



PHIL 1301-002

# Introduction to Philosophy

## Course Syllabus

“The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, but wiser people so full of doubts.”

- Bertrand Russell

The primary aim of this course is not to train you to be professional philosophers, but rather to teach you to think philosophically. The ability to think philosophically consists of four things: (1) the courage to question that we haven't questioned (and often would rather not); (2) the ability to make distinctions; (3) the ability to interpret and understand complex ideas expressed in written or spoken form; (4) and the ability to intelligibly express one's own questions, assumptions, or complex ideas. These skills are practical for almost any human endeavor, personal or professional. This is so in part because philosophy is everywhere; it's just hiding and you have to know where to look.

To develop your ability to think philosophically, we will examine some long-standing philosophical questions, such as what's the right thing to do and why should I do it, do I exist and if so what am I, what is my mind, do I have free will, and what's the meaning of life anyway? We will examine the answers provided by some philosophers, both ancient and contemporary.



## Dr. Brian Robinson

Assistant Professor  
Department of History, Political  
Science, and Philosophy

FALL 2019  
RHOD 332  
MWF 11:00 - 11:50  
3 Credit Hours

Office Hours  
MW 2:00 - 4:00  
F 2:00 - 3:00

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

**Catalogue Description:** Inquiries into the nature of the self, the universe and society as they relate to various definitions of reality, truth and value with readings from major works of classical and modern philosophers.

**Prerequisites:** None

### Student Learner Outcomes:

Students will:

- Develop the ability to reveal philosophical assumptions of themselves and others through dialogue,
- Gain an understanding of major theories in ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics,
- Learn to engage in reasoned debate and discussion with others,
- Improve skills in active reading to understand and explain philosophical texts,
- Improve your ability to think critically, reason soundly, and write clearly, and
- Develop the ability and a willingness to question one's own previously unquestioned assumptions.

### Textbook:

None: All readings posted on Blackboard (<https://blackboard.tamuk.edu/>)

### Contact:

#### **Dr. Brian Robinson**

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Rhode Hall 313

361-593-3602 (office)

361-593-3502 (fax)

[www.brobinson.info](http://www.brobinson.info)

\*preferred mode of communication



### Technology Requirements:

- Computer or mobile device that can access Blackboard (<https://blackboard.tamuk.edu/>),
- Audio recording device that can produce a digital audio file. (NB: most computers, smart phones, or tablets can already do this without extra software. Speak with the instructor if you do not have access to any such recording device; something will be worked out at no extra cost to you.)

**SCHEDULE**

**Deadlines at Glance:**

- |   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| • 3 Sentence (Daily Reading Engagement) | Every Class Meeting (before class) |
| • Dialogue Project 1                    | Sept. 27 by 11:59 pm               |
| • Exam 1                                | Oct. 9 by 11:59 pm                 |
| • Dialogue Project 2                    | Oct. 30 by 11:59 pm                |
| • Exam 2                                | Nov. 8 by 11:59 pm                 |
| • Dialogue Project 3                    | Dec. 4 by 11:59 pm                 |
| • Final Exam/Exam 3                     | Dec. 11 by 10:30 am                |

**Daily Schedule:**

Date	Reading Assignment (to be read before class)	Assignments due
<b>Introduction</b>		
• 8/21	Plato - Allegory of the Cave	none
• 8/23	Russell - The Value of Philosophy	3 sentences
<b>Epistemology</b>		
• 8/26	Corvino - The Fact/Opinion Distinction	3 sentences
• 8/28	Unger - An Argument for Skepticism	3 sentences
• 8/30	Lewis - Elusive Knowledge	3 sentences
• 9/2	No Class - Labor Day	
• 9/4	Lewis - Elusive Knowledge	3 sentences
• 9/6	Fricker - Testimonial Injustice	3 sentences
• 9/9	Fricker - Testimonial Injustice	3 sentences
	Popper - Science as Falsification	(none for this)
• 9/11	Popper - Science as Falsification	3 sentences
<b>Ethics</b>		
• 9/13	Rachels - Divine Command Theory	3 sentences
	Rachels - Morality is not Relative	(none for this)
• 9/16	Rachels - Morality is not Relative	3 sentences
• 9/18	Pojman - Utilitarianism	3 sentences
• 9/20	Pojman - Utilitarianism	3 sentences
• 9/23	Pojman - Kant and Deontological Theories	3 sentences
• 9/25	Pojman - Kant and Deontological Theories	3 sentences



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- 9/27 Annas - Virtue Ethics 3 sentences
  - 9/30 Annas - Virtue Ethics 3 sentences
- Dialogue Project 1**

**Personal Identity**

- 10/2 Perry - A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality (Night 1) 3 sentences
  - 10/4 Perry - A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality (Night 2) 3 sentences
  - 10/7 Perry - A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality (Night 3) 3 sentences
  - 10/9 Hume - We Have No Substantial Self with Which We Are Identical 3 sentences
  - Buddhist Scripture - Questions to King Milinda (for both)
- Exam 1**
- 10/11 Dennett - Where Am I? 3 sentences
  - 10/14 Dennett - Where Am I? 3 sentences

**Philosophy of Mind**

- 10/16 Jacquette - Descartes' Arguments for the Mind–Body Distinction 3 sentences (together)
  - Jen McWeeny - Princess Elisabeth and the Mind–Body Problem
  - 10/18 Armstrong - The Nature of Mind 3 sentences
  - 10/21 Putnam - The Nature of Mental States 3 sentences
  - 10/23 Chalmers - Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness 3 sentences
  - 10/25 Chalmers - Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness 3 sentences
  - 10/28 Turing - Computing Machinery and Intelligence 3 sentences
  - 10/30 Searle - Minds, Brains, and Programs 3 sentences
- Dialogue Project 2**

**Free Will**

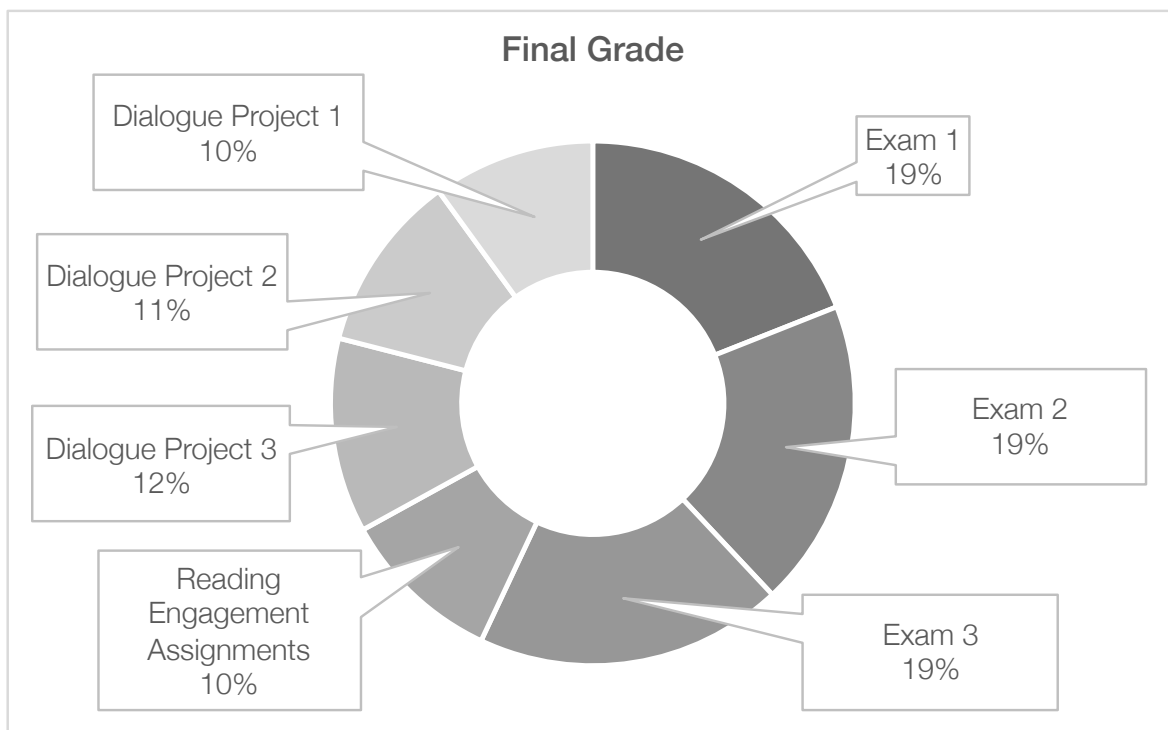
- 11/1 van Inwagen - The Powers of Rational Beings 3 sentences
  - 11/4 van Inwagen - The Powers of Rational Beings 3 sentences
  - 11/6 Hume - Of Liberty and Necessity 3 sentences
  - 11/8 Hume - Of Liberty and Necessity
- Exam 2**
- 11/11 Frankfurt - Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person 3 sentences
  - 11/13 Frankfurt - Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person 3 sentences
  - 11/15 Wolf - Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility 3 sentences



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Existential Issues		
• 11/18	Epicurus - Moderate Hedonism	3 sentences
• 11/20	Epictetus - Stoicism, Enchiridion	3 sentences
• 11/22	Camus - The Myth of Sisyphus	3 sentences
• 11/25	Nagel - The Absurd	3 sentences
• 11/27	Nagel - The Absurd	3 sentences
• 11/29	No Class - Thanksgiving Break	
• 12/2	Wolf - The Meanings of Lives	3 sentences
• 12/4	Wolf - The Meanings of Lives	<b>Dialogue Project 3</b>
• 12/11	(@ 10:30 am)	<b>Exam 3</b>

**COURSE GRADING AND REQUIREMENTS**



**3 Sentence (Reading Engagement Assignments)**

There are assigned readings for every class meeting. For each reading (accept the first), students are required to identify 3 sentences from the reading and submit them online through Blackboard prior to class. Even in cases of excused absences due to university travel (e.g., sports), this assignment is due at the assigned time and cannot be made up. These sentences can be any of the three following types and should be labelled:



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- Key Sentence (KS): A sentence that summarizes a main point of the reading or a section of it or that makes a claim that is central to the author's main argument in the reading.
- Bull (Bull): A sentence which makes a claim that you believe to be wildly implausible. (For example: "As everyone knows, the moral law requires of us all that we hop on one foot at least once a day and give Prof. Robinson half our salary.")
- What? (???): A sentence that is completely incomprehensible to you; you have no idea what it means.

Students should be prepared to report in class what sentences they selected and to explain why. For full credit, students must submit at least 2 KS's and 1 other sentence of any type. Students may miss up to 4 reading participation assignments over the course of the term and still receive full credit.

### Dialogue Projects

Three group dialogue projects will be assigned through the semester. The groups will be two students each (or three if necessary and pre-approved by the instructor). Each group will conduct and record a philosophical dialogue on the material covered in the past two sections of the course. Each student will individually then upload to Blackboard the audio file of the dialogue and their own written summary of the dialogue. Students are individual responsible for ensuring that all files are uploaded to Blackboard on time. The minimum length of the dialogues will increase throughout the semester. The first must be 10 minutes; the second 20 minutes; the third 30 minutes. The conversation must stay on topic for that length of time. The conversation starters for the first dialogue will initially be supplied by the instructor, and students will become increasingly responsible for these for the next two. 20% of the grade will be based on the dialogue itself. 80% will be based on each student's individual work (preparation for the dialogue and the written summary).

### Exams

There will be three exams, each over two sections of the course. (See the Schedule below.) Since the point of studying philosophy is not to memorize who said what, but rather to understand what was said (and be able to explain it in your own words), the exams will be take-home and open-notes exams. The questions will be distributed at least one week prior to the due date (see above). They are to be submitted via Blackboard; a demonstration of how to do this will be provided in class prior to the first exam. Students are individual responsible for ensuring that all files are uploaded to Blackboard on time. They will be subject to an automated plagiarism checker (Turnitin or similar). Plagiarism will result at minimum in zero credit for the exam.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### Attendance and Participation

Since philosophy is hard and much of the course will be discussion based, attendance is necessary for learning. It is your responsibility to be in class. Attendance may be taken regularly at the beginning of class. You may miss up to five class days without penalty, but on the sixth missed day your overall grade in the course may be reduced by one-half grade for each day missed beyond the fifth. Please provide documentation if absences are due to legitimate reasons. Falsifying the attendance of another student by signing in for them carries the penalty of immediate course failure. (See Academic



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Misconduct below.) I do not provide make-up lectures for students who were absent from class. (If, however, a student has problems understanding certain points about material covered during an absence, I will help by answering specific questions.) I will review material from an excused absence, after the student has obtained notes from a classmate and if the student has clearly read the assignment first.

Participation includes being in class on time, having the assigned text for the day, and being attentive in class. Simply being physically present in class is not sufficient to attain a passing attendance grade. As such, it is necessary to demonstrate some form of active engagement in the learning process.

Besides being on time, and silencing cell phones, I must stress the importance of everyone allowing for an open forum for discussion, so that we are all free to speak our minds on any topic without condemnation or hostility. Our job is to examine and evaluate ideas, not each other.

### **Reading Assignments**

The schedule for reading assignments is provided below. They are to be read prior to that day's class. Students are required to always bring the assigned reading to class. Students are required to have either a printed copy or a means of accessing the PDF in class. Please download them before class.

### **Plagiarism/Cheating**

Plagiarism on a exam or dialogue will result in no credit for the assignment and a report to the department chair and dean(s). Repeated plagiarism on more than one assignment can result in an automatic F for the course. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, paraphrasing or directly quoting published or unpublished work(s), words, ideas, or data by another person (including online resources) without documentation, citation, or acknowledgement. The submission of material(s) prepared by another person(s) or agency that sell academic papers or other material(s) also constitutes plagiarism. In the context of this course, plagiarism also includes, but is not limited to, quoting from an assigned reading on an exam without putting it in quotation marks.

Students must write their exams separately, independently, and without outside assistant. It is each student's responsibility to ensure that their answers on the exam are her/his own alone and do not match those of another student either from the same class, another section, or a previous semester. It is each student's responsibility to ensure that his or her submitted work adheres the university's policy on plagiarism and cheating. If you need help understanding this policy or what constitutes plagiarism, please contact me.

### **Office Hours**

My office hours are listed above. My door is open and I highly encourage students to come see me. My job is to help you succeed, and one of the best times I can do that is during office hours. So please come see me. If my office hours don't work for you, let me know and something can be arranged.

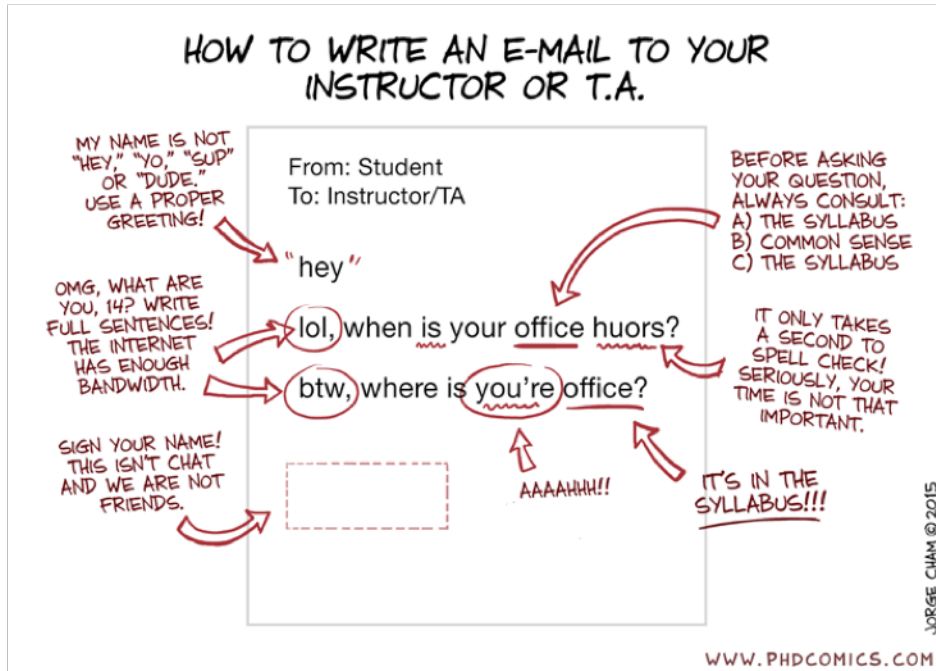


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## Email

I am available by email and you are welcome to contact me with questions. I generally respond the same day. However, you should think of any email to me as something formal, instead of as a casual email to a friend. You should include a subject, a salutation, and your name. I advise you read the following as well: <http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor>.



## Cell Phones, Computers, & Tape Recorders

(1) You may not use your phone during class (for calling or texting). (2) Unless otherwise stated, you may not use a computer (or tablet) in class, including to take notes or to view an assigned online reading. Studies have shown usage of computers in class leads to more distraction and lower grades for you and those around you and that you learn more by taking handwritten notes. (3) You may only record (audio or video) class sessions if you obtain my permission beforehand.

## Deadlines

All assignments must be turned in by the date and time specified. I do not accept late work unless class was missed for a documented emergency that arose without time for you to submit your work in advance. If you know that you will miss a class session prior to that session, you will need to submit your assignment in advance.

## Grades

A (100-90): Outstanding. The student displays thorough mastery of all material and genuine engagement with the subject matter. This grade is reserved for those individuals who attain the highest levels of excellence in thought and expression. Exceptionally good writing.



- B (80-89): Good. The student displays accurate understanding of the bulk of material. Writing is clear and free of mechanical errors.
- C (70-79): Adequate. The student displays basic grasp of roughly three fourths of the course material. There may arise occasional misunderstanding or inaccuracy. Writing is acceptable.
- D (60-69): Marginal. The student displays a grasp of the course material that deserves credit. Quality of apprehension of material indicates lack of effort and/or lack of aptitude.
- F (<60): Unacceptable. The student displays virtually no grasp of the course material.

### Names and Pronouns

If you prefer to be referred to by a different name or with a different pronoun, please let the instructor know. Please contact the instructor if you have any questions or concerns.

### Changes to Syllabi

The standards and requirements set forth in this syllabus may be modified at any time by the course instructor. Notice of such changes will be by announcement in class, by email notice, and by changes to this syllabus posted on Blackboard.

## UNIVERSITY POLICIES

### Six Drop Policy

The following provision does not apply to students with Texas public college or university credits prior to Fall 2007. The Texas Senate Bill 1231 specifies the number of course drops allowed to a student without penalty. After a student has dropped six courses, a grade of QF will normally be recorded for each subsequent drop. Additional information on Senate Bill 1231 is available at the Registrar's Office at (361) 593-2811 and at [Academic Procedure: Drop Policy](#).

### Students with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodations of their disability. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) as early as possible in the term at (361) 593-2904. DRC is located in the Life Service and Wellness building at 1210 Retama Drive.

### Classroom Conduct Expectations

Students are referred to the Student Code of Conduct section of the [Student Handbook](#). Students are expected to assume individual responsibility for maintaining a productive learning environment and conduct themselves with the highest regard



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for response and consideration of others. Ongoing or single behaviors considered distracting will be addressed by the faculty member initially, but if the behavior becomes excessive and the student refuses to respond to the faculty member's efforts, the issue will be referred to the Dean of Students. In the case of serious disruptive behavior in a classroom, the instructor will first request compliance from the student and if the student fails to comply, the instructor has the authority to ask the student to leave the classroom. The student is expected to comply with the instructor's request and may subsequently contest this action using procedures established by the department. If the student fails to leave after being directed to do so, assistance may be obtained from other university personnel, including the University Police Department. The incident shall be handled as an academic misconduct matter using established departmental procedures for academic misconduct to determine if the student should be allowed to return to the classroom.

### Academic Misconduct

Students are expected to adhere to the highest academic standards of behavior and personal conduct in this course and all other courses. Students who engage in academic misconduct are subject to University disciplinary procedures. Student are expected to be familiar with the current Student Handbook, especially the section on academic misconduct, which discusses conduct expectations and academic dishonesty rules. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to:

1. Cheating: deception in which the student misrepresents that he/she has mastered information on an academic exercise that he/she has not mastered; giving or receiving aid unauthorized by the professor on assignments or examinations.
2. Aid of academic dishonesty: Intentionally facilitating any act of academic dishonesty. Tampering with grades or taking part in obtaining or distributing any part of a scheduled test.
3. Fabrication: use of invented information or falsified research.
4. Plagiarism: unacknowledged quotation, and/or paraphrase of someone else's work, ideas, or data as one's own in work submitted for credit. Failure to identify information or essays from the internet and submitting them as one's own work also constitutes plagiarism. Please be aware that the University subscribes to the Turnitin plagiarism detection service. Your paper may be submitted to this service at the discretion of the instructor.
5. Lying: deliberate falsification with the intent to deceive in written or verbal form as it applies to an academic submission.
6. Bribery: providing, offering or taking rewards in exchange for a grade, an assignment, or the aid of academic dishonesty.
7. Threat: an attempt to intimidate a student, staff or faculty member for the purpose of receiving an unearned grade or in an effort to prevent reporting of an Honor Code violation.

Other forms of academic misconduct include but are not limited to:

1. Failure to follow published departmental guidelines, professor's syllabi, and other posted academic policies in place for the orderly and efficient instruction of classes, including laboratories, and use of academic resources or equipment.



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2. Unauthorized possession of examinations, reserved library materials, laboratory materials or other course related materials.
3. Failure to follow the instructor or proctor's test-taking instructions, including but not limited to not setting aside notes, books or study guides while the test is in progress, failing to sit in designated locations and/or leaving the classroom/ test site without permission during a test.
4. Prevention of the convening, continuation or orderly conduct of any class, lab or class activity. Engaging in conduct that interferes with or disrupts university teaching, research or class activities such as making loud and distracting noises, repeatedly answering cell phones/text messaging or allowing pagers to beep, exhibiting erratic or irrational behavior, persisting in speaking without being recognized, repeatedly leaving and entering the classroom or test site without authorization, and making physical threats or verbal insults to the faculty member, or other students and staff.
5. Falsification of student transcript or other academic records; or unauthorized access to academic computer records.
6. Nondisclosure or misrepresentation in filling out applications or other university records.
7. Any action which may be deemed as unprofessional or inappropriate in the professional community of the discipline being studied.

### Harassment /Discrimination

Texas A&M University-Kingsville does not tolerate discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, gender, gender identify or sexual orientation (or any other illegal basis) and will investigate all complaints that indicate sexual harassment, harassment, or discrimination may have occurred. Sexual harassment and sexual assault are types of sex discrimination. Such sexual misconduct is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Any member of the university community violating this policy will be subject to disciplinary action. A person who believes he/she has been the victim of sexual harassment or unlawful discrimination may pursue either the informal or the formal complaint resolution procedure. A complaint may be initially made to the Office of Compliance at (361) 593-4758, complainant's immediate supervisor, a department head, a supervisory employee, or the Dean of Students at (361) 593-3606 or the Office of Compliance at (361) 593-4758. Regardless of who the complaint is filed with, the Compliance Office will be notified of the complaint so it can be investigated.



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