

Introduction to Philosophy

PHIL 1200

Syllabus

Welcome to Philosophy. You are likely to find that you are a somewhat changed person after you have taken this course. Philosophy is ultimately the disciplined study of unsolved problems, and can be both rewarding and frustrating at the same time. Comedian and Actor, Steve Martin, once remarked that:

“If you’re studying geology, which is all facts, as soon as you get out of school you forget it all; ... but philosophy, you remember just enough to screw you up for the rest of your life.”

Contacting your instructor

For information on contacting your instructor as well as other important information from your instructor see the Instructor Letter link in your course website.

Course description

The University of Manitoba *Undergraduate Calendar* describes this course as follows:

An introduction to five main areas of philosophy. Topics are logical thinking; the criteria and limits of human knowledge; and three of: God, right and wrong, free will and the nature of consciousness, scientific inquiry, and social justice. Students may not hold credit for PHIL 1200 (or 015.120) and any of: PHIL 1261 (or 015.126), PHIL 1510 (or 015.151), or PHIL 1511 (or 015.151).

This course provides an introduction to the following five areas of philosophy: logic, the existence of God, theory of knowledge, ethics, and metaphysics. Study in these five areas provides a thorough, but by no means complete, synopsis of the central problems in contemporary philosophy. While the focus of this course is “the problems,” there is a significant amount of historical reference to classical texts. This is intended to give you a well-rounded background from which to approach the philosophical problems presented in the course.

Course objectives

This course is designed to acquaint you with the terms, problems, methods, and theories of several different areas within philosophy. We will also help you to become a fledgling practising philosopher by introducing you to the skills of analytic reasoning and debate. These skills will enable you to discuss the philosophical problems you will encounter in this course. They should enable you to think more clearly and debate more effectively on intellectual issues in general. The course objectives are to:

- introduce you to the subject matter and methods of philosophy; and
- enhance your skills as a thinker and debater.

Course materials

Required readings

Bookstore

The following required materials are available for purchase from the [University of Manitoba Bookstore](#). Please order your materials immediately, if you have not already done so. See your [Distance and Online Education Student Handbook](#) for instructions on how to order your materials.

PHIL 1200 Introduction to Philosophy Online Study compiled by Patrick Walsh and Phil Veldhuis.

Online

Many of the required readings are in your purchased readings package, but many are also accessed directly by clicking on links in the assigned readings sections in the course units.

The collection of print and online classical and contemporary philosophical works contains excerpts from classical works, along with contemporary articles from philosophical journals. These readings are intended to provide both the historical, “first hand” rendering of certain problems, and the contemporary “state of the art” philosophical formulations of those problems. Unless you have some previous background in philosophy, you should approach these course readings only after you have read the corresponding material in the course manual.

Videos

Required videos are linked throughout your course units. These videos are streamed in a Real Media format. If the link does not automatically open in your player, please access the following page for assistance. [Get Player](#)

Required

Examined Life, a 2008 documentary film directed by Astra Taylor. The film features eight influential contemporary philosophers walking around New York and other metropolises and discussing the practical application of their ideas in modern culture

Optional

PHIL 1200 discussion topics by Dr. Martin Gerwin. Available in the course website.

Note: The Gerwin videos are also available to borrow from the University of Manitoba library, should you have difficulty viewing them directly online. The Examined Life videos are available only within the course.

Library resources

You will write several short essays, and you will likely become interested in reading more on the content of at least some of the units. Each course unit ends with a short list of supplemental books relevant to the subject matter. You can search for books and journal articles online through the University of Manitoba Library and by the following link http://www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/distance_education/index.html The service is also explained in the section on borrowing library materials in the *Distance and Online Education Student Handbook*.

Optional

Since most of your final mark is determined by your essay writing, you should consider acquiring a style manual. An annotated list of style manuals available through the University of Manitoba Bookstore is contained in the *Distance and Online Education Student Handbook*. You can also access the following style manual online at <http://www.bartleby.com/141/index.html>:

Strunk, William. *Elements of Style*. Ithaca, NY: Priv. print. [Geneva, NY: Press of W.P. Humphrey], 1918; Bartleby.com, 1999.

Course overview

In this online course, your course materials will provide the information and encouragement that ordinarily would be presented by a professor in an on-campus classroom setting. We have therefore attempted to anticipate the general problems that you might encounter in working on your own. However, if you experience any problems or difficulties, do not hesitate to contact the course instructor. Refer to the letter of introduction from your instructor in the course web site for instructions on how to contact the course instructor or choose the course link for contacting the Distance and Online Education staff.

Six units will be covered and six assignments are required. The course materials will provide you with the structured debate from the philosophical tradition. The selections from the course readings will provide you with the primary source material on the topic being discussed.

As a general rule you should allocate approximately four weeks to complete a unit; that is, the four weeks prior to the due date of the assignment.

You should dedicate at least one week to prepare your assignment. You can expect to receive the marked copy of your previous assignment returned online from one to three weeks after it was submitted. You may want to revise your current assignment given the comments you received on a previous assignment, so you should try to budget some time for this eventuality.

Topics

Discerning philosophical from empirical issues with corresponding questions is central to formal philosophy. This is illustrated by the roots of the word philosophy that come from the ancient Greek words, “philos,” for “love,” and “sophia” for “knowledge. Philosophy, etymologically then, is “the love of knowledge,” indeed the subject of philosophy for the ancient Greeks was everything.

History progressed and humanity’s knowledge grew. Philosophically, this amounted to various areas of inquiry developing into their own distinct fields of inquiry. This distinction was characterized by philosophical inquiry; resolving, or at least demarcating particular empirical parameters within which the inquiry was to be conducted. For example, natural science is the study of the physical world based solely on descriptive observation of the physical world. In turn, particular natural sciences like chemistry or physics have even more specific parameters put on the scope of their inquiry of the physical world.

The nature of philosophical questions is the focus of the main teaching point in the first unit—distinguishing philosophical from non-philosophical questions.

The other units adopt the following postures in this regard:

- Unit 2 Philosophy of religion questions as opposed to questions of religion.
- Unit 3 Epistemology questions as opposed to psychology of education or pure education questions.
- Unit 4 Ethics as opposed to a legal/practical approach to life discussion.
- Unit 5 Metaphysics as opposed to cosmology or pure science, and philosophy of mind as opposed to a pure psychology discussion.
- Unit 6 Free will and determinism as opposed to a legal/sociological discussion.

Learning activities

- Self-test questions and answers follow the units.

Unit 1 self-test is set up as a true/false quiz that you can complete as often as you wish. Other unit tests include answers or samples of answers. **Complete the questions before looking at the answers; this will give you some indication of how well you know the material.** These questions can be used as the basis for your discussion in each unit (see below). In addition to testing your knowledge of the material, they are intended to motivate further inquiry on your part. You will probably notice, quite quickly, in online discussion that not everyone in the class approaches the questions in the manner you do. This isn’t a detriment. It provides a good basis for inquiry in the topic.

Dealing with topics as essentially problems is how they are given to us in folk philosophy. For this course, the goal will be to clarify an issue to more precisely define the question. This process often sets the parameters for investigation—not always entirely for the philosophical questions but also for what would be the residual in that case, and what becomes the empirical question. The empirical questions are the basis of other areas of inquiry as delineated by the positioning of the philosophical question.

- Discussion areas will be available for each Unit.

The discussion should be the first thing you start to do for each unit. It will serve the same purpose as the introductory discussions in an on-campus course, and provides a holistic understanding by demonstrating how our “folk philosophy” on the issues is developed and refined into a formal philosophy, taking special care to focus on the philosophical as opposed to empirical issues. By “empirical issues” we mean, in a less precise fashion, “subject specific” issues

Evaluation and grading

Distribution of marks

	Assignment	Value
Assignment 1: Unit 1	Introduction to Philosophy	17%
Assignment 2: Unit 2	Reason and Religious Belief	17%
Assignment 3: Unit 3	Theory of Knowledge	17%
Assignment 4: Unit 4	Ethics	17%
Assignment 5: Unit 5	Philosophy of Mind	16%
Assignment 6: Unit 6	Determinism and the Problem of Free Will	<u>16%</u>
	Total	100%

The combined grades of all assignments are worth 100% of the final grade.

Grading scale

Letter grade	Percentage range	
A+	94 - 100	Exceptional
A	84 - 94	Excellent
B+	78 - 84	Very good
B	70 - 78	Good
C+	60 - 70	Satisfactory
C	50 - 60	Adequate
D	44 - 50	Marginal
F	0 - 44	Failure

Please note: All final grades are subject to departmental review.

While percentage grades are used to calculate your final grade, the percentage grade you receive on a piece of work is only indirectly related to the quality of your work. The corresponding letter grade provides the qualitative assessment of your work.

A to A+

What it means: Your work is excellent to exceptional. You have missed or misinterpreted no major points in your work and have made insightful criticisms and comments on our topic. In addition, your comments go well beyond the course material in significant ways. All controversial claims in your paper receive support.

What it might indicate for your final grade: This is work, which, if it continues, will probably receive a well above average final grade - quite possibly an A range grade.

B to B+

What it means: Your work is good to very good but needs improvement. You may have missed or slightly misrepresented some minor points on the topic. Your comments and criticisms, again, display some misunderstanding of the main issues, and tend not to go far beyond commentary on the course material. Some controversial claims are probably made in your paper that do not receive proper support.

What it might indicate for your final grade: This is work that will probably receive a grade that is above average if it continues. It is clearly possible for you to improve to the highest grade level by applying yourself seriously to the task. Consider reading a style manual for examples of how one might write philosophy papers.

C to C+

What it means: While your work is adequate to satisfactory, it misses or misrepresents some (but by no means all) important points on our topic. You display a basic but flawed appreciation of the main positions and lines of argument. Your comments and criticisms are also in need of some reworking and do not go beyond the course material. You need to focus more thoroughly on supporting controversial claims in your paper with support for their truth.

What it might indicate for your final grade: This is work that will probably receive a grade that is approximately average if it continues. There is significant room to improve by applying yourself seriously to the subject matter. You might consider reading a style manual for examples of how one might write philosophy papers. You might want to contact the instructor for extra help.

D

What it means: This work is of a marginal quality. Your work misses the mark on our topic as often as it hits the mark; it requires significant re-thinking. Still, you appear to have some grasp of the central points. You need to be much more conscientious about supporting your claims with reasons for thinking they are true.

What it might indicate for your final grade: This work will probably receive a grade slightly below average if it continues. There is significant room to improve at least to two levels by applying yourself seriously to the subject matter. You should look at a style manual, and contact the instructor.

F

What it means: Your work displays serious misunderstanding of crucial topics. It is not adequate, and you should contact the instructor soon about individual issues concerning your performance on this assignment.

What it might indicate for your final grade: Consistent work at this level will receive substandard evaluation. Significant change in your work is required to receive a better grade. Contact the instructor to discuss a course of action.

Honesty declaration

Remember to complete and submit a Student Honesty Declaration when submitting your first assignment. The declaration is located in the assignments section on the course website, is submitted directly online, and will be recorded in the course grade book.

Unit assignments

Each of the six units includes an assignment. The six assignments consist of logic questions and short essays. They are of equal value from the point of view of marks.

Assignment due dates

Consult your course schedule for the assignment due dates.

Feedback from your instructor

Each unit assignment will be marked and returned to you online with a grade and comments from your instructor. These comments are meant to encourage you when you are doing the right thing, and to offer suggestions for improvement. However, you may have problems or questions that the instructor will not know about unless you come forward with them. When you request help, you should be clear on where your problem lies. Check the online letter of introduction from your instructor with contact information and a list of office hours. If you have an administrative or technology question, contact the Distance and Online Student Service's Office.

Plagiarism, cheating, and examination impersonation

You should acquaint yourself with the University's policy on plagiarism, cheating, and examination impersonation as detailed in the General Academic Regulations and Policy section of the University of Manitoba *Undergraduate Calendar*. Note: These policies are also located in your *Distance and Online Education Student Handbook* or you may refer to Student Affairs at <http://www.umanitoba.ca/student>.

Distance and Online Education (DE) Student Resources

In your course website there are links for the following:

- Contacting Distance and Online Education Staff
- Distance and Online Student Handbook
- Distance and Online Education Website

Sample

Acknowledgements

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Patrick Walsh was born and raised in south Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. He received his B.Sc. and B.A. from the University of Winnipeg and his M.A. from the University of Manitoba. Patrick is also an instructor with the Philosophy Department at the University of Winnipeg.

Patrick is currently making the forced transition from zealous athleticism and music appreciation to concerns of fiscal responsibility and home renovations. In these times of flux the only constant has been the consumption of coffee, wonderful coffee.

Phil Veldhuis leads a double life; in one life he is an armchair philosopher, in the other he is a burly beekeeper. Phil has a Master's Degree in Philosophy from the University of Manitoba. His main philosophical interests are in the areas of Philosophy of Mind and Philosophy of Science. His Master's thesis explored the idea that the honeybee dance language is more significant than usually thought. Phil has been teaching various basic courses in philosophy since 1993.

Phil's other life as a beekeeper occurs on his bee farm, based in Starbuck, Manitoba. He has about 1000 hives producing about 200 barrels of honey annually. Beekeeping tends to be a solitary and contemplative business, so Phil has lots of time to think about philosophy when working his bees. Unfortunately, he also tends to think about bees when he is supposed to be working on philosophy. Phil, and his wife, Vona, have two children, Timmy and Jayna.

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