



PHIL 1301-602

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

Spring 2021
MWF 11:00
online via Blackboard
3 Credit Hours

Office Hours

MWF 10:00-11:00
MW 9:00-10:00
by appointment (online strongly
recommended and preferred)

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.

Requirements during the COVID-19 Pandemic: In order to keep themselves and others safe and healthy during the pandemic, students attending class face-to-face are required to (1) wear face coverings over the nose and mouth and (2) scan the QR Code posted in the classroom/teaching location to log their attendance to assist in contact tracing, if needed

For information on the use of face coverings, see [Face Covering FAQ website](#).

For information on the Face Covering Policy, see [Face Coverings Policy website](#)

Students are responsible for staying informed on the latest updates regarding the university's response to COVID-19 by checking their TAMUK email regularly and accessing information at [TAMUK Coronavirus Updates website](#).

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

brian.robinson@tamuk.edu (preferred mode of communication)

Rhode Hall 324

361-593-3602 (office)

361-593-3502 (fax)

www.brobinson.info

Technology Requirements:

- Computer or mobile device that can access Blackboard (<https://blackboard.tamuk.edu/>),
- Computer, tablet, or smart phone with microphone (required) and camera (strongly recommended) to join virtual lectures or office hours and to record audio for dialogue projects.



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SCHEDULE

Deadlines at Glance:

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| • Quick Quizzes | Sundays by 11:59 pm |
| • Dialogue Project 1 | Feb. 28 by 11:59 pm |
| • Exam 1 | March 7 11 by 11:59 pm |
| • Dialogue Project 2 | April 4 by 11:59 pm |
| • Exam 2 | April 11 by 11:59 pm |
| • Dialogue Project 3 | April 28 by 11:59 pm |
| • Final Exam/Exam 3 | May 5 by 10:30 am |

Daily Schedule:

Date	Reading Assignment (to be read before class)	Assignments due
Introduction		
• 1/20	Plato - Allegory of the Cave	none
• 1/22	Russell - The Value of Philosophy	Quick Quiz
Epistemology		
• 1/25	Epistemology Survey & Discussion Corvino - The Fact/Opinion Distinction	Quick Quiz
• 1/27	Unger - An Argument for Skepticism	Quick Quiz
• 1/29	Lewis - Elusive Knowledge	
• 2/1	Lewis - Elusive Knowledge	Quick Quiz
• 2/3	Fricker - Testimonial Injustice	
• 2/5	Fricker - Testimonial Injustice	Quick Quiz
	Popper - Science as Falsification	
• 2/8	Popper - Science as Falsification	Quick Quiz
Ethics		
• 2/10	Ethics Survey & Discussion Rachels - Divine Command Theory Rachels - Morality is not Relative	Quick Quiz
• 2/12	Rachels - Morality is not Relative	Quick Quiz
• 2/15	Pojman - Utilitarianism	Quick Quiz
• 2/17	Pojman - Utilitarianism	Quick Quiz
• 2/19	Pojman - Kant and Deontological Theories	Quick Quiz
• 2/22	Pojman - Kant and Deontological Theories	Quick Quiz



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- 2/24 Annas - Virtue Ethics Quick Quiz
- 2/26 Annas - Virtue Ethics Quick Quiz
- 2/28 **Dialogue Project 1 due (by midnight)**

Personal Identity

- 3/1 **Personal Identity Survey & Discussion**
Perry - A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality (Night 1) Quick Quiz
- 3/3 Perry - A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality (Night 2) Quick Quiz
- 3/5 Perry - A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality (Night 3) Quick Quiz
- 3/7 **Exam 1 due (by midnight)**
- 3/8 Hume - We Have No Substantial Self with Which We Are Identical
and Buddhist Scripture - Questions to King Milinda Quick Quiz
- 3/10 Dennett - Where Am I?
- 3/12 Dennett - Where Am I? Quick Quiz

Philosophy of Mind

- 3/15 **Philosophy of Mind Survey & Discussion**
Jacquette - Descartes' Arguments for the Mind–Body Distinction
and McWeeny - Princess Elisabeth and the Mind–Body Problem Quick Quiz
- 3/17 Armstrong - The Nature of Mind Quick Quiz
- 3/19 Putnam - The Nature of Mental States Quick Quiz
- 3/22 Chalmers - Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness
- 3/24 Chalmers - Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness Quick Quiz
- 3/26 Turing - Computing Machinery and Intelligence Quick Quiz
- 3/29 Searle - Minds, Brains, and Programs Quick Quiz

Free Will

- 3/31 **Free Will Survey & Discussion**
van Inwagen - The Powers of Rational Beings
- 4/2 van Inwagen - The Powers of Rational Beings Quick Quiz
- 4/4 **Dialogue Project 2 due (by midnight)**
- 4/5 Hume - Of Liberty and Necessity
- 4/7 Hume - Of Liberty and Necessity Quick Quiz
- 4/9 Frankfurt - Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person
- 4/11 **Exam 2 due (by midnight)**



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| • 4/12 | Frankfurt - Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person | Quick Quiz |
| • 4/14 | Wolf - Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility | Quick Quiz |

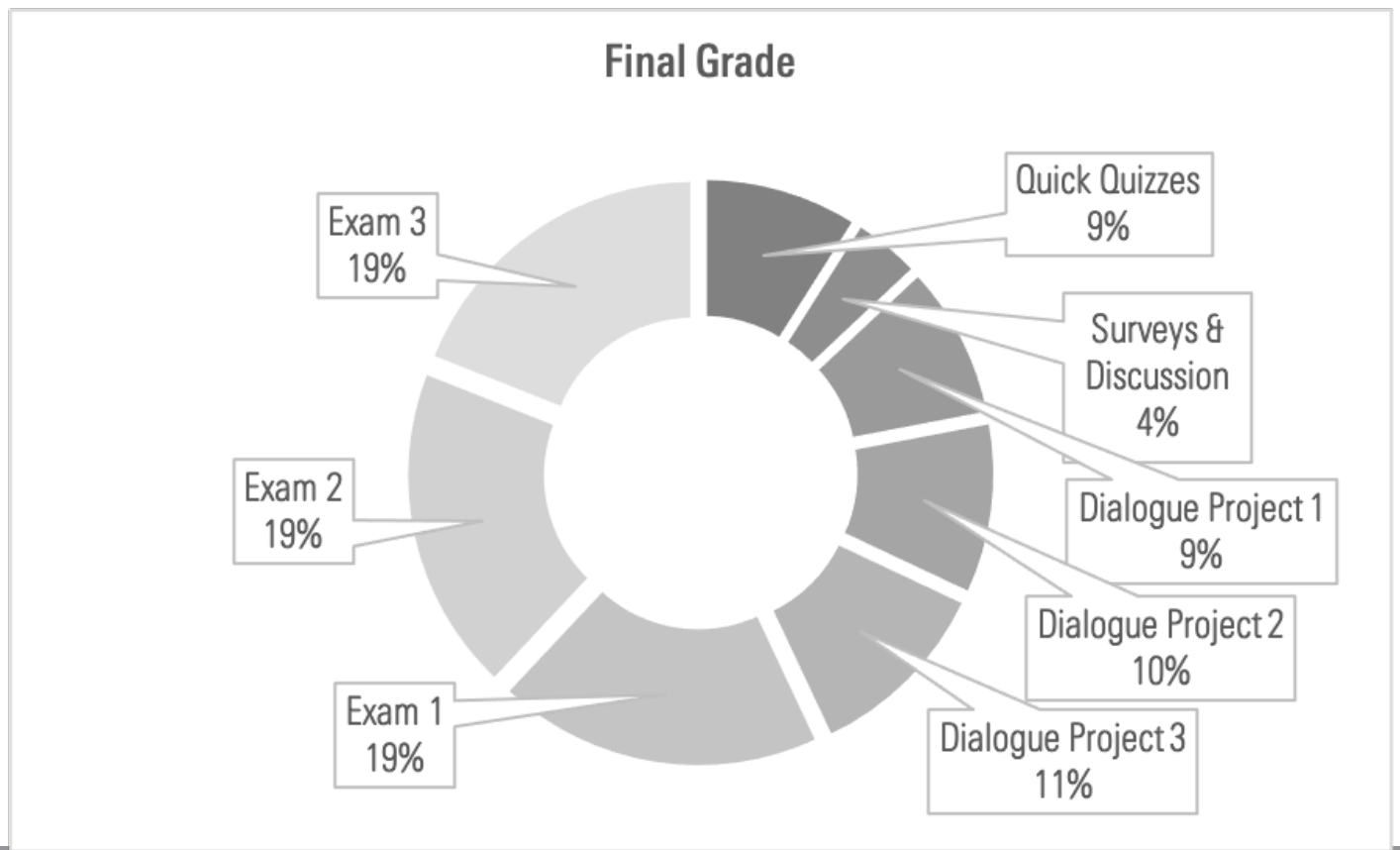
Existential Issues

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| • 4/16 | Existential Issues Survey & Discussion
Epicurus - Moderate Hedonism | Quick Quiz |
| • 4/19 | Epictetus - Stoicism, Enchiridion | Quick Quiz |
| • 4/21 | Camus - The Myth of Sisyphus | Quick Quiz |
| • 4/23 | Nagel - The Absurd | |
| • 4/26 | Nagel - The Absurd | Quick Quiz |
| • 4/28 | Wolf - The Meanings of Lives | Quick Quiz |
| Dialogue Project 3 due (by midnight) | | |

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| • 5/5 | Exam 3 due (at 10:30 am) |
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COURSE GRADING AND REQUIREMENTS

Grades are based on the following formula:



Exam 1 - 19%	Exam 2- 19%	Exam 3 - 19%
Dialogue Project 1 -9%	Dialogue Project 2 - 10%	Dialogue Project 3 - 11%
Reading Engagement Assignments (all combined) - 9%		Surveys and Discussions (all combined) 4%

To calculate your grade, multiply your grade on each of these assignments (or the average for reading engagement assignments and surveys and discussion) by the percentage listed above and add them. Do NOT simply average all grades together, as Blackboard does. Blackboard shows the correct grade for each assignment, but does not weight them.

Quick Quizzes (9%)

For each reading (and sometimes twice for a reading), there is a quick quiz. Quizzes will become available at the start of the week and will be due the following Sunday by the end of the day (except for the last week, when they are due on the last day of classes). Students are *strongly* encouraged to attend class before taking the quiz. The quick quizzes consist of a few content mastery questions, generally in multiple choice format. You may look back at the reading and your notes, while taking this quiz. You may also retake any quiz as many times as you like; only the highest grade will count. The point of these quizzes is not to stump you, but to allow you to check if you caught some of the key points. If you can't figure out the answer, ask in class, by email, or during office hours

Generally, they cannot be made up except in cases of extenuating circumstances. Approved university travel (such as for sports) does not qualify. Students need to stay on top of these assignments. Part of the point is to keep students from falling too far behind. Students may miss up to 3 quick quizzes over the course of the term without penalty.

Surveys and Discussion Participation (4%)

At the beginning each of the six sections, students are required to complete a short survey rating their agreement or disagreement with five to seven prompts. There are no right answers; grades are based on completing the assignment. The point of this survey is (a) to introduce you to the coming material, (b) provide me with a fuller picture of your views on philosophical issues, (c) allow you to determine your own views, (d) allow students to come to understand the views of others, and (e) help prepare you for the Dialogue Projects.

Surveys will be completed on Blackboard. Answers are anonymous; credit is awarded for completing the survey. Record your answers and have them available to you when class meets on the date they are due. Surveys will be available on Blackboard one week before they are due. They **must** be completed before class time on the assigned day.

On the date that a survey is assigned, have your response with you. Students will be split into groups on Zoom to discuss their responses. Participating in this discussion will result in full credit for the discussion component of this grade.

3 Dialogue Projects (First: 9%, Second: 10%, Third: 11%)

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 then individually upload to Blackboard the



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audio file of the dialogue and their own written summary of the dialogue. Students are individually 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 (19% Each)

There will be three exams, each over two sections of the course. (See the schedule above.) 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). Exams must be submitted via Blackboard. 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. Plagiarism on a second exam will result in an F for the term.

COURSE POLICIES

Plagiarism/Cheating

Plagiarism on a exam or dialogue project 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 sells 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 assistance. It is each student's responsibility to ensure that their answers on the exam are their 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 their 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

This term, out of a necessity of physical distancing, my office hours are virtual and by appointment only. Office hours will be posted each week on Starfish, where students can reserve an appointment time. 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>.

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 me know. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns. My pronouns are he/him/his.

Changes to Syllabus

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



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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 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



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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.
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)



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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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