

Introduction to Philosophy – Phil 100

Summer 2008, Session II (Online)

Instructor: Jeffrey Dunn

377 Bartlett Hall

Description:

This course is designed to introduce you to several major themes in philosophy and works by important philosophers. In pursuit of this goal, we will be reading works from ancient philosophy all the way through to contemporary philosophy, including philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, and A.J. Ayer. By the end of the course you should have a better understanding of what philosophy is, and should have cultivated the ability to think and write clearly.

*Note: The workload for this course will probably end up being less than the amount of work in a regular (e.g., Fall or Spring) term course. However, since this is a compressed summer session lasting only a bit more than five weeks, the course may feel quite intensive.

Text:

Core Questions in Philosophy (4th edition). Elliot Sober. Pearson Prentice Hall.
ISBN: 0-13-189869-8

Students are required to purchase a copy of this text. It is widely available online. For students in the Amherst area, a limited number of texts have been ordered at Amherst Books. Please be sure to purchase the 4th edition. Several of the assigned readings are not available in our text. These will be made available to you online.

Contact Information:

Email: All email correspondence for this course will be through the email service available on our course's Vista page. Every member of the course is able to send and receive messages through this service. This is NOT the same as your regular or university email account. **IMPORTANT:** *I will not be regularly checking my UMass email account for this course. To get in touch with me you must use the Vista email service.*

Online Office Hours: I will hold virtual office hours in our course's Vista chat room on Thursdays from 10:00 – 11:00 am (EDT). In this chat room, I can respond to your questions in real time. There is a group chat room, where you can ask me questions which are visible to all students in the class. There is also a private chat room where you can ask me questions which are visible to only you and me. If you would like to ask me a question in the private chat room, please let me know this by sending me a message in the group chat room. I am also available for online office hours by appointment. Please send me an email to set up an appointment.

Discussion Boards: There are discussion boards that have been created for each topic that we cover in this course. Posting questions and comments is a great way to stay up on the material that is presented. I have posted questions for discussion on these discussion boards and from time to time will add comments. (For more on discussion boards, see below)

Actual Office Hours: For those of you in the Amherst area this summer, I will occasionally be available to meet in person at my office on the UMass Amherst campus by appointment.

*Note: Since this is an online course with no class meetings, it is imperative that you contact me in one of the ways above if you have any questions, or get confused with some of the material presented.

Course Mechanics:

The course is divided into four units: (1) Introduction and Logic, (2) Philosophy of Religion, (3) Epistemology, and (4) Ethics. After the brief introductory unit, we will start unit 2 and consider arguments for and against the existence of God. In the third unit, we will be interested in questions concerning knowledge: what is it, how much of it do we have, and how do we get it? In the final unit we will ponder questions about goodness, rightness, and morality.

Our textbook contains both lectures and original texts written by philosophers. Reading assignments will usually consist of one lecture and a corresponding original text. Occasionally, I will post supplementary lecture notes in addition to the reading assignment. Reading assignments are posted on the calendar. I have also posted an Excel spreadsheet, which gives an overview of the assignments. Ideally, you will read the lecture and the corresponding text for each day on that day. This is to your advantage, and will help you fulfill the discussion requirement for this course (see below).

You will notice that on the home page for our course there are five learning modules, corresponding to each week of the course. When you click on a learning module, you will see a heading for each day that there is a reading assignment. So, for example, if you click on the learning module titled "Week 1", you will see headings for July 14 & 15, July 16, and July 17 & 18. Below each of these headings you will find a link to the discussion board for that day's reading assignment. You will also find a document which summarize the main points from that day's lecture. In addition, some days have supplementary material relevant to the day's lecture. Hopefully, these learning modules are fairly straightforward and self-explanatory. If you have any questions, be sure to let me know. The best way to stay up on the course material is to work your way through the learning module for each week on that week.

Grading:

There are four aspects to your grade in this course:

1. Midterm Exam
2. Final Exam
3. Essay Assignment
4. Discussion Requirement

Midterm

There will be a midterm exam roughly half-way through the term. It will be posted on Friday, August 1, and must be completed before 11:59 pm on Sunday, August 3. It will consist of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, short answer questions (1-3 sentences), and one long answer question (2-3 paragraphs). There is a time limit for the midterm. Once you open

the midterm, the time will begin and you must submit it within the time limit. (I will let you know what the time limit is as the midterm approaches).

Final Exam

There will be a final exam at the end of the term. It will be posted on Monday, August 18. It must be submitted by the last day of class, Wednesday, August 20 before 8:00 pm. The final exam is cumulative and the format will be similar to the midterm.

Essay Assignment

You are required to submit one essay for this course. It is due by noon on Wednesday, August 20, and should be 2-3 pages long (double-spaced, 12 point font). I have posted essay questions on our main course page. You must answer one of them to meet the essay requirement.

Discussion

In addition to the two exams and essay assignment, you are expected to participate in the online discussion board. To receive full discussion credit, you must make at least **two quality** posts for each week's learning module, by the end of that week. For the purposes of discussion, the week ends on Sunday at 9:00 pm. For example: to receive full discussion credit for the Week 1 learning module, you must have made at least **two quality** posts spread out on any of the Week 1 discussion boards by Sunday, July 20 at 9:00 pm.

A quality post is either

- a well-articulated, and thought-out response to a current discussion thread or question,

or

- a well-articulated, and thought-out post that raises a question or starts a discussion.

A quality post has the following characteristics:

1. It is thoughtful. (A post can be thoughtful in many ways: by looking carefully at a particular part of the assigned reading; by raising an original point or question; by seeing a connection between several issues; by responding insightfully to a previous question or post, etc.)
2. It is clearly stated.
3. It is relevant to the topic of discussion.
4. It does not merely state your *opinion* or how you *feel* about a certain topic. In this course we will be interested in giving *reasons* or *arguments* for the things that we say.

If you have at least two quality posts per week, you receive full discussion credit. If you do not, you will lose discussion credit. Occasionally, I will post comments on the discussion board, but for the most part, this is a student-lead aspect of the course.

Grading Breakdown

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Points</u>
Midterm	70
Final	100
Essay	70
<u>Discussion</u>	<u>60 (12 points per week)</u>
Total:	300 points

What you can expect from me:

I will post documents in the learning modules that clarify and organize the material presented in lecture.

I will answer any Vista emailed questions that I receive as promptly as possible (note: you're likely to get a quicker response if you email me from 9-5, M-F).

I will hold "virtual" office hours where we can chat online in real time.

I will be available by appointment to chat online during times other than my office hours.

I will give you constructive and useful feedback concerning your performance on exams.

I will occasionally post comments on the discussion board (if necessary) to clear up confusion or redirect the discussion.

What I expect from you:

You will complete the assigned readings and lectures by the end of each week.

You will make at least *two* posts to the discussion board for each learning module (and more if you like!).

You will contact me if you are confused about something in the reading or that we have gone over in lecture.

You will complete the two exams and essay assignment by the posted deadlines.

Students with Disabilities:

If you have a disability relevant to this course that you think that I should be aware of, please contact me as soon as possible.

Academic Dishonesty:

Academic dishonesty is a very serious issue, and I take it very seriously: don't do it. If you do, there are severe penalties that can be found here:

http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/code_conduct/acad_honest.htm

If I discover *any* instance of academic dishonesty, I will pursue the harshest penalty consistent with university policy.

***Note: If you have any questions about the course, or this syllabus, please be sure to contact me.** I look forward to an enjoyable introduction to philosophy course!