

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

Harvard Summer School 2018

Professor Andreas Teuber



Introduction

The primary concern of philosophy is the study of ideas central to the ways we think and live. The value, however, of many of our key concepts is often hidden from us. We take the ways we make sense of ourselves and the world for granted. We forget why truth matters or acting decently is a minimal requirement for treating others justly.

Philosophy makes the invisible visible.

It cultivates techniques that help us become clearer about what matters to us most. It develops skills that are essential in the pursuit of every discipline. As Robert Rubin, Treasury Secretary under Clinton, said many times: “I took one course in philosophy in college and it made me a better economist.”

The course will ask and aim to answer central questions in philosophy: **“Can Machines Think?” • “What is Consciousness?” • “Do Persons have Free Will?” • “How do you Know you are not a Brain-in-a-Vat or Living in a Matrix?” • “What is Justice?” • “What’s so Bad about Inequality?” • “If you had the Option, would you Choose to be Immortal?” • “Does Life have Meaning?”**

The course is more about thinking than it is about coverage or the memorization of a bunch of facts. The main focus is on the questions.

In its aim and format the course is more an invitation to do philosophy than an introduction. Introductions seek to map out a territory or lay the groundwork for more detailed study. There will be some of that in the Summer of 2018, but insofar as invitations beckon and introductions point, the course beckons students to the study of philosophy rather than points the way.

Topics include arguments for and against the existence of God, the problem of evil, minds, brains and programs, personal identity (“who am I?”), freedom and determinism, moral objectivity v. moral relativism, justice and mercy, and what makes life worth living . . . to name a few. The course is not intended to be comprehensive or exhaustive. The classic philosophical materials are selected to provide a basis for understanding central debates within the field.

The course is divided into four sections and each section focuses on a key area within Western philosophy, in the areas of (somewhat fancily put) epistemology, general metaphysics and ontology as well as philosophy of mind, philosophy of religion, political philosophy and ethics:

- Preamble: What is Philosophy?**
- **PART I: REASON & FAITH**
 - **PART II: MIND & BODY**
 - **PART III: KNOWLEDGE & REALITY**
 - **PART IV: ETHICS, JUSTICE & THE GOOD LIFE**

The Syllabus for the **Introduction to Philosophy** course (taught by Andreas Teuber) has been listed among the top ten most popular philosophy syllabi in the world by **Google** and the **Digital Library of America** for more than a decade”

“The Ten Most Popular Philosophy Syllabi in the World”

http://www.dancohen.org/blog/posts/10_most_popular_philosophy_syllabi

Class Times

The course will meet on **Tuesdays & Thursdays from 12:15 to 3:00 PM.**

Reading

You will not be required to purchase a textbook or course pak. All the readings will be posted online. But the **Norton Introduction to Philosophy (2015)** available at the **HARVARD COOP** has most of the course readings between its two covers and is strongly recommended as is Tom Nagel’s **WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN? – A Very Short Introduction to Philosophy**, Oxford University Press.

Writing

Three short papers are required on topics growing out of the readings and class discussions. Each paper should be about 5 pages in length. Paper topics will be available at least seven days before a paper is due. The topics will also be handed out in class and posted on the web to allow you to show the question, if you wish, to family and friends and argue with them about it. The first of the three exercises will *not* be graded. It will give everyone the opportunity to try their hand at “doing some philosophy,” to defend a position, think of a strong objection and respond to it. More will be said on the first day of class. There will also be a FINAL PAPER, of (roughly, roughly) 6-7 pages and three Reader Response Exercises which will require no more than a paragraph each

Rewriting

You will have the opportunity to rewrite one of the three graded papers. Rewrites must be accompanied by a copy of the original with the comments, plus a cover sheet, stating how you have improved the paper and a brief description of what you did to make your paper, now rewritten, better. The grade you receive on your paper will be the grade you receive for the rewrite. It will not be an average of the two grades. Again: more will be said about rewriting on the first day of class and at the time the rewrite option kicks in

Examinations

There will be no exams of any kind: no quiz, no midterm and no final exam.



Participation

You may meet the participation requirement by participating in class discussions, attending discussion sessions, talking and corresponding with family and friends as well as classmates, by keeping a diary or journal, and by communicating on Facebook. At the end of the semester everyone will be given the opportunity to send an email describing what they did in and outside the class to meet the requirement.



Attendance

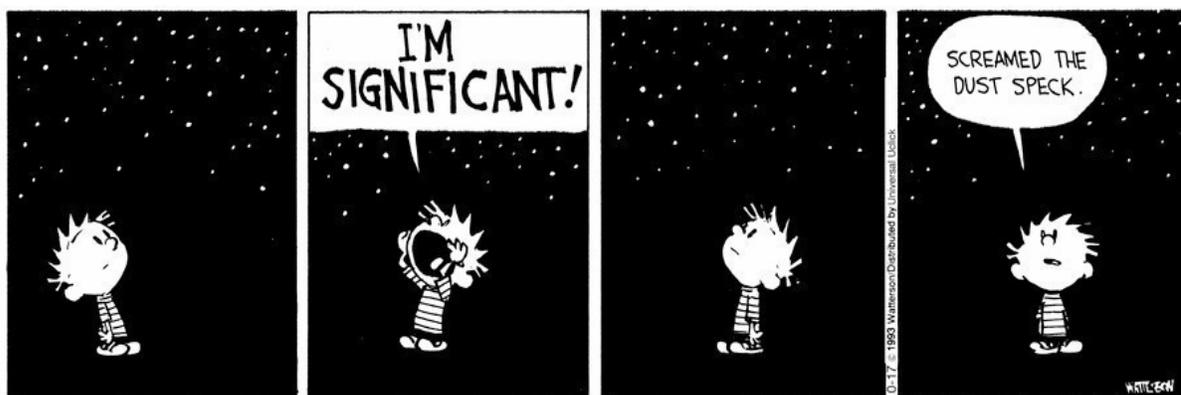
If you are taking the course on campus, you are expected to attend class.

Grading

The course calls for four short papers, the first of which will be a credit/no credit paper, three short reader response exercises and a participation requirement. If you receive "credit" on the first paper and we will work together with you to make sure that happens, the three remaining graded papers will be weighted as follows: 35% for your best effort, 25% for your next best effort and 20% for the one which is least successful of the three. The three reading exercises will count a total of 10% and participation count 10% of your final grade.

Course Web Site

The Course has its own Canvas Web Site.



Teaching Assistants

Several Teaching Assistants have been assigned to the Course. The Teaching Assistants will be primarily responsible for reading your papers and making comments on them as well as participating in and helping to lead discussion sessions. The Teaching Assistants will also be available to discuss your ideas for how you wish to address this or that paper topic. I shall look at all the papers before grades are handed out and decide on what grades each paper should receive. If you are convinced an error has been made, first talk with your teaching assistant with whom you have been working. If you are still not satisfied, you may bring your paper to me.

Office Hours

I will hold office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:15 until 4:15 and by appointment. If you wish to leave messages for me, send me an email either at teuber@g.harvard.edu or teuber@fas.harvard.edu. The Teaching Assistants will also hold office hours and be reachable by email. Their hours will be announced in the first week of the Summer semester.



Academic Integrity

Harvard Summer School expects you to understand and maintain high standards of academic integrity. Breaches of academic integrity are subject to review and disciplinary action by the Administrative Board. Examples include plagiarism, inappropriate collaboration, cheating, duplication of assignments and falsification and misrepresentation of research results. See the Harvard page at

Harvard Resources to Support Academic Honesty

<https://www.summer.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources-support-academic-integrity>



Resources to Support Academic Integrity

The University offers essential information about the use of sources in academic writing.

The Harvard Guide to Using Resources

<http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do>

To receive the most benefit, read all six sections of the guide. You will gain a deep appreciation for why and how sources are used in academic writing and the ethical implication of improper citation.

Accessibility and Accommodation Services

The Accessibility Services Office at Accessibility@dcemail.harvard.edu or 617_998_9640 offers a variety of accommodations and services to students with documented disabilities, permanent and temporary injuries, and chronic conditions. If you are a student with a disability, the Summer School will engage you in an interactive process to provide you with an equal opportunity to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from the academic activities and materials in the **INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY Course**. The manager of accessibility services will work with you on an individualized, case by case basis, to provide appropriate services to ensure you have a rich and rewarding academic experience.

Online Option

The *Introduction to Philosophy* course may be taken either **ON CAMPUS** or **ONLINE**. Classes meet on campus and you can take the course on campus as you would take a regular course at the university. The course also has an online option. You may take it online. Class sessions will be video- taped and posted within 24 hours of the time the class meets. So you may take the course on campus and watch the videos to refresh your memory or for review.

Calvin and Hobbes

BY WATERS



GET WHAT YOU CAN WHILE THE GETTING'S GOOD - THAT'S WHAT I SAY! MIGHT MAKES RIGHT! THE WINNERS WRITE THE HISTORY BOOKS!

