

Jason Potter

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Web Site: <http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/potter/index.aspx> (Please note: all handouts, along with lecture outlines, study guides and this syllabus are available at this web site or on CU Learn for this course.)

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

Course Description

This course is different from other courses in philosophy that you have taken. If you approach it in the same way you will miss what is important. You have been trained to treat philosophy as an academic subject, one that others produce and you consume. This class will teach you to think like a productive philosopher, by looking closely at the thinking process of creative philosophers and giving you opportunities to think yourself, both orally and in written form. In the end, you will expand upon those fundamental skills, methods, concepts, and distinctions you already possess and/or that are essential for the study and practice of philosophy. The basic skills covered include the writing of philosophical essays, deep, active reading of philosophical articles and books, and the extraction and evaluation of arguments contained therein. If you don't find your habits of thought and philosophical study altered this semester, our time here will likely have been wasted.

Course Objectives

1. That you learn to identify arguments, the chief tool of philosophical work.
2. That you learn to read philosophical works in an active and comprehensive way, and more importantly, to develop the skills necessary to consider alternative versions of *what the author meant* by their assertions, alternatives that you then attempt to refine into the most-plausible interpretation (*very few* people, including very many *working philosophers*, develop this skill to the highest level, and philosophy as it is practiced today is the worse for it).
3. That you learn to express your thoughts clearly, to listen carefully to what others have to say, and to recognize when your own thinking is inflexible and overdetermined by your accidental and/or well-worn habits of mind.
4. That you make progress in the fine art of assessing, analyzing and criticizing arguments and the framework of thought and analysis that supports them.
5. Most importantly, that you develop skills for considering the grounds and wellsprings of philosophical *problems* and *questions*: where do they come from? Why should you, or anyone, care if they go unsolved/unanswered? Why are *these* particular problems, i.e., the ones under discussion in contemporary academic philosophy, the problems/questions that matter?

Required Texts

None. We will be reading papers that I make available through the E-Reserve system at Norlin Library or through our CU Learn site. You should look at the Supplementary Packet for this course (available on the web site, or for copying on reserve at Norlin), containing:

- (i) helpful hints for writing philosophy papers,
- (ii) a list of abbreviations used in grading papers,
- (iii) a model history-of-philosophy paper, and
- (iv) a very brief but amazingly informative survey of informal logic.

Course Requirements & Percentage of Final Grade

(1) Diagnostic Exercises/Starting Gate Survey	10%
(2) Attendance/Class Participation ¹	20%
(3) Quizzes, Writing Exercise 1 & Presentations	50%
(4) Second Paper	20%

Notes on Course Requirements:

(1) Our work will be more or less evenly divided between exercises and assignments designed to improve your reading skills and those designed to improve your writing skills. Many class sessions will be spent discussing the readings in detail, often after you have submitted a reading summary, or we have had a presentation from two of your classmates on it.

(2) Since a philosophical essay is *not* like other kinds of essays you may have written in college (or elsewhere), it is

¹Participation in class discussion is a *requirement* in this course, as is attendance. If you find it difficult to speak in a small group, you are going to have great difficulty engaging in an essential part of our work together this semester. Come see me if you have trouble talking in class and we will work together to overcome it. If you miss *any* classes beyond 2, your grade begins to drop for this part of the course from 100 pts at the rate of 5 pts per-missed-day and will reach an F when you have missed 10.

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, and the model history-of-philosophy paper (all to be found in the supplementary packet available at the Reserve Desk in Norlin). I do assume that you have already learned how to write essays in English. Here you are trying to learn how to write *philosophical* essays in English.

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 (and I don't mean the Critique of Pure Reason)
- (2) Late papers, exercises, reading summaries, etc., are a Really Bad Thing. The usual excusing conditions must exist if I am to make exceptions to this rule: earthquake, civil emergency, Ebola outbreak, hospitalization, total personal breakdowns and the like.
- (3) Breaches of academic honesty will receive the harshest allowable university penalty. However, I do think it is worth noting that to cheat in philosophy is to cheat oneself, since you undermine the potential development of your own mind (which *is the point of any education worth having*).
- (4) You are responsible for the entire reading assignment—not just what we discuss in class.
- (5) Reading assignments in philosophy tend to be both challenging and time consuming. You might want to take this into account when planning your spring semester. This course is as difficult as any technical course you take (calculus, for example). Do not assume it is a cakewalk...you will regret the assumption later.
- (6) Readings should be done prior to the class for which they are assigned. If this involves a range of days, you should have everything read by the first day in the range.
- (7) Total points possible: 100.
- (8) What to expect from me: prompt and honest feedback, clear leading questions, discussions and lectures (which will only occur occasionally), sufficient contact outside class (e.g., office hours, e-mail, the web site, group chat and blog exchanges).
- (9) Since the institution of privacy protections for students in the late 1990s, it is no longer possible to leave papers in the Philosophy Department office for distribution to those who are not in class the day that an assignment is returned. *It is your responsibility to get your assignments back* if you are not there the day I return your work. I suggest you email me when you are hopeful that I will bring work to class that has been returned on some previous date, so that I can bring it to the next class session. Since students often do not pick up their final papers, please let me know in advance if you would like detailed comments on yours (otherwise, I will only grade, not comment). Also, if you want your final paper returned to you, please give me a self-addressed, stamped envelope for that purpose when handing in the paper in December.
- (10) I am happy to discuss grades with you after assignments are returned, but please save these discussions for office hours.
- (11) Arrangements to extend deadlines for papers, to be excused for class absences, etc., can only be made in person. *Do not email me about these things* except to warn me about a problem and to arrange a meeting to discuss them.
- (12) This syllabus is subject to revision.

Assignment Schedule

To Be Announced (on CU Learn site for this courseh).

Disability Statement

If you have specific physical, psychiatric, or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to the Disability Services Office in Willard 322 (phone 303-492-8671).

One Last Thing

Since I find it very helpful to speak with each of you at least once, there will be required, short (10-minute) meetings during office hours the first three weeks of the semester to discuss your progress. I will bring a sign-up sheet with me to class during the first week so you can arrange a time and date that suits you. Don't put this off too long, or we will have a buffalo stampede that will make all of us grumpy.