

PHIL 1000-003—INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY  
FALL, 2010; CLARE 302, 2:00-3:15 P.M., T-TH  
SYLLABUS

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Note: All handouts, assignments, study guides, and this syllabus are available at this web site or on the CU Learn site for this course.

Office Hours: 3:30-4:45 P.M. T-TH; Hellems 274.

**Course Description**

Aristotle claimed that philosophy "begins in wonder", and so it should. As you will discover over the next 16 weeks, many interesting, absorbing, difficult, sometimes maddening questions arise out of that state of stunned perplexity to which Aristotle refers. These questions, and attempts to answer them, form the elements of a long conversation extending back at least 2600 years. Our purpose here is to read from the transcripts of that conversation, and by application of our own capacities for thought and understanding, to discover what particular wonderments drove these people to converse and think in this unusual, often apparently odd way. We will discover which of their perplexities continue to fascinate and disturb us, which seem no longer of interest, and consider which answers seem to ring true, which false. Over the course of time you should develop some idea how philosophers tackle the difficult questions they raise, and begin to fashion some philosophical tools of your own, tools you will find useful even outside philosophy. The following questions are among those we will consider this semester:

What is the nature of reality? What is our nature as human beings? Can we think usefully about the world? Why should one care that we might? What is a good explanation? What is it to be rational? How is my mind connected to my body? Why should I be moral? Am I free to choose the right action, or is such freedom of choice impossible? What is a good life? How do I know whether God exists?

**Course Objectives**

There are many fine reasons to study philosophy. I will not attempt to persuade you of these here, at the very least because many of the works we will read speak to this question more or less directly. But you should have some idea what I hope you will gain from our 16 weeks together. While there are many high ambitions lurking, here is a set of "least" ambitions for our time and efforts:

1. That you learn to identify arguments, the chief tool of philosophical work.
2. That you learn to express your thoughts clearly.
3. That you make progress in the fine art of assessing, analyzing and criticizing arguments generally, and begin to apply these skills in conversation with each other (not only with profs & GPTIs).
4. That you leave here knowing at least two answers that philosophers have given in the past to each of the questions we will address.

**Required Texts**

S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, and C.D.C. Reeve, Eds., *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy*.

Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

Bertrand Russel, *The Problems of Philosophy*.

Robert Ammerman, *Classics of Analytic Philosophy*.

**Text on Reserve**

Norman Melchert, *The Great Conversation, Volume I: Pre-Socratics through Descartes*.

## Course Requirements & Percentage of Final Grade

(1) Attending/Participating in Class <sup>1</sup>	10%
(2) Presentations	30%
(3) Two 5-6 Page Papers	40%
(4) Final Exam (cumulative, takehome)	20%

### Extremely Generous Rewrite Option:

You may rewrite one of your papers, using my criticisms and suggestions as a guide, and then turn it in on the final examination date; the grade you receive on the revised paper will replace the grade you originally received.

### Notes on Course Requirements:

(1) The first paper will be on the Presocratics, Plato's *Dialogues*, or Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*. The second paper, will be on any topic covered in the course (to be agreed upon with me 3 weeks prior to the due date). All papers and take home exams must be typed, and turned in by 5:00 p.m. on the due date either as a digital word processor file or on paper. Late papers/exams, other things being equal, are a Really Bad Thing. Submission of both papers is a necessary condition for passing the course.

(2) It is strongly recommended that before preparing your papers, you read very carefully the helpful hints for doing philosophy papers, the list of abbreviations used in grading papers, the model history-of-philosophy paper, and the very brief survey of informal logic (all to be found in the supplementary packet).

(3) The final examination will consist in a combination of extremely short answer (10%), short answer (60%), and long essay (30%) components. There will be an in-class "practice" final on the last day of class.

(4) Presentations. I will explain the nature of these presentations during our first class together.

### **Clarifications, Rules of the Road, Regrettable Necessities & Errata**

(1) What your grade means:

A: Superior work

B: Good work

C: Work with some strengths, balanced against clear weaknesses

D: Work with few strengths, many weaknesses

F: Work that brings CPR to mind

(2) Late written assignments are accepted in the event of civil emergencies, Ebola outbreak, or fits of generosity on my part. However, none are accepted without approval from me prior to the day on which the assignment in question is due.

(3) You are responsible for the entire reading assignment—not just what we discuss in class, and not only those assignments given to your group for consideration.

(4) Reading assignments in philosophy tend to be both challenging and time consuming. You might want to take this into account when planning your semester.

(5) Readings should be done prior to the class for which they are assigned.

(6) Total points possible: 100. No extra credit.

(7) What to expect from me: prompt and honest feedback, clear lectures, sufficient contact outside class (e.g., office hours, e-mail).

(8) Since students often do not pick up their final papers/exams, please let me know in advance if you would like detailed comments on yours. Those who wish to have their exams/papers mailed to them should include a self-addressed, stamped envelope when they turn them in.

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<sup>1</sup>Not everyone is amenable to public speaking and discussion, but philosophy is a discussion sport. If you can bring yourself to speak, you will find it easier to understand the issues and arguments, largely because we often do not know what we think until we try to say it. However, I will not use class participation to decide a grade. Class attendance does count, and reaps an easy reward. Those who attend all but 2 classes or less get a 100 for this 10% of the course. If you miss *any* classes beyond 2, you begin to drop from 100 at the rate of 3 pts. per class day missed.

(9) There will be a one-day "cooling off" period following receipt of grades on any given assignment.

(10) This syllabus is subject to revision.

### **Assignment Schedule**

To be Announced on the CU Learn Assignments Page

### **One Last Thing**

Since I find it very helpful to speak one-on-one with each of you at least once, there will be required, short meetings to get to know each other during the first three weeks of the semester. Let's try to get all of these out of the way by October 5 at the latest (either come during my normal office hours, or arrange another time to meet).