

# Syllabus for Philosophy 10101

Instructor: Alex Arnold

aarnold1@nd.edu — (773)-257-3891 — Malloy 213

<http://nd.edu/~aarnold1/>

Office Hours: M W F 1PM-2PM or by appt.

Fall 2009

## Course Description

In this course, we will acquaint ourselves with some of the central questions of Western philosophy — among them: is there a God? what are we? do we know anything? are there objective moral truths? is morality relative to one's culture? Along the way, we will learn how to better argue for and against various positions we encounter, in both speech and in writing. Hopefully, learning how to argue in those contexts will translate into better critical thinking skills overall—a very useful thing indeed.

## Course Requirements

**Participation—20%:** I expect students to show up to class prepared to discuss the material assigned. To encourage this I oftentimes shall assign **small 250-500 word assignments** on specific readings, usually asking you to explain the main idea of the assigned reading. I also reserve the right to give **pop quizzes** at any time. Smaller written assignment and pop quizzes (if any there be) will be a large factor in your participation grade. For those who are uncomfortable speaking in class, intelligent conversation during office hours is a worthy substitute for in-class participation.

**Written Assignments—50%:** There are three written assignments: one 500-750 word paper and two 1250-1500 word papers. The 500-750 word paper is worth 10%

of your final grade; each 1250-1500 word paper is worth 20%. **I am more than happy to go over paper drafts during office hours.**

**Midterm—15%:** There will be a midterm exam. It will consist of 2-3 short-answer questions and one long-answer question. I will make a study guide and take class time to review for it.

**Final Exam—15%:** There will be a **cumulative** final exam at semester's end. It will consist of some short-answer questions and a few long-answer essay questions. There will be a review session and a study guide for your convenience.

## Course Policies

**Required Texts:** There are no required texts to purchase. I will supply all the readings ahead of time by email. Because of copyright considerations, I cannot post all the readings online; however, many readings are readily available in the public domain.

**Attendance:** You're all adults, so I do not require attendance. However, be mindful of the fact that participation is **20%** of your grade, and that receiving a good grade in this class requires regular attendance. **In other words, don't expect a good grade if you miss a lot of class. In fact, expect a bad one.** You are responsible for anything you miss in class. If you happen to know in advance of an absence, do me the courtesy of letting me know.

**Paper Format:** Papers will have one-inch margins, and be written in standard 12pt sans-serif typeface.<sup>1</sup> Papers will be stapled and have all identifying information confined to a title page, **which will be the last page of the paper.** This is to make "blind review" easier. Papers will be turned in both via email and hard copy to my mailbox in Malloy 118.

**Late Papers:** Short answer: **there are none.** Longer answer: there are none, *unless you have a University-approved excuse.* You are given ample time to complete each paper.

**Plagiarism:** You should always cite your sources because **plagiarism is academic suicide.** Any possible case of plagiarism is treated with the utmost gravity and seriousness. If it turns out that a student has plagiarized material, she or he will

---

<sup>1</sup>Also do not use the following fonts, because I *hate* them: Comic Sans MS and Papyrus.

receive an automatic 'F' in the course, and may have to withdraw from the University. To prevent this from happening, you should familiarize yourself with the Philosophy Department's guidelines regarding plagiarism.<sup>2</sup> If ever in doubt, *ask me*.

## Course Schedule and Assigned Readings<sup>3</sup>

### **Week 1:** Introduction, and is there a God?

25 Aug. — Course overview (no reading)

27 Aug. — St. Anselm, *Proslogion*, chs. II and III

### **Week 2:** Is there a God?

1 Sept. — St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, art. 3

3 Sept. — William Paley, selections from *Natural Theology* and David Hume, selections from *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*

### **Week 3:** Is there a God?

8 Sept. — J.L. Mackie, 'Evil and Omnipotence'

10 Sept. — Peter van Inwagen, 'The Problem of Evil'

### **Week 4:** Is belief in God rational?

15 Sept. — W.K. Clifford, selection from 'The Ethics of Belief'

17 Sept. — William Alston, 'Perceiving God'

### **Week 5:** What are we?

22 Sept. — René Descartes, selection from *Meditations* and St. Thomas Aquinas, selections from *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 75-75

24 Sept. — John Locke, II, xxvii from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and Thomas Reid, III, vi from *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*

### **Week 6:** What are we?

29 Sept. — David Hume, I, iv, §6 from *A Treatise on Human Nature* and Peter Unger, 'I Do Not Exist'

1 Oct. — No new reading

### **Week 7:** What are we?

6 Oct. — Eric Olson, 'An Argument for Animalism'

8 Oct. — No new reading

---

<sup>2</sup>To be found at <http://philosophy.nd.edu/undergraduate-program/documents/plagiarism.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>The date on which a reading appears is the date by which I expect you to have read that reading.

**Week 8: Midterms**

- 13 Oct. — Review
- 15 Oct. — Midterm

**Week 9: Fall Break—no class (duh)****Week 10: Do we know anything?**

- 27 Oct. — Sextus Empiricus, selections from *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*
- 29 Oct. — René Descartes, Meditation One from *Meditations on First Philosophy*

**Week 11: Do we know anything?**

- 3 Nov. — David Hume, §4 of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*
- 5 Nov. — G.E. Moore, 'Certainty'

**Week 12: Do we know anything?**

- 10 Nov. — Bryan Frances, 'Live Skeptical Hypotheses'
- 12 Nov. — No new reading

**Week 13: Do we know anything?**

- 17 Nov. — Richard Feldman, 'Reasonable Religious Disagreement'
- 19 Nov. — No new reading

**Week 14: Are there objective moral truths?**

- 24 Nov. — J.L. Mackie, selections from *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*
- 26 Nov. — **Thanksgiving—no class (duh)**

**Week 15: Is morality relative to one's culture?**

- 1 Dec. — Ruth Benedict, 'Anthropology and the Abnormal'
- 3 Dec. — James Rachels, 'The Challenge of Cultural Relativism'

**Week 16: Is morality a matter of God's commands?**

- 8 Dec. — Plato, selection from the *Euthyphro* and Philip Quinn, selection from 'Divine Command Ethics'
- 10 Dec. — Review