

**PHIL 1301—Introduction to Philosophy  
Fall 2011**

**Instructor: Zachary Cloer Alexander**

**Conference: By appointment**

**Time: Thursdays 5-9pm**

**Room: 209**

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**Course Description:**

**This course will hit upon some of the major figures in the history of philosophy and focus on many topics that have influenced our thinking throughout our history. The aim of this course is to introduce a general understanding of philosophical thinking along with a rudimentary survey of the various philosophical disciplines, methods, doctrines and ideas that form our historical, social, spiritual and scientific ideas. This course will not give a complete account of the philosophy but rather focus on come prime examples of Ancient, Classical, Medieval, Reniasance, Reformation, and Modern philosophy to give a sense of the overall foundations and design of philosophical thought. We will examine how past and present thinkers formulate their questions and how their specific understanding of the world influences how they come to solutions. We will be asking many questions throughout the class: Is knowledge possible? If so, where does knowledge come from (experiences/reason/ both)? What is the basic structure or substance of the world? How did it begin? Does God exist? How can we explain evil? Do people possess freewill? What is normative? What is Truth? Is morality relative, absolute or something in between? What is the difference between *a priori* and *a posteriori*. Through the examination of general philosophical constructs and some of the problems they face, the student will be challenged to begin to form their own opinions regarding the world and how these questions apply to their own lives. By engaging some of the most influential philosophical concepts this course will encourage students to expand their capacity to read, analyze and evaluate literature. It will also teach students how to express their own views pertaining to philosophical positions and how to critically assess them.**

**Course Objectives:**

- **Students will learn to read, interpret, think write philosophically.**
- **Student will be introduced to some important philosophers and major philosophical problems that have shaped our understanding of the world.**
- **Students will increase their awareness and understanding of the relationship between philosophy and Christianity**

**Means to Achieve These Objectives:**

- **Lectures**

- Class Discussions
- Reading Assignments
- Writing Assignments

### **Expectations and Requirements:**

- A. Reading and Preparation.** Each student should read carefully the assigned texts prior to class. However, the key is to look for central issues and to avoid getting lost in the intricate details. More specifically, each student should formulate a critical analysis of the assigned readings, and should thus be prepared for informed participation in the discussion at each class session.
- B. Book Review.** Each student will write critical response (3 pages) to one of the philosophical topics revealed within the book *Sophie's World*. The paper will demonstrate an understanding of the underlying philosophical concerns at the heart of the problem and explain how you would handle the problem. The Book Review is due September 29, 2011.
- C. Midterm Exam:** October, 6, 2011.
- D. Topic Paper.** Each student will write a 2 page (single spaced) Topic Paper which will explore a philosophical topic which is relevant to their specific situation and context. Each student will meet with the instructor to discuss their individual topics before writing them. The student will then present their topic in class. The paper is due October 13, 2011.
- E. Major Paper.** Each student is required to write a paper that spells out their approach to philosophy (2 pages), unpacks their understanding of the relationship between ethics and Christianity (3 pages), and unearths the implications of their position for constructive interaction with everyday situations (1 pages). The paper should be at least 10 pages and no more than 15 pages and is due on Friday, November 25, 2011.
- F. Final Exam:** December 8, 2011.

Note: **Gender-exclusive language** will result in a grade reduction in class or in written assignments. The student will use gender-inclusive language and refrain from the use of gender specific 3<sup>rd</sup> person nouns or pronouns when relating to humanity as a whole or to people in general. I.e. "Humankind" not "mankind," human not man, "(one, he/she, (s)he, he or she, or a person) might relate to the problem..." not "he might relate to the problem..." When in doubt use the feminine pronoun not the masculine. No papers which use none gender inclusive language will be accepted in my class and participation grades may be penalized accordingly.

### **Required Text:**

- Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie's World*, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux (1994).
- Internet Readings

- Handouts

### **Attendance, Grading and Plagiarism:**

Students should attend all class meetings. If you are unable to attend a class period, please inform me in advance. In the case of unavoidable absence please contact me in order to get the proper notes or assignments which were missed.

Each student's semester grade will consist of the following components:

Book Review	10%
Midterm	15%
Topic Paper	15%
Final Examination	20%
Class Preparation/Participation	20%
Major Paper	20%

Essay and Paper grades can be measured as follows:

**A (Excellent):** Shows superior command of the primary and secondary literature and the ability to employ relevant theory to great effect in the interpretation of the primary literature. The A paper or essay can raise new questions in the context of previous scholarship. An A essay or paper also shows flawless English grammar and rhetoric.

**B (Good):** Shows strong command of the primary and secondary literature and some ability to form independent interpretive judgment. A B paper also shows near flawless English grammar and rhetoric. It has some of the merits of an A paper but not to the extent that it warrants an A.

**C (Average)** A C essay or paper has some grasp of both primary and secondary literature and a general awareness of the central theoretical issues covered by the course but shows little ability to form independent scholarly judgment. Serious English compositional flaws may lower an otherwise A or B paper to a C.

**D (Below Average)** A D essay or paper lacks coherence or significant awareness of the issues raised in the course about the texts studied in it. The writing and organization is poor and it exhibits no pertinent understanding of the readings or lecture material and/or contains seriously misconstrued philosophical or logical methodological components.

**F (Failing)** Don't ask!

The grading scale is as follows: A=90-100, B=80-89, C=70-79, D=60-69, and F=0-59.

## Plagiarism:

**Plagiarism and citation of sources:** Plagiarism is the representation of another person's work as your own and is a form of theft. **This includes material composed by other students, purchased from an online paper service, or copied from published books and articles or from the Internet.** If in any assignment you employ material written by someone else, you must give the author proper credit, **documenting the source with an appropriate citation and marking any words directly quoted with quotation marks (or with indentation if four or more lines are quoted).** Failure to appropriately credit the sources you use will result in a reduction in your grade for the assignment in question and/or the requirement that you revise the assignment. **Intentionally representing another person's work as your own will be grounds for academic discipline, including your possible dismissal from the School.** For more information on how to acknowledge sources properly and avoid plagiarism, refer to the School's "Guide to Written Work" ([http://www.austingrad.edu/images/Resources/student/guide\\_for\\_written\\_work.htm](http://www.austingrad.edu/images/Resources/student/guide_for_written_work.htm)).

## Class Schedule:

1. Introduction to Philosophy: Why Study Philosophy—Basic Definitions and Philosophical Theories
2. Ancient Near Eastern Cosmology, Greek Cosmology, Modern Scientific Cosmology.
3. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle
4. Introduction to Philosophy of Religion; Ontological Argument Cosmological Argument; Teleological Argument
5. St. Augustine, St. Thomas
6. The Problem of Evil; Responses and Rebuttals
7. Erasmus and Luther on Free Will/Determinism
8. Introduction to Philosophy of Mind; Dualism; Problems with Dualism
9. Freedom; Hard Determinism; Replies to Hard Determinism
10. Compatibilism; Problems with Compatibilism
11. Relativism; Divine Command Theory
12. Utilitarianism; Problems with Utilitarianism
13. Introduction to Epistemology; Descartes' Project
14. Locke's Project; Berkeley's Project
15. Relativism, Egoism and "Postmodern" Philosophy