

Introduction to Philosophy (Phil E-4) Harvard Extension School

Fall 2018

Harvard Hall 104

Tuesdays, 5:50-7:50pm (lectures will be streamed live and then posted online within 24 hours)

Course Website: <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/52986>

Instructor: Ben Roth (PhD in philosophy)

broth@fas.harvard.edu (I will usually respond within 24 hours on weekdays, but please check the syllabus and course website for answers to questions first.)

Teaching Assistant: Erin Seeba (MA in philosophy, current PhD student)

ekseeba@gmail.com

Optional Online Discussion Sections: TBA (Once enrollment settles, we will run a poll to see when the most interested students are available.)

What is happiness? Should we fear death? Does ethics depend on god's existence? Do we have free will? What should we do when we think a law is immoral? This course introduces students to Western philosophy through fundamental questions about how we should live. Beginning with Plato's account of his teacher Socrates' trial and execution for impiety in ancient Athens, we read central historical thinkers such as Aristotle, Augustine, Montaigne, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Thoreau, Nietzsche, Sartre, Beauvoir, and King Jr., as well as a number of influential contemporary philosophers who show why these questions remain pressing today.

Course Goals:

- To give you an overview of different time periods and topics in Western philosophy.
- To teach you not just what some philosophers have argued, but to think philosophically yourself, about your own life.
- To improve your reading comprehension abilities.
- To improve your ability to concentrate and resist distractions.
- To improve your writing, especially the ability to explain complex views with clarity and precision and to make your own arguments with reasons.

Expectations:

- That you will keep up with the course lectures, either by attending in person, viewing the livestream, or viewing recordings weekly.
- That, before each lecture, you will have read the assigned selections carefully and critically, multiple times (on purpose, a limited number of pages are assigned each week). I do not expect you to fully understand the readings on your own, but I do expect you to spend enough time with them such that you have an initial understanding of them, and that you have a sense of where you need clarification and further explanation.
- That we will all treat each other and the readings with respect, but also skepticism. Philosophy does not care about a view simply because someone believes it, but only because of the quality of reasons that can be provided for that view.

— That, for papers of the more explanatory type, you will reread the relevant selections yet again, such that you can explain them clearly, in your own words, proving what you say with textual evidence and analysis.

— That, for papers of the more argumentative type, you will not simply write up the first idea that comes to you, but spend some time considering different possible arguments and then develop the most promising one as deeply as you can, having considered objections to it.

— That you will turn papers in on time (by uploading them to Canvas).

Texts:

These are the editions/translations that I will be referring to and quoting in lectures, and they are available at The Coop: <https://tinyurl.com/300-PHIL-E-4-F18>. You are welcome to use other editions (many can be found online), but know that following along with me will be somewhat more difficult.

Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, 3rd ed., Hackett 9780872205543

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd ed., Hackett 9780872204645

Montaigne, *Essays: A Selection*, Penguin 9780140446029

Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 3rd ed., Hackett 9780872201927

Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, Signet 9780451532169

Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Vintage 9780679724650

Pereboom, ed., *Free Will*, 2nd ed., Hackett 9781603841290

Additional readings will be made available on the course website.

Guidelines for writing-intensive courses:

Writing-intensive courses at Harvard Extension offer students the opportunity to develop their writing skills in the context of a particular academic discipline, and they all feature common elements. Students will:

- develop core writing skills, as defined by the instructor, in the discipline of the course;
- complete multiple writing assignments of varying lengths, at least 2 of which must be revised;
- produce a minimum of 10-12 pages of writing, exclusive of the required drafts, over the course of the term;
- meet at least once in individual conference (in person, by phone, or electronically) with the instructor or TA to discuss writing in progress;
- and receive detailed feedback on their drafts and revisions, on both content and expression.

Accessibility:

The Extension School is committed to providing an accessible academic community. The Accessibility Office offers a variety of accommodations and services to students with documented disabilities. Please visit www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/disability-services-accessibility for more information.

Evaluation:

You will write a number of short papers, increasing in length over the semester. Two of these (one midway through the semester, one at the end) will be revised. For undergraduate credit students, the first revision will come, mid-semester, after a conference with the teaching assistant. Students taking the course for graduate credit will initially follow the same assignment structure, but be held to a higher standard in grading. Toward the end of the course, they will write a longer final paper on a topic of their own devising (in consultation with faculty), and their revision conference will instead

be about a first draft of it. Non-credit students may submit papers for comments, but are excluded from the revisions and revision conferences. There is no final exam. Late papers will be docked a third of a letter grade per day. Here is the grading breakdown:

Undergraduate Credit:	Graduate Credit:
Paper 1: 5%	Paper 1: 5%
Paper 2: 5%	Paper 2: 5%
Paper 3: 10%	Paper 3: 10%
Paper 4: 10%	Paper 4: 10%
Revision of Paper 3 or 4: 20%	Revision of Paper 3 or 4: 20%
Paper 5: 15%	Draft of Final Paper Prompt: 5%
Paper 6: 15%	Draft of Final Paper: 15%
Revision of Paper 5 or 6: 20%	Revision of Final Paper: 30%

Participation:

Each week, you can participate in three ways:

- By attending lecture in person and asking a question and/or participating in the discussion at the end of the period.
- By participating in the weekly virtual discussion section, led by the course TA.
- By submitting a question (clearly stated in a sentence or two at most) by 11:59pm on Monday night to the Canvas “Assignment” created for that purpose each week. I will attempt to incorporate an answer to it into my lecture the next day. Such questions should generally be about the upcoming topic (rather than the previous one), formulated on the basis of you having done the reading ahead of time.

Your participation can slide your final grade up or down a third of a letter grade (so, e.g., a B can become a B- or a B+). Doing one of the above each week well—e.g., putting care into your question, contributing thoughtfully to discussion section—will result in a positive participation grade. Doing more than one each week will not boost you any further. Poor conduct during lecture or discussion section, such as a lack of punctuality, distractions caused by your devices, or dominating or disrespectful comments, will lower your participation grade.

Plagiarism:

You are responsible for understanding Harvard Extension School policies on academic integrity (www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/student-conduct/academic-integrity) and how to use sources responsibly. Not knowing the rules, misunderstanding the rules, running out of time, submitting the wrong draft, or being overwhelmed with multiple demands are not acceptable excuses. There are no excuses for failure to uphold academic integrity. To support your learning about academic citation rules, please visit the Harvard Extension School Tips to Avoid Plagiarism (www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/tips-avoid-plagiarism), where you'll find links to the Harvard Guide to Using Sources and two free online 15-minute tutorials to test your knowledge of academic citation policy. The tutorials are anonymous open-learning tools.

If you have any questions, either now or as the semester develops, about what constitutes plagiarism or how to properly quote and cite sources, please speak to me immediately. In general, I would encourage you *not* to pursue outside sources until we have discussed a topic and you have written your paper on it. Our readings are not easy—you will need to read them carefully, and multiple times—but everything you need to write your papers is in the texts themselves. There is a lot of

nonsense written about philosophy on the internet, even on what might seem to be reputable websites (the best internet resource for philosophy is the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, at <https://plato.stanford.edu>). If a topic piques your interest, I would be very happy to guide you to related readings. On the syllabus, I have included some “Further Reading” suggestions, the sorts of things I would assign if we had more time.

Course Schedule:

September 4

Course Introduction

Plato, “The Allegory of the Cave” from *The Republic* (on course site)

Paper 1 (1 page) due by 5:45pm on 9/11: Explain the distinction Socrates is making when he asks Euthyphro “Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods?” (10a). What does each alternative mean? What are the ramifications for figuring out what is pious if one is true? If instead the other is?

Make sure you consult the Formatting Guidelines and An Introduction to Writing Philosophy Papers (both under “Files”) before you submit your paper, then keep them in mind throughout the semester.

September 11

Plato, “Euthyphro”

Model Euthyphro Paper (will be uploaded to course website after lecture)

September 18

Plato, “Apology”

Further Reading: Plato, *The Republic*, Book I

Paper 2 (1 page) due by 5:45pm on 9/25: Succinctly explain why, according to Aristotle in Book I.5, neither pleasure, nor honor, nor virtue is equivalent to happiness.

September 25

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I

Nagel, “The Absurd” (on course website)

October 2

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X.6-8

model paper, “Aristotle’s Problem with Incontinence” (on course website; based on book VII)

Frankfurt, “The Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person” (in *Free Will*)

Further Reading: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books III and IV

Paper 3 (1.5-2 pages) due by 5:45pm on 10/9: If something—e.g., god or, alternatively, a supercomputer—could predict your behavior with absolute certainty, would that mean you are not responsible, not reasonably praised or blamed, for your actions? You may, but are not required to, draw on Augustine or any other relevant readings in your paper.

October 9

Augustine, from *On Free Choice of the Will* (in *Free Will*)
Montaigne, “On Idleness” and “On Solitude”
Further Reading: Slouka, “Quitting the Paint Factory” (on course website)

October 16

Montaigne, “To Philosophize Is to Learn How to Die”
Plato, “Phaedo” death scene
Rosenbaum, “How to Be Dead and Not Care” (on course website)
Further Reading: Montaigne, “That It Is Madness...,” “Judgment’s of God’s...,” “On the Lame”

Paper 4 (1.5-2 pages) due by 5:45pm on 10/23: Explain one (and *only* one) of the arguments about the fear of death from our readings. Is the argument successful? Why or why not?

October 23

Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* 1-2
Further Reading: <https://qz.com/982044/descartes-most-famous-idea-was-first-articulated-by-a-woman/>

October 30

Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* 3-6
discussion of revision
(Undergraduate Credit revision conferences this week)

November 6

Hume, from *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (in *Free Will*)
Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment” (in *Free Will*)
(Undergraduate Credit revision conferences this week)

Revision of Paper 3 or 4 (2-2.5 pages) due by 5:45pm on 11/13

November 13

Plato, “Crito”
Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?” (on course website)

Graduate Credit: Draft of Final Paper Prompt (a paragraph) due by 5:45pm on 11/20

November 20

Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience”
King Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (on course website)
model paper, “Martin Luther King Jr.’s Troubled Attitude...” (on course website)
Further Reading: Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

Undergraduate Credit: Paper 5 (2-3 pages) due by 5:45pm on 11/27: Suppose you are a police officer. A law, which seems to you unjust, is passed and goes into effect, and you are tasked to enforce it. What should you do? Provide an argument for your view, with reference to Plato's *Crito*, Kant, Thoreau, and/or King.

November 27

Nietzsche, "On the Prejudices of the Philosophers"

Undergraduate Credit: Paper 6 (2-3 pages) due by 5:45pm on 12/4: "[Philosophers] all pose as if they had discovered and reached their real opinions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely unconcerned dialectic [...]; while at bottom it is an assumption, a hunch, indeed a kind of 'inspiration'—most often a desire of the heart that has been filtered and made abstract—that they defend with reasons they have sought after the fact." (p. 12)

What does Nietzsche mean by this? Pick one of the philosophers we have read earlier in the course. What "desire of the heart" do you think Nietzsche would say motivated him? Why?

Graduate Credit: Draft of Final Paper (5-6 pages) due by 5:45pm on 12/4

December 4

Nietzsche, "Natural History of Morals" and "What Is Noble?"

(Graduate Credit revision conferences this week)

December 11

Sartre, "Bad Faith" (on course site)

De Beauvoir, Introduction to *The Second Sex* (on course site)

Further Reading: Sartre, *Nausea*

(Graduate Credit revision conferences this week)

Undergraduate Credit: Revision of Paper 5 or 6 (3-4 pages) due by 5:45pm on 12/18

Graduate Credit: Revision of Final Paper (7-8 pages) due by 5:45pm on 12/18

December 18

MacIntyre, "The Virtues, the Unity of a Life, and the Concept of a Tradition" (on course website)

Appiah, "The Case Against Character" (on course website)

Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of our Character" (on course website)

My Paper's Title

This is roughly how I would like you to format your papers. Use a normal font (like Times New Roman) in 12-point size, and one-inch margins on all sides. Single-space your header information (if you are using *Word*, go to “Format,” “Paragraph,” and check “Don’t add space between paragraphs of the same style”), and include it only on the first page, then double-space the body of the paper. Length guidelines are based on this formatting. Give your paper an interesting and informative title. Include page numbers at the bottom of the page.

Citation-wise, I don’t need anything for assigned works beyond parenthetical page numbers for quotations and paraphrases. For example, Descartes writes that “this pronouncement ‘I think, I exist’ is necessarily true every time I utter it or conceive it in my mind” (18). In quoting Plato and Aristotle, it is traditional to use the standardized page numbers included in the margins of every respectable edition. For example, Euthyphro defines piety as “what is dear to the gods” (7a). If you refer to any source beyond those assigned, you should provide enough bibliographical information in a footnote that I can track it down, though this is unlikely for anything except the final paper for graduate students. For example, Heidegger writes, “By its very essence, death is in every case mine.”¹ Note that citations aren’t necessary for references to common knowledge, or general claims about well known works like, say, *Hamlet*.

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Collins, 1962), 284.

A Timeline of Western Philosophy

Our Readings, [Other Philosophers]		Context
		Homer
	600 B.C.E.	
[Pre-Socratics]		Torah
[Socrates]		Peloponnesian War
Plato, 429-347, <i>Euthyphro</i> , <i>Apology</i> , <i>Crito</i>	400 B.C.E.	
Aristotle, 384-322, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>		
[Hellenistic philosophy]	200 B.C.E.	
	1	Jesus
[Roman philosophy]		Roman Empire
	200	
Augustine, 354-430, <i>On Free Choice of the Will</i>	400	
	600	Fall of Roman Empire Muhammad
	800	Charlemagne
[Islamic philosophy]	1000	<i>Beowulf</i>
[Maimonides]		Crusades
[Aquinas]	1200	Magna Carta
		Black Death, Dante
[Scholastic philosophy]	1400	
[Machiavelli]		Italian Renaissance
Montaigne, <i>Essays</i> , 1580s		Reformation
Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> , 1641	1600	Shakespeare
[Hobbes]		
[Spinoza] [Locke] [Leibniz]		Newton
[Rousseau]		
Hume, <i>Enquiry Con. Human Understanding</i> , 1748		Declaration of Independence
Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" 1784	1800	French Revolution
[Mill] [Hegel]		
Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," 1849		Civil War
[Kierkegaard] [Marx]		
Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , 1886		Freud
[Wittgenstein] [Heidegger]		WWI
Sartre, <i>Being and Nothingness</i> , 1943		WWII
De Beauvoir, <i>The Second Sex</i> , 1949		
MLK, Jr., <i>Letter from Birmingham Jail</i> , 1963		Civil Rights Movement
Strawson, 1963; Nagel, 1971; Frankfurt, 1971		
MacIntyre, 1981; Rosenbaum, 1986	2000	
Kamtekar 2004; Appiah, 2010		

An Introduction to Writing Philosophy Papers

This is a writing-intensive course, meant to introduce you to the conventions of writing in philosophy. Like all disciplines, philosophy has values and conventions specific to it, which sometimes overlap with, and sometimes are in tension with, those in other kinds of writing. Keep that in mind as you learn and practice writing in philosophy in this course. I will discuss writing issues as part of some of my lectures, including leading you through some model student essays. You can also raise questions about writing issues (in addition to the content of the readings) in discussion section. And you will receive feedback about matter of form and rhetoric, in addition to content, on your papers. Here are some important initial guidelines about writing in philosophy:

Philosophy values **clarity** and **precision** very highly. You should choose your words carefully and define or explain uncommon, unfamiliar, and technical terms (think of your audience as generally well educated and curious, but not specifically familiar with our readings). It is often helpful to make distinctions, so your reader knows you mean X rather than—similarly but importantly differently—Y. Work to make sure your sentences cannot reasonably be interpreted to mean other than what you intend them to mean. Don't trust that your reader will be charitable; make your sentence literally mean what you intend it to. Since philosophy often deals with complex and abstract issues, it is all the more important to use straightforward and plain language whenever possible. Don't falsely inflate your diction, syntax, or tone in an effort to sound smart or cover over vagaries in your thinking.

Philosophy values **reasons** and **argument** very highly. When discussing an existing view (from our readings), it is not enough to explain *what* is claimed. Rather, you will almost always be asked to explain *why* a philosopher claims what he or she does, what reasons are put forward to defend that claim as being true. When writing about your own views in philosophy, it is not enough to merely state your opinion, *that* you think X, or *that* someone is wrong to claim Y. Rather, you need to argue *why* X is true, *for what reasons* Y is false, so that your reader has rational grounds for accepting your claim. Finally, in making arguments, it is better (especially in short papers of the sort assigned in this course) to develop one unified argument for your claim than it is to list numerous partially developed ones. Pick your strongest reason and develop it as fully as you can.

Here are the most common types of papers assigned in philosophy classes:

Explanation

Often, especially early in introductory classes, you will be asked to write essays that merely explain a claim or argument. Here the task is simply to clearly and precisely explain—in your own words, but usually with key supporting textual evidence—what the prompt asks you to explain: what a claim means and/or how an argument is supposed to lead to its conclusion. Notice that this kind of essay does *not* ask you whether you agree with the claim or whether you think the argument works. This kind of paper does not really have a contentious thesis, as such prompts assume there is a right way to understand the claim/argument. While you will want to think about how to best organize your explanation, such essays usually don't have a formal introduction/body/conclusion structure. Jump right in, starting by stating the claim to be explained. A common mistake in these papers is to start too far from the specific topic, including broad summary and background information not strictly relevant and so a waste of precious space. In our class, Papers 1 and 2 are of this form.

Interpretation

Sometimes, especially in classes dealing with very difficult texts or more engaged with secondary scholarship about such texts, you will be asked to write essays that go beyond merely explaining to more fully interpreting a claim or argument. Such papers are similar to explanation essays (and the line between them isn't always hard and fast), but they include a contentious thesis: that one should understand what is discussed in *this* way, rather than in *that* way. Whereas in explanation essays, alternative interpretations aren't usually discussed, or discussed only to make clear that you mean X and not Y, in interpretation essays, it is assumed that others could reasonably understand the claim or argument differently, and your task is not just to explain, but to make an explicit case that your interpretation is the best one available. Our class doesn't include this kind of paper (in part because we are avoiding harder texts), but it is good to be aware of it.

Application

Sometimes, especially in classes on Applied Ethics (Medical Ethics, Business Ethics) and Philosophy of Art, you will be asked to apply a philosophical theory to a specific case or situation or work. Such essays usually build an initial moment of explanation (or interpretation) into them, as you will probably need to make sure that your reader understands the theory before discussing how it applies in this specific instance. This kind of paper is centered on a contentious thesis: that the theory applies in *this* way, for *this* reason. Its structure may be more or less formal depending on the length and the complexity of views discussed. In our class, Paper 6 is of this form.

Critical Analysis/Evaluation

The most common type of paper in philosophy classes asks you to analyze and/or evaluate an argument, that is, to make your own argument about an existing claim, most often whether or not an author has provided sufficient reasons to accept it is true. Most of the time, students are expected to identify a problem with the examined argument. This might be a problem with its logic, or with one of its premises, or with an unstated assumption it makes, or with an unacceptable implication it has. One can also identify a potential problem, but then show how it is resolvable (ultimately siding with the original author, now having added new support to the claim). Such essays usually build on an initial moment of explanation (or interpretation), since you need to make sure your reader understands what is claimed, and how the argument is supposed to work, before making your own argument about it. This kind of paper usually has an explicit thesis, foregrounding your claim—that so and so's argument is problematic because of X—and a fuller structure (which is not to say irrelevant background should be included; it still shouldn't be). In our class, Paper 4 is of this form.

Original Argument

This kind of paper asks you to make an original claim of your own (usually in response to a specific question or issue) and defend it with reasons that add up to one unified argument. It is very much centered on a contentious thesis—your claim and a succinct statement of the reason(s) you will put forward in defense of it, and it usually has a fuller introduction/body/conclusion structure. Often, such papers will build on an initial moment of explanation (or interpretation) and/or critical analysis—if explaining an existing philosophical view and/or criticizing an argument put forward in defense of it is the best way of setting up your own argument that something else (your thesis) is true instead. A common mistake in this kind of paper is merely offering your opinion, not an argument that it is true. Another common mistake is thinking that an earth-shatteringly original claim is better than a more modest but still interesting one, carefully defended. In our class, Papers 3 and 5 are of this form.