

Introduction to Philosophy

Philosophy 100 · Spring 2010

Professor Alexander Klein
Office Hours T & Th 9:45-10:45
Email aklein@csulb.edu
Office MHB 912

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Philosophy is an ancient intellectual tradition. It was invented by Plato in the fifth century BCE, and has been carried on in a slowly evolving, almost unbroken conversation, all the way to today. Then and now, philosophers pose questions that are disarmingly simple, yet at the same time address fundamental issues of human life. Philosophers' investigations can be divided into some broad categories: *epistemology* (the study of knowledge), *metaphysics* (the study of the nature of reality), *ethics* (the study of right and wrong), *aesthetics* (the study of art), and *logic* (the study of reasoning). This course uses both classic and contemporary works to offer a basic overview of philosophy. We will focus especially on epistemology and ethics, though we will also touch on metaphysics and aesthetics more briefly.

COURSE GOALS

Upon completion of this course, diligent students should find that they

- can demonstrate basic comprehension of the main ideas of some key figures in the history of philosophy;
- can demonstrate a basic ability to think philosophically about novel problems;
- can demonstrate a basic ability to comprehend and critically analyze philosophical texts.

REQUIRED TEXT

Jonathan E. Adler and Catherine Z. Elgin (2007). *Philosophical Inquiry: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

NOTE: you must bring the book with you to every class session.

GRADING

Grades will be based on a midterm exam (25%), a final exam (30%), class participation (10%), and an average of your 10 best scores out of 12 total take-home assignments (35%).

TYPES OF ASSIGNMENTS

Take-Home Assignments

NOTE: Over the course of the semester you will need to **12 Scantron Sheets, Form number 882-E**. You must buy these yourselves—they are available at the bookstore. I strongly recommend buying a stack of 12 now so that you don't have to keep returning to the bookstore every week.

The Scantron sheets will be used for your take-home assignments, which will consist of 3-5 questions per week. They will be distributed Friday evenings on Beachboard, and will be due **at the beginning of class**, typically on the following Tuesday. These assignments will always be based on the previous week's readings and lectures.

At the end of the semester, I will only count the top 10 of your 12 scores. This is to allow you perhaps to miss an assignment or two for any reason, or simply to have as many chances as possible to do well. Because of this cushion, **TAKE-HOME ASSIGNMENTS MAY ONLY BE SUBMITTED IN CLASS, AND ONLY AT THE START OF CLASS**. If you are late to class, you cannot hand in your assignment. These assignments will not be accepted outside of class for any reason.

To be clear: I will not accept your take-home assignments if you missed class or were late even for an excusable reason. Again, the point of the cushion is to allow you to miss an assignment or two, for whatever reason, with no negative consequences on your grade.

Exams

The midterm and final will incorporate some short-answer questions as well as some multiple choice questions. The midterm will cover the material from the 1st half of the semester, and the final will be cumulative.

Attendance/Reading

Please jot down either a question or a comment about the reading material assigned on any given day. I will randomly call on students to read their comment or question each class. These will not be collected or graded; however, I will take into account the quality of your comments and questions in formulating the participation portion of your grade.

POLICIES

Beachboard

This class requires the use of Beachboard. I will distribute the syllabus and many assignments simply by posting them online. I will also post your grades to Beachboard, and send the occasional group email to all enrolled students.

Withdrawal

I follow the University's current withdrawal policy, which can be found at:

http://www.csulb.edu/divisions/aa/catalog/2009-2010/academic_information/withdrawal_policy.html

How to Submit Assignments in Case of an Excused Absence

Weekly assignments cannot be handed in outside of class, and they cannot be handed in late, even in the event of an excused absence. See section entitled "Take-Home Assignments," above. If you cannot attend the midterm or the final, you must contact me at least 24 hours in advance of the exam to schedule an alternative exam session.

Disability

I am more than happy to accommodate any special requirements you may have in connection with a University-documented disability. Please notify me in advance if you need any such accommodation. I would appreciate hearing from you as soon as possible.

EMAIL POLICY

Because of the state budget cuts, I currently have no phone in my office. So if you need to contact me, please use email. I try to respond to student email within **1 work day** (M-Sa) of receiving a message. If you do not hear back from me within that period, feel free to give me a gentle e-nudge. Please do use your university email account for all communication.

I'll probably suggest that we meet during office hours if you raise a substantive question over email. If you email and ask for information that is readily available online, please do not be offended if I respond with a very brief message. That helps free me up to deal with more pressing issues related to the class.

Finally, please do not send me email attachments unless we have arranged something in advance.

I am a new faculty member here, so this course is a work in progress. As such, I reserve the right to change any regulations during the semester, though I will try to reach a consensus with the class should the need arise to make any significant alterations.