consciousness? Paper due, Athenians	See if you can articulate your own view of what consciousness is - and give reasons!
11.15	[class cancelled]	
11.20	"Humans Need Not Apply" (CGP Grey)	Are there human tasks a computer in principle cannot do?
11.27	"Escape the echo chamber" (C. Thi Nguyen) Paper due, Spartans	What is the difference between an echo chamber and an epistemic bubble?
11.29	Virtual friends? Matthews and Cocking, "Unreal Friends"; Briggie, "Real Friends: How the Internet can Foster Friendship"	What so Matthews & Cocking and Briggie agree on, and where do they differ?
12.4	Rachel Barney, "[Aristotle] On Trolling"	What makes a troll a troll?
12.6	Conclusion Final paper due (everyone): "What is Philosophy?"	