

Philosophy 261W: Introduction to Philosophy

Instructor: Diana Buccafurni
Sam Houston State University
Spring 2008

TTh: 8:00-9:20AM, AB4 204
Section 07; 3 credits
dianabuccafurni@gmail.com

Office Hours: M-F, 1:00-2:00pm; By Appt.
Office: LDB 337; Office Ph.: 936.294.3585

Course Description:

This course is an introduction to some of the problems with which philosophers are concerned. As such, we will examine several questions, including the following: 1) Are there good reasons for believing in God?; 2) How should we determine whether an action is right or whether a person has good moral character?; 3) Do we have free will?; 4) Is our knowledge justified?; 5) What is it that makes that an individual is the same person over time?. This course will focus on philosophers' solutions to the above questions, and others, as well as the arguments they give in favor of these solutions.

Course Goals/Objectives: By the conclusion of this course, you should:

1. Be able to recognize, construct, and evaluate arguments. This is a "skill" goal of the course.
2. Be able to express your ideas clearly and thoroughly in a written format. This is a skill goal of the course.
3. Be familiar with various philosophical problems reviewed in the course, and proposed solutions to these problems. This is the "content" goal of the course.

Required Texts:

1. Feinberg and Shafer-Landau, *Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy*, 13th ed., Thomson-Wadsworth.

Blackboard:

The syllabus and any handouts I give in class will be posted on Blackboard. You can access Blackboard via the SHSU homepage. This will be my means of communication with you as a class. You are responsible for all information, messages, and announcements posted on Blackboard.

Course Requirements:

- 1. Microcommentaries.** These are worth 20% of your grade. There are ten microcommentaries due throughout the course of the semester (see dates below) and they are each worth 10 points. These are short written assignments (a maximum of 1-2 pages each, typed, double-spaced). For these assignments, you will be required to answer a question from the reading, or outline an argument from the reading, before we discuss the reading in class. These assignments will be posted on Blackboard. These are due at the beginning of class and must be typed. I do not accept late microcommentaries. If you must miss class on a day a microcommentary is due, you may email me the assignment as an attachment in WORD, and your email must be time-stamped by 8:00am that same day—otherwise, it will be late and I will not accept it. Otherwise, I do not accept microcommentaries via email—that is, if you attend class on a day a microcommentary is due, you must bring a hard copy of your microcommentary—I will not accept it by email, period. There are no exceptions to any of these policies.
- 2. Exams.** There are four exams in this course, which includes a final exam. Each exam, including a final exam which is cumulative, is worth 20% of your grade. Each exam is 100 points each. All exams are essay exams.
- 3. Regular, punctual attendance.** I will take roll at the beginning of every class. You can miss up to three classes without being penalized. If you miss more than 3 classes, I will deduct 5% from your final grade (e.g., 84% becomes 79%). If you arrive late and miss roll, you will get marked as tardy. Two tardies equals an absence. Attending class means you are actively participating in class and you stay in class for the duration of the entire class period. See Academic Policy Statement 800401 for SHSU's position on attendance.
- 4. Microcommentary Due Dates**

January	February	March	April	May
1/29	2/7	3/6	4/8	5/1
	2/14	3/20	4/15	
	2/21		4/22	

Grading:

The following is the grading scale that I will use to determine grades for this course. I will not deviate from this scale.

A	90-100%	Excellent, superior performance
B	80-89%	Above average, good performance
C	70-79%	Average performance
D	60-69%	Below average performance
F	59% and under	Failing

Course Policies:

- **Attendance.** You can miss up to three class sessions, without penalty. Use these wisely. I do not excuse absences, period. There is only one exception to this policy and that is for religious holidays as explained by the following university website: <http://www.shsu.edu/~vaf/www/aps/documents/861001.pdf>. Because I calculate absences at the end of the semester, please do not ask me how many absences you have accumulated. It is your responsibility to track your absences.
- **Grades.** Your grade will reflect your performance on exams and assignments, not on effort. There are no points for mere attendance and attendance is not considered a form of merit in this class. There are no opportunities for extra credit. No exams or assignments are dropped—every exam and assignment counts in the calculation of your final grade. *I do not negotiate grades and I will abide by the grading scale above.* If you have concerns about your grade or the course, please make an appointment to meet with me during office hours. *I will not discuss these items during class, before class, or after class. I will not schedule an appointment to discuss your exam on the same day you receive the exam.* If you have a concern about an exam grade, you must meet with me before taking the next exam. In practice, this means that I will not discuss your grade on exam one after exam two takes place and so forth. I do not discuss or distribute grades over email. If you have a question about your microcommentary grade, you must make an appointment with me in a timely manner.
- **Success in this class.** You should come to class already having completed the readings. I expect that students come to class with thoughtful comments about the readings. You should also participate in class, as this will allow you to evaluate the arguments we review and engage with the material, solidifying your understanding of the material. Finally, you should take notes. *I cannot emphasize enough just how integral good note taking is to doing well in this course*—good notes are necessary for doing well, though not sufficient for doing well. Handouts I provide in class of argument outlines are meant to supplement notes you take in class.
- **Make-ups.** You must attend the scheduled exam days. *Only cases of death, severe illness, or other extraordinary circumstances are satisfactory reasons for missing an exam. Unless you have one of the above circumstances, with documentation, you will not be allowed to take a make-up exam.* Unexcused absences for exams will be graded as a zero. If you do not have a documented, excused reason for missing an exam, then do not ask for an exception anyway—I will not grant the exception. I will not grant requests to take exams at alternative times to accommodate a personal issue unless it satisfies one of the excused reasons outlined above (e.g., weddings, divorce proceedings, and traffic court dates do not count as reasons that I will accommodate). Understand that you will receive a zero for an exam if you miss an exam for reasons other than the ones I have outlined.

- **Respect.** I create an environment of mutual respect in the classroom and I expect every student to maintain this environment. Disciplinary action results if a student does not adhere to standards of respectful classroom conduct. In terms of classroom conduct, this means adhering to the following:
 - o **Courtesy.** In class we will discuss the material with mutual respect and courtesy. Offensive language and jokes, verbal abuse, and personal attacks are not tolerated.
 - o **No side conversations.** This is disruptive and disrespectful to both me and your fellow classmates.
 - o **No active cell phones.** Power off cell phones before class begins. This means they are completely off, and not in vibrate mode. No text messaging in class.
 - o **Entering and leaving class.** If you know in advance that you have to arrive late to class, or leave class early, plan on not attending class that day as this is disruptive.
 - o **SHSU** has additional conduct requirements. Please familiarize yourself with these: <http://www.shsu.edu/students/guide/dean/codeofconduct.html>.

- **Academic Dishonesty.** I do not tolerate academic dishonesty. If I find that you are cheating on an exam, or misrepresenting your work in some other way, this will result, minimally, in automatic course grade of "F". See: <http://www.shsu.edu/administrative/faculty/sectionb.html#dishonesty>.

- **Disability Statement.** The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that reasonable accommodations be provided for students with physical, sensory, cognitive, systemic, learning and psychiatric disabilities. Please contact me at the beginning of the semester to discuss any necessary accommodations. The university's policy can be found at: http://www.shsu.edu/~vaf_www/aps/811006.pdf.

- **Roles: Mine and yours.** Your role is to come to class prepared to actively discuss the readings and participate in class. Please bring your textbook to every class session. I am here to help you in any reasonable way that I can. I encourage you to make an appointment with me if you are having difficulty with the course material. I am more than happy to meet with you at a mutually agreeable time. The best way to reach me is through email.

Tentative Schedule*

(This schedule is subject to change as I see fit.)

Th	1/17	Introduction to course, introduction to logic
T	1/22	Introduction to logic continued

Philosophy of Religion:

Th	1/24	Dostoevsky, Rebellion, 72-78; Mackie, Evil and Omnipotence, 78-85
T	1/29	Swinburne, Why God Allows Evil, 89-97; Johnson, God and the Problem of Evil, 97-101
Th	1/31	Paley, The Argument from Design, 32-37; Anselm, The Ontological Argument, 6-7; Guanilo, On Behalf of the Fool, 7-10
T	2/5	Guest Lecturer TBA
Th	2/7	Clifford, The Ethics of Belief, 101-105; James, The Will to Believe, 106-114
T	2/12	Clark, Without Evidence or Argument, 114-119

Ethical Theory

Th	2/14	Quinn, God and Morality, 610-625
T	2/19	Exam #1
Th	2/21	Kant, The Good Will and The Categorical Imperative, 625-640
T	2/26	Mill, Utilitarianism, 640-653
Th	2/28	Rawls, Justice as Fairness, 600-610
T	3/4	Aristotle, The Nature of Virtue, 570-586

Applied Ethics

Th	3/6	Singer, Famine, Affluence, and Morality, 678-685; O'Neill, Kantian Approaches to Some Famine Problems, 686-692
T	3/11	No class—Spring Break
Th	3/13	No class—Spring Break
T	3/18	Exam #2
Th	3/20	Nussbaum, Judging Other Cultures: The Case of Genital Mutilation, 668-678; Singer, All Animals are Equal, 701-713
T	3/25	Rachels, Active and Passive Euthanasia, 697-700

Free Will

Th	3/27	Holbach, The Illusion of Free Will, 458-463; Stace, The Problem of Free Will, 419-424
T	4/1	Frankfurt, Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility, 486-492

Epistemology: The Theory of Knowledge

Th	4/3	Pollock, A Brain in a Vat, 137-139; Moore, Proof of an External World, 216-219
T	4/8	Chisholm, The Problem of the Criterion, 150-156
Th	4/10	Locke, The Causal Theory of Perception, 197-204
T	4/15	Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, Synopsis: 164-166; Meditation One: 166-168
Th	4/17	Exam #3
T	4/22	Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation Two, 169-172
Th	4/24	Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation Three, 173-180

Personal Identity

T	4/29	Locke, The Prince and the Cobbler, 365-368; Reid, Of Mr. Locke's Account of Our Personal Identity, 368-370
Th	5/1	Hume, The Self, 371-373
T	5/6	Parfit, Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons, 373-378
Th	5/8	Parfit continued
Th	5/15	FINAL EXAM, 8:00-10:00AM