

# Introduction to Philosophy

Phil 101A · Prof. J. Dunn

Fall 2012  
M,W,F 10:30 - 11:30  
318 Asbury  
DePauw University

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## Description

There's an old Monty Python sketch, "The Argument Clinic", where patrons can pay to engage in various kinds of arguments. The sketch is funny ([link](#)), but there's no indication that anyone actually gets better at analyzing arguments on account of visiting the Argument Clinic. It would, however, be very useful to cultivate this ability. This, in fact, is one of the main goals of *this* course, and so you could think of Phil 101A as having a subtitle:

### **Introduction to Philosophy: *The Argument Clinic***

Arguments are everywhere, and, as we will see, clear and careful thinking requires the ability to analyze these arguments. This course will introduce you to major themes and works in philosophy by focusing on arguments and their analysis. By the end of the course you should have gained a familiarity with several important debates in philosophy (What do we know? Does God exist? How should we behave?) and some important philosophical thinkers, both historical and contemporary (*e.g.*, Plato, Descartes, Hume, Bertrand Russell, Peter Singer). You should also have cultivated the ability to think clearly and carefully through complex topics by giving and analyzing arguments.

## Textbook

► *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings (5th Edition)*, Perry, Bratman, & Fischer, OUP.

## Grading

Writing Assignments (45%)	
Argument Assignments (5):	15% (3% each)
Religion Papers (3):	15% (2%/5%/8%)
Final Paper:	15%
Exams (45%)	
Exam 1:	13%
Exam 2:	13%
Final Exam:	19%
Participation (10%)	

## Course Requirements

### *Participation*

One of the best ways to learn philosophy is to engage in careful, informed discussion about the material being read. You are expected to contribute to such discussion each day in class. For such discussions to be profitable, however, they must be *informed*. This means that you are also expected to *carefully* do the reading, and come to class with questions and comments. I will assess this aspect of your participation based on your engagement during and outside class, your attendance, and on activities we will do most days during the first ten minutes of class.

These activities will consist of one of the following:

- (1) Reading Quiz. If you carefully do the reading before each class, you should do fine on these quizzes. Your lowest two reading quiz scores will be dropped. If you are absent from class, or late you cannot make up a reading quiz.
- (2) Free Write. You will be asked to write for 5-7 minutes on a question related to the day's reading. I will collect and read these to see what you are thinking, but you get full credit just for doing them. These give you a good chance to identify your own ideas about the material and to practice writing. You cannot make these up if you are late or absent.
- (3) Group Discussion/Activity. On some days, we will have a group discussion or activity. I will collect a record of what your group discussed. On other days, I will announce that a Think Piece related to a particular reading assignment is due for the following class. A Think Piece is something between a polished piece of writing and a Free Write. Think of it as a thoughtful letter to a friend. Think Pieces need to be typed and a hard copy needs to be brought to class. On days when a Think Piece is due, you will discuss your Think Piece with fellow students for the First Ten.

Using laptops and smartphones negatively affects class participation and discussion. So please put these items away during class.

### *Argument Assignments*

During the first unit of our course, we will have five short, focused writing assignments that are designed to help you improve the basic skills needed for constructing and analyzing arguments. The due dates for these assignments are available on the course schedule, which is posted online.

These assignments themselves will be announced in class and posted online.

Because the assignments build on each other sequentially, it is important that you keep up with these assignments. Late assignments will not be accepted.

### *Religion Papers*

This is the writing assignment for the second unit of the course.

Philosophy is all about fostering real debate between opposing viewpoints. For this assignment you will write a series of three papers on the same topic and respond to the viewpoints of your classmates. This will give you a chance to use the argumentative skills you have practiced in the first unit.

The first paper will be a short piece (200-400 words) responding to a prompt about the existence of God.

I will look through these first papers, select 3-5 as *exhibits* and then post them to Moodle. Your second paper will be a slightly longer piece (500-700 words), which responds in some way to one of the exhibits and furthers the debate.

I will then look through this second batch of papers, select 3-5 as *new exhibits* and then post them to Moodle. Your third, and final paper (1,000-1,300 words), will respond in some way to the new exhibits. For more information about these papers, see the assignment description, which is posted online.

First Paper Due: **Oct. 3**

Second Paper Due: **Oct. 12**

Third Paper Due: **Oct. 29**

### *Final Paper*

Your final paper is the most involved writing assignment in this class. It is a 1,500 - 2,000 word argumentative paper and is due on the last day of the course, **Dec. 7**. This paper will give you the chance to display your full argumentative abilities.

To help you write a strong final paper, you need to turn in a rough draft by November 26. I will give you comments on your draft and then return it to you for revisions.

For more information about the paper, see the link on the course website.

\* I strongly recommend that you take advantage of the Writing Center in the Academic Resource Center, located in 115 Asbury. After scheduling an appointment, you will have the chance to meet with a trained tutor who will read your work and offer feedback. This is a great way to improve your writing, however slots can fill up quickly, so please plan ahead to take advantage of this great resource.

### *Exams*

At the conclusion of each of the three sections, there will be an in-class exam. The exam will consist of questions requiring paragraph-length answers, and short essays.

Exam 1: **Sep. 28**

Exam 2: **Nov. 5**

Final Exam: **Dec. 14, 8:30 - 11:30 am** (finals week)

Exams 1 and 2 are non-cumulative, covering material solely from Units 1 and 2 (respectively). These exams are each worth 13% of your overall grade. The Final Exam is cumulative. It will cover the material from Unit 3 in-depth and the material from the earlier units in less detail. This exam is worth 19% of your overall grade.

### *Other Requirements*

You should take control of your experience in this course: what you get out of it will largely be a function of what you put in to it. If you are falling behind or are confused about something, please make arrangements to meet with me. I'm on campus every day and very happy to discuss this interesting material with you.

### *Things You Can Expect From Me*

I will give clear and prompt feedback on your work.

I will be available to discuss the course material outside of class.

I will assist you in choosing a paper topic, and on editing and revising your final paper.

I will be available for extra help when needed.

## Special Considerations

DePauw University is committed to providing equal access to academic programs and university-administered activities and reasonable modifications/accommodations to students with disabilities in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, as amended in 2008. Any student needing special accommodations due to a disability should contact the Coordinator of Student Disability Services, Pam Roberts, 302 Harrison Hall or call (765) 658-6267. It is the responsibility of each student to discuss implementation of approved modifications/accommodations with each faculty member and/or staff member within one week of the date of receiving a modification/accommodation approval memo or within the first two weeks of the academic semester.

## Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is very important, and violations are serious offenses, which I take very seriously. There is a clear Academic Integrity Policy that can be found here:

<http://www.depauw.edu/handbooks/student/acadlife/app/aip/>

It is your responsibility to read the university policy. If you are unclear about what constitutes a violation of academic integrity, it is your responsibility to contact me with any questions so that you are clear about it. Ignorance is not an excuse. The *minimum* penalty for violations of Academic Integrity is a 0 on the relevant assignment and a further reduction in your overall grade.