

WHAT PHILOSOPHY IS

80-100, SPRING 2008

GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION

Time: Monday and Wednesday 9:30–10:20 AM

Room: Doherty Hall A310

INSTRUCTOR

Name: David Gray

Office: Baker Hall 143

Email: degray@andrew.cmu.edu

Office Hours: Monday and Tuesday 10:30–12:00 PM or by appointment

TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Name: Jonah Schupbach

Office: Baker Hall 143

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Office Hours: Wednesday 10:30–12:00 PM and Friday 3:30–4:20 PM

Name: Robert Tillman

Office: Baker Hall 138

Email: rtillman@andrew.cmu.edu

Office Hours: Wednesday 3:00–4:00 PM and Thursday 3:00–4:00 PM

RECITATION INFORMATION

SECTION I: Schupbach

Time: Friday 2:30–3:20 PM

Room: Porter Hall 226C

SECTION J: Tillman

Time: Friday 2:30–3:20 PM

Room: Porter Hall A21

SECTION K: Schupbach

Time: Friday 1:30–2:20 PM

Room: Porter Hall 226B

SECTION L: Tillman

Time: Friday 12:30–1:20 PM

Room: Porter Hall A21

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES

Important course information will be posted on the Blackboard for this class on the web. Please routinely check for updates at:

<http://www.cmu.edu/blackboard/>

REQUIRED TEXTS

All articles are available in PDF format on Blackboard.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

“Wonder is the feeling of a philosopher,” said Plato, “and philosophy begins in wonder.” In this course, I hope to share the feelings of wonder that have affected philosophers for millennia. In particular, we will explore classical and contemporary works that address a few representative philosophical problems concerning God, the Good and the Beautiful. While this course’s approach will perhaps be more rigorous than you are used to, the problems we address should not be. For as long as there have been people, adults and children (*especially* children) have asked these questions. You have undoubtedly asked some of them yourself.

There is no simple and precise definition of the subject-matter for philosophy, as it covers many different topics and disciplines. For this course, we will look at three branches within philosophy and some basic problems they each address. We will begin with the theological question of whether it is possible to demonstrate that God exists. Then we will move into the domain of ethics, which concerns the nature of morality and questions of right and wrong. Following that, we will return to theology and examine the relationship between reason and religious faith. Finally, we will conclude with aesthetics, focusing on whether judgments of a work of art are susceptible to rational deliberation.

Throughout the course, you will not merely learn about philosophy, but you will also actively practice it. I encouraged you to critically examine and develop your own views on these issues. While these problems may initially appear obscure and irrelevant, our responses to them profoundly shape how we understand ourselves and our place in the world.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this term, I expect that you will be able to

- Describe those problems troubling philosophers that we cover in class,
- Clearly articulate the arguments that attempt to solve these problems,
- Critically evaluate these arguments, and
- Communicate all the above through both verbal and written discourse.

Each course requirement and assignment is designed with these objectives in mind.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Short Assignments	= 25%
First Paper	= 25%
Second Paper	= 25%
Final Exam	= 25%

Philosophy is a full-contact sport. However, we will wrestle with arguments and not attack those advocating them. In order that you seriously digest the material, ***attendance is required*** and I will encourage class participation. You are allowed three total absence from lecture and recitation, no questions asked. Please note, however, these are not vacation days,

they are for illness, job interviews, and other emergencies. Each additional absence results in 2 points deducted from your final grade, for a maximum of 10 points (i.e., one letter grade).

Philosophy is also a social enterprise, so I strongly suggest that you discuss this course's issues with your TA, instructor, fellow classmates, friends, and family. However, all written work must be done independently, unless otherwise noted. Students are expected to be familiar with the university policies on cheating and plagiarism. If you have any questions, please ask; do not assume.

GRADING SCALE

Each assignment will be graded on a 100 point scale. Unless you are notified of otherwise, the grading distribution will be as follows:

90–100	A
80–89.9	B
70–79.9	C
60–69.9	D
0–59.9	R

Your final course grade will be on the same 100 point scale.

COURSE OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION – WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

January 14: Course Introduction.

January 16: Plato, *Apology*.

January 18: Recitation.

PART I – THE EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD

January 21: No Class.

January 23: Saint Anselm, “The Ontological Argument from *Proslogium*”.

William L. Rowe, “The Ontological Argument”.

January 25: Recitation.

January 28: Saint Thomas Aquinas, “The Five Ways from *Summa Theologica*”.

Michael Martin, “The Cosmological Argument”.

January 30: David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

February 1: Recitation.

February 4: William Paley, “The Argument from Design from *Natural Theology*”.

February 6: Stephen Jay Gould, “The Panda’s Thumb” and “Senseless Signs of History”.

February 8: Recitation.

PART II – THE NATURE OF MORALITY

February 11: Plato, *Euthyphro*.

February 13: Ruth Benedict, “Anthropology and the Abnormal”.

James Rachels, “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism from *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*”.

February 15: Recitation.

February 18: David Hume, “Morality as Based on Sentiment”.

James Rachels, “Subjectivism in Ethics from *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*”.

February 20: Ayn Rand, “Value Yourself from *Atlas Shrugged*”.

James Rachels, “Ethical Egoism from *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*”.

February 22: Recitation.

First paper topic handed out.

February 25: Jeremy Bentham, “The Principle of Utility from *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*”.

Robert Nozick, “The Experience Machine from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*”.

February 27: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*.

E.F. Carritt, “Criticisms of Utilitarianism”.

February 29: Recitation.

Rough draft of first paper must be brought to recitation on February 29.

March 3: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*.

March 5: Michael Walzer, “Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands”.

First paper due at 11:59:59 PM on March 5.

March 7: No Recitation.

March 10: No Class

March 12: No Class.

March 14: No Recitation.

PART III – REASON AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF

March 17: Richard Swinburne, “Why God Allows Evil”.

March 19: J.L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”.

March 21: Recitation.

March 24: Blaise Pascal, “The Wager from *Pensées*”.

William G. Lycan and George N. Schlesinger, “You Bet Your Life: Pascal’s Wager Defended”.

March 26: *Genesis 22*: 1–14.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*.

March 28: Recitation.

March 31: Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Death of God”.

April 2: Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*.

April 4: Recitation.

Second paper topic handed out.

PART IV – ÆSTHETIC JUDGMENT

April 7: Plato, *Republic*.

April 9: Aristotle, *Poetics*.

April 11: Recitation.

Rough draft of second paper must be brought to recitation on April 11.

April 14: David Hume, *Of the Standards of Taste*.

April 16: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*.

Second paper due at 11:59:59 PM on April 16.

April 18: No Recitation.

April 21: Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*.

April 23: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*.

April 25: Recitation.

April 28: Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?*

EPILOGUE – WHAT PHILOSOPHY IS

April 30: Plato, *Republic*.

Voltaire, “The Good Brahmin”.

May 2: Recitation.

May TBA: Final Exam. (*See the Spring 2008 Final Exam Schedule*)

EXPLANATION OF ASSIGNMENTS

Reading: Philosophy texts are not textbooks or novels. Unlike these, they present sophisticated arguments that attempt to justify a particular position or point-of-view. Hence, you need to do more than merely peruse the readings: you must endeavor to understand the author’s position and how the author justifies it. In some cases, this may take multiple readings to accomplish. However, reading assignments are relatively short so that this is feasible. In addition, it is good to take notes while reading, so that you can remember the author’s main points. For the more difficult readings, questions will be provided to help guide you in this. Finally, feel free to bring questions to class. This material is hardly obvious and, despite a tremendous amount of scholarship, it still challenges the most intelligent of people.

Class Participation: Class attendance and participation is very important in understanding and retaining the class material. As noted above, attendance is required and I will do my best to encourage class participation. I recognize that not everybody is comfortable speaking in class, and so only repeated class absences will lower your grade. Nevertheless, active class participation can increase your final grade if you are in a borderline situation.

Short Assignments: Every week or two, a short (2–3 page) writing assignment will be assigned and due the following week. These will involve composing either an analytic summary of an argument from the text *or* a position paper where you are asked to take a position on an issue and build an argument to support it. These assignments will give you some

prefatory experience for writing your two papers. Late assignments will be accepted, but with a penalty.

Films: Throughout the term, I will be showing several films exploring the subject matter we are covering in the course. You are not required to attend these, but you can complete a write-up for extra credit towards your overall short assignment grade. The movie schedule will be handed out once it is finalized.

Papers: Communicating your ideas, and those of others, is the most essential skill you can learn in college. I will provide you opportunities to train this skill in the form of two medium length (6–7 page) papers. These papers will assess your ability to

- Reconstruct and critically evaluate important philosophical arguments and
- Construct a reasoned argument in support of a considered position or claim.

The weekly assignments will also help develop these abilities. The particular format and topics of each paper will be announced and discussed in class. Attached to this syllabus are some basic tips for writing a philosophy paper, and your TAs will devote their recitations to helping guide you in writing. Late papers will be accepted, but with a penalty.

Final Exam: There will be a final exam for this course, which will test your overall comprehension of the course material. In particular, there will be

- Short answer questions, where you are provided a few lines from the reading and its author, and you must answer a question concerning this author's position, and
- Longer answer questions, where you are asked to compare and contrast the positions of two or more author's on some philosophical issue.

Everything on the final exam will consist of material explicitly presented and discussed in class, so take good class notes. We will discuss the final exam towards the end of the term. Failure to take the final exam will result in a failing grade for the course.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

I recognize that most students are human beings with occasional human problems associated with human finitude. Illness, family emergencies, job interviews, Other Professors, etc. . . will inevitably lead to legitimate conflicts over your time. If you expect that you will be missing class, be unable to turn in an assignment on time, or take the final exam at the assigned time, please notify me (either in class or via email) ***in advance*** and we can agree on a reasonable accommodation. Arrangements after the fact will only be made in extraordinary, documented circumstances.

CHALLENGING AN ASSIGNMENT GRADE

I also recognize that I and your TAs/graders are human too: mistakes will occasionally occur when grading your papers. Therefore, you have ***one week*** after an assignment is

handed back to challenge its grade. To do so, you must return the assignment plus a clearly written explanation of your reason for challenging the grade to whomever graded it. We will promptly and seriously consider all such challenges and meet with you, if necessary, to resolve them. Assignments without a written explanation will not be considered. After one week, no challenges will be accepted, except in extraordinary, documented circumstances. Of course, if you are not satisfied with your grade, but recognize that it was not due to a fault in the grading, I encourage you to talk with either myself or your TA/grader to learn how to improve on future assignments.

EXTRA CREDIT

Opportunities for extra credit will be provided at my discretion. If provided, extra credit will only count towards your overall assignment grade. It will also only be factored in once the curve has already been determined. If there are any community lectures, documentaries, television specials, news reports, web content, etc...on topics related to course material, please bring them to my attention. I may provide extra credit opportunities for the class based upon them.

A NOTE ON CLASSROOM COURTESY

Classes begin on the half-hour. Students are expected to be seated by that time and to remain seated until the class is dismissed. If you must leave before the class ends because of a medical appointment, or similar commitment, notify me before class begins and sit near the door. Students who leave without providing such notice and have not suddenly taken ill will be expected to file a drop form and not to return.

VIDEO TAPING AND AUDIO RECORDING

Under Pennsylvania state law, consent is required to record any communication uttered by a person who has an expectation that it will not be recorded by any electronic device. Your instructor, TAs, and classmates have a reasonable expectation to not be recorded in this course. Therefore, video taping and audio recording are prohibited without the expressed permission of the instructor, TAs, and your classmates.

PLAGIARISM – THE SHORT NOTE

plagiarism (plā'jĕ-rîz'ĕm) *n* 1: a piece of writing that has been copied from someone else and is presented as being your own work. 2: the act of plagiarizing; taking someone's words or ideas as if they were your own.

Plagiarism is bad. Do not do it. It amounts to lying, cheating, and stealing. Anyone caught doing it can fairly assume that they will not pass this course.

To encourage proper citing of sources, *turnitin.com* will be used for submitting each of your assignments. A separate handout on this process will be provided.

PLAGIARISM – THE LONG NOTE

It is the individual student's responsibility to be aware of the university policies on academic integrity, including the policies on cheating and plagiarism. This is available online at: <http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/Cheating.html> and in the section on "University Policies" of *The Word: Undergraduate Student Handbook*.

Students who plagiarize face serious sanctions at both the course level, and the university level. At the course level, faculty members have significant discretion to determine the sanctions that are appropriate to individual cases of cheating and plagiarism. Within the Philosophy Department, it is customary for professors to give plagiarized assignments a failing grade and, when appropriate, fail students for the course. Additionally, a letter may be sent to the Dean of Students indicating that the student in question has submitted plagiarized material and received a course-level sanction. Plagiarism is also a violation of the community standards of Carnegie Mellon University. As such, allegations of plagiarism may be brought before a University Academic Review Board, which will determine whether community standards have been violated and level additional sanctions, if appropriate. Although this body also has significant discretion over the sanctions that it levels, plagiarism can result in academic probation, suspension, and even expulsion.

GENERAL INFORMATION FOR WRITING A SUCCESSFUL PHILOSOPHY PAPER

STRATEGY

- Sometimes you will be asked to do a **short analytical summary** of the argument in some text. The purpose of this is to take a longer argument from a reading and condense it down to a concise statement of
 - The main conclusion of the text’s argument,
 - The set of premises or reasons that are offered as support for that conclusion, and
 - How those premises are supposed to support or entail the conclusion.

In most disciplines, you will inevitably find it necessary to explain the arguments and positions of others. However, a analytic summary is **not** a book report. The challenge is to ascertain the essential elements of the author’s argument (i.e., the premises, conclusions, and the inferences from the former to the latter) and not be distracted by the inessential parts (e.g., author digressions, elaborate introductions, examples not essential to the argument, and other rhetorical devices).

- Other times you will be asked to do a **short position paper** on some contentious issue. The purpose of this is to building a reasoned argument in support of a particular claim or conclusion. You should
 - State concisely your central claim and then
 - Demonstrate how this conclusion is supported or entailed by reasons (premises) that are plausible in their own right or difficult to deny.

A good paper, no matter the subject matter, typically involves making a reasoned argument for some claim. You probably have some experience with this from high school and college writing courses, and so this should not be too foreign.

- As indicated on the syllabus, a typical philosophy paper requires that you
 - Reconstruct and critically evaluate important philosophical arguments and
 - Construct a reasoned argument in support of a considered position or claim.

As such, a typical philosophy is usually an extended position paper that involves providing brief analytical summaries of the positions that you are supporting, critiquing, developing, or however addressing.

As with analytic summaries, the crucial challenge is **staying focused** when describing the relevant aspects of the position or theory you are assessing. You do not need to provide a comprehensive outline of the position you are addressing. Instead, just present the particular aspects that you will be addressing in your paper. For instance, say a thinker provides five separate arguments for a position, and you want to argue that two of these are bunk. Then present only those two arguments, and do so in

sufficient detail such that it will be clear later where precisely you disagree with the thinker. Briefly mention that there are other arguments (without going into them) you do not address in either your introduction or conclusion. Any more than this will only distract the reader and waste precious space.

ESSENTIALS

- **Use the first person singular!** I know that in high school, you were repeatedly told to never do this. I hate to burst your bubble, but this is horrible advice. Without it, your reader can easily become confused over whether a statement reflects your position or someone else's. Furthermore, do not try and pull the royal “we” or the “this author” line as a substitute. Human beings are reading your papers, not (as of yet) robots.
- **Keep your introductions simple, direct and to the point.** I am sure that in high school you also learned some ridiculous “umbrella” (or whatever) approach to writing papers, where your introduction is supposed to express some sweeping generalities before you narrow in on your paper's thesis. Once again, this is bad bad bad! Starting your paper with such a banality as “Since the dawn of time, man has feared death. . .” adds nothing of substance to your discussion. (I cannot believe it, but for a professional conference, I reviewed a paper with this very introduction! I almost rejected it on the spot, but decided to give the author the benefit of the doubt. However, the author never rose above the trivial drivel with which the paper began.) Sweeping statements also suggest that you are unsure about what to say, and are looking for a way to fill up space. (In Montana, we call it bulls–t.)

Instead, just jump right in to your topic. In many cases, you'll only need a sentence or two to introduce your topic, and then you can give your thesis. For instance:

According to X, blah blah blah. This position, however, is challenged by Y, who claims bleh bleh bleh. In this paper, I will argue that Y's argument fails to seriously challenge X's position.

For the size and scope of the papers you will be writing in this course, such a three sentence introductory paragraph is perfectly acceptable. Right away, your reader knows two important things: (1) What your paper is about and (2) What your paper will argue for. This is precisely what an introduction ought to convey.

- **Keep the rest of your paper simple too.** The point of a philosophy paper is to convince your reader of something. This is virtually impossible if your sentences run on for 5 lines and your paragraphs are longer than a page. Aesthetically, the writing appears cluttered and jumbled, and more than likely the content will be as well. When sentences and paragraphs get long, think seriously about how to break them up into smaller components. (I'd rather read a Hemingway than a Steinbeck any day.) Also, keep your language as simple as possible. Avoid excessive jargon, esoteric words, neologisms, and polysyllabic overload. If you must use technical language (and sometimes you will), be sure to explain what it means. Finally, be sure to use transitional language, so the connection between paragraphs and sentences are clear. This will convey

to the reader where you are in your paper’s overall argument. I care about the ideas you are trying to express, not the pretty words you use to do so.

- **Use quotations wisely and sparingly.** A terrible thing to see is a paper that is just a string of quotations—even if they are all the relevant ones. This shows laziness and little attempt to make the material your own. Yes, if you attribute something to a person you are discussing, you need to back it up with evidence. Paraphrasing (with an appropriate citation) will usually do the trick. This shows that you have read the material *and* have taken the time to understand it. Only directly quote a passage if that passage will play an important role in your paper (e.g., you will be referring back to it throughout the rest of the paper) or if its simplicity is such that paraphrasing would be impossible.
- **Finally, check out how your paper “sounds”.** Once you think you are finished with your paper, read it aloud or to some friends. If things do not sound right, they will not read right either. Just because you are doing philosophy does not mean that what you are doing should be incomprehensible to normal people.

FORMATTING

- Give your paper an appropriate title. If its clever and witty, so much the better.
- Make sure the paper is the appropriate length. I realize that sometimes is necessary to write a longer paper, and that is acceptable; just keep in mind that a longer paper is not always a better paper. If you are over the paper length, odds are you are including lots of extraneous junk; if you are under, odds are you are not fully developing your argument.
- All papers should be typed, double-spaced, employ a 12pt “Times New Roman” font, and possess 1 inch margins.
- Please cite material in footnotes. Use {author, article/book title, page number} style citations. For instance: “Better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied”.¹

¹Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 576.

SETTING UP YOUR TURNITIN ACCOUNT

80-100

For this course your instructor will be using turnitin.com to check each of your assignments for their originality. For each assignment, you will be expected to submit a copy to turnitin (no hardcopies need be submitted). If you have trouble submitting please email a copy to your instructor or section TA.

Before you can turn anything in, you must set up an account on turnitin and get it connected to this course. This is a relatively painless process so dont be scared. Of course, you are a CMU student, which means you should already be friendly with technology and have already hacked into this website and are capable of making it do your bidding. On the other hand, if computers frighten you then you just may wish to reconsider your choice in colleges. I hear the Amish are quite welcoming this time of year with their green bean casseroles and whatnot.

Regardless, follow these simple instructions in order to begin your journey on the path of originality:

1. Get a computer with Internet access.
2. Open up a web browser and go to: <http://www.turnitin.com>.
3. Look at the top right of the webpage and click on NEW USERS.
4. On the next screen, select that you are a STUDENT from the pull down menu, and then click the NEXT button.
5. On the next screen, enter the following information based on what section you are in:

Turnitin class ID (sections I and K only):	<u>2125402</u>
Turnitin class ID (sections J and L only):	<u>2125411</u>
Turnitin class enrollment password:	<u>plato</u>

And click the NEXT button.


6. On the next screen, enter your ***andrew email address (or whatever email address you actually check)*** and click the NEXT button.
7. On the next screen, make up a password (***and write it down! No serious, write it down right now! Just write it here:*** _____) and enter it into the two fields and then click the NEXT button.
8. On the next screen, select a “secret question” from the pull down menu and then type the answer in the field provided. Then click the NEXT button.
9. On the next screen, enter your (real) first name and last name. Then click the NEXT button.

10. On the next screen, pretend you read and understand everything there, or (like your instructor) just skip it and click on I AGREE – CREATE PROFILE.
11. On the next screen it should say yippy, you are done. And so you are. Ignore the instructions it gives you—you do not need to turn anything in (yet).

TURNING IT IN WITH TURNITIN 80-100

Now that you have set up your turnitin account (see the previous handout on this), you are now ready to submit your highly original assignments. Please note that you are expected to submit all assignments via the turnitin website by their respective due date/time in order to avoid a late penalty. Turning in a hardcopy in class is not required as long as the assignment has been successfully submitted to turnitin.

In order to turn in your first analytical summary, please follow these monkey-approved instructions:

1. Finish the assignment. Make sure it is all in a *single* text file (acceptable formats are MS Word, WordPerfect, PostScript, PDF, HTML, RTF, and plain text) on a computer.
2. Find a computer with Internet access and somehow put your papers file on it.
3. Open up a web browser and go to: <http://www.turnitin.com>.
4. Look at the top of the webpage and enter your email address and password (which you had better have written down) and then click on LOGIN.
5. On the next screen, click on 80-100.
6. On the next screen, click on the submit icon () next to where it has the name of the assignment you wish to turn in.
7. On the next screen, for SUBMISSION TITLE enter “My Assignment” (or “Plato Approved” or something else witty and clever). Then click the CHOOSE FILE button to find the location of the assignment’s file on the computer. Then click the SUBMIT button.
8. On the next screen, make sure this is the file you wish to submit and then click YES, SUBMIT.
9. On the next screen it should say zip-a-dee-doo-dah and that you are done. And yes you are. Congratulations.

If any problems occur when trying to submit, please email a copy of your assignment to your instructor or section TA. They can then submit it for you. If you cannot do this before the due date/time, then you must submit a hardcopy in the instructor’s mailbox (in Baker Hall 135) to avoid a late penalty.