

Course: Phil. 007
Instructor: Kyle Scott, kyle_scott@pitzer.edu
Office Hrs: Wed.'s, 5:45-7:45pm, Broad Hall 212 #12

Course Time: Mon. & Wed., 4:15-5:30pm
Course Location: Broad Hall 207

Phil. 007: Introduction to Philosophy

Course Description

The very idea of an “introduction to philosophy” course is, perhaps, absurd. For one thing, it is far from obvious that there is any single, unified discipline of “philosophy” with a distinctive content or methodology all its own. (“What is philosophy?” is *itself* a philosophical question!). For another, even granting the existence of such a discipline, the idea that a single course could “introduce” you to the dizzying range of philosophical thought spanning well over two millennia is...certainly a fantasy. Even a “greatest hits” model, focusing exclusively on the most influential texts and traditions would take at least a full academic year (if not a lifetime!).

We will not, then, be attempting any such herculean feat. Rather, this class will attempt to immerse you in the practice of philosophy as it has been understood by just a small snippet of thinkers. We will focus primarily (though not exclusively) on just one Western philosophical tradition, dating back to ancient Greece and continuing to this day. This is a wonderful, exciting, powerful, mind-blowing philosophical tradition. I love it with all my heart. However, we focus on it, not because it is in any sense “superior” to the many other equally wonderful ways of doing philosophy, but rather simply because it is the one I know best.

And yet, any full “introduction” to even just this tradition would require much more time than we have. So, narrowing our scope even further, we will focus on just three topics. In the first part of the course, we will focus on the topic of “the good.” Some questions we will consider include: What is good? What is good *for me*, as the particular being that I am? And how can I know it? We will then turn to the related topic of personal identity and human nature, and consider questions such as: What am I? How can I know what I am? And just what I will know when I know it? In the final part of the course, we will turn to topics of ethical and social concern. Some questions we will consider here are: how should I relate to others? In what ways are human relations liable to go awry? And how can we fix them when they do?

As we address all the above questions, we will search for the best answers to them, but we will also think about whether they are good questions to ask and consider the possibility that they do not have any definitive answers at all.

Objectives

In addition to exposing students to philosophy and philosophical ways of thinking, this course also aims to provide students many opportunities to practice the fundamental skills of philosophical inquiry, including the extraction, expression, and evaluation of arguments articulated in philosophical texts; the crafting of compelling and convincing philosophical prose; and the development of one's own informed point of view on philosophical issues. More generally, the course aims to make students better writers and communicators. More specifically, students will learn:

1. How to produce a cogent argument and how to express it with maximum perspicuity, both in writing and orally.
2. How to articulate and even welcome objections to one's views; how to apply the principle of charity to others' opinions; and how to address objections and competing views effectively and respectfully in one's writing.
3. How to read, analyze, and articulate arguments and viewpoints in primary philosophical texts, both historical and contemporary.
4. How to turn a rough idea into a polished piece of writing.
5. How to develop and defend one's own position with respect to problems that have occupied both historical and contemporary philosophers.

Texts

All readings will be made available on the course website.

Course Requirements

The course requirements are designed to help you build three types of skills relevant to philosophy (and general life): (1) how to clearly and productively discuss a difficult text or complex topic, (2) how to read a difficult text, and (3) how to clearly and compellingly express yourself in writing.

Attendance and Participation (15%)

Philosophy is not simply a set of facts or questions that one could passively memorize; it is rather a way of approaching important problems and thinking them through. As such, philosophy is something that is "done." It is thus crucial to learning philosophy that it be actively practiced. Your attendance and informed participation in the class is therefore expected and required. This generally entails regular attendance and engagement in discussion during class but can also be accomplished by taking part in other fora, such as office hours. More specifically, all the following counts as active participation:

- Asking questions and engaging with the instructor and other class participants in a courteous and charitable dialogue about the week's required reading.
- Asking a classmate to clarify or repeat a point they made or asking them a question about something they said.
- Explaining that you are confused or unsure about some aspect of the course material.
- Visiting office hours or scheduling an appointment with me to discuss the material.

For further examples of effective participation, please see **“But How Do I Participate? A Sampling of Ways to Contribute to a Philosophical Conversation,”** by Olivia Bailey, which is posted to the course website.

Having said that, I do of course understand that life sometimes gets in the way of attending class. Each student will thus be permitted **five absences from the course, no questions asked**. You do not need to email me or provide any excuse for missing any of those five classes. However, if you miss *more* than five classes (for any reason), then we will need to meet to determine some way to make up for the missed class time, since attending class is an integral part of the learning process for this course.

In-Class Exercises (30%)

One quarter of your grade will be determined by exercises that will be due some days of class. These exercises will come in two forms: some days there will be reading quizzes, and some days you'll be asked to turn in a short written reflection about the reading. There will be 10 of them, and they will be graded credit/no-credit. Two missed or no-credit exercises will be dropped. So, for example, if you miss two exercises and receive no-credit on one, then your in-class exercise grade will be 7/8. Or, if you pass all of them, your exercise grade will be 8/8.

The reading quizzes will not be especially difficult if you keep up with the course material and read closely. However, you must answer all questions correctly to receive credit.

The reflections should be about half a page (single-spaced), and can cover anything related to the reading due that day: something you enjoyed about it; something you disliked or found confusing; a question it raised for you; some way you found it illuminating or relevant to your life, the world, etc. In short, these reflections can cover just about anything at all, so long as they are related to the reading. These exercises will be turned in at the beginning of class on the day they are due. Any honest and complete effort will receive full credit.

→ **Extra Credit (up to an additional 2 exercises towards your exercise grade)**

There will also be five opportunities to earn extra credit for your in-class exercise grade. These assignments can be used to make up a missed or no-credit exercise, or to add on to your existing in-class exercise grade. So, you can earn up to a 10/8 on your in-class exercise grade.

These assignments will take slightly more time. They will be reflection papers; however, instead of half a page, they will be a full page (single-spaced). Moreover, they will concern the connection between some reading(s) and a film covering related themes. So, in addition to doing the reading, you will have to watch the film (I will tell you which film to write on).

Levels Writing (30%)

The next quarter of your grade will be determined by papers written during the semester. These will be part of a “levels system” developed by Professor Dustin Locke at CMC. This system works like a video game: each time you complete one type of assignment (or “level”), you unlock the next one, which will be slightly harder. At each level you’ll be focusing on one aspect of philosophical writing that will help you prepare for writing your final paper (the last quarter of your grade). Each assignment will deal with one of the readings that we discussed after the last attempt, and the details will depend on the level you’re on. There are three levels:

Level 1: An expository paper of 150-300 words. You will choose one argument or point from the course reading and explain it in your own words.

Level 2: An expository paper of 400–600 words. You will choose two related arguments from the readings, explain them, and explain their relationship. You might choose an argument that objects to another argument, or an argument that supports another argument, or something else along these lines. This paper should have a brief introduction that tells the reader what the paper will be about, followed by the explanation of the two arguments and their relationship.

Level 3: An expository and critical paper of 700–1000 words. You will choose two related arguments from the readings, explain them, explain their relationship, and argue that one of the arguments is unsound. This paper should have a brief introduction that tells the reader what the paper will be about, followed by the explanation of the two arguments and their relationship. You should then present an original criticism to one of the arguments (i.e., not an objection from the readings) and briefly defend your objection against potential responses.

Each of your level-up attempts will receive one of four evaluations: ‘not much progress’, ‘good attempt’, ‘almost’, or ‘complete’. In order to advance from level 1 to level 2, and from level 2 to level 3, you first need to earn a “complete” on the previous level. For instance, you are only eligible to submit a level 2 attempt once you have first earned a “complete” for a level 1 attempt, and so on.

Your levels grade will then be determined by the level and evaluation of the last written assignment you submit:

	Complete	Almost	Good Attempt	Not much progress
Level 3	A	A-	B+	B
Level 2	B-	C+	C	C-
Level 1	D	D-	F	F

You will have 5 attempts in total to progress as far as you can through the levels:

Date	Attempt	Readings you can write about for this attempt
9/13	Attempt one due	Any readings from 8/30 - 9/13
10/04	Attempt two due	Any readings from 9/18 - 10/04
10/25	Attempt three due	Any readings from 10/09 - 10/25
11/15	Attempt four due	Any readings from 10/30 - 11/15
12/06	Attempt five due	Any readings from 11/20 - 12/06

Final Paper (25%)

There is no final exam for this course. However, the last quarter of your grade will be determined by a final paper, due on the last day of final exam week, **December 18 by 11:59pm PST**. The structure of this paper will be the same as a Level 3 paper but will be graded on the standard letter grade scale. In this paper you may discuss any two related arguments from this course that you have not already written about in *any* of your level papers.

Grading and Late Policy

Unless otherwise stated, all assignments will receive a letter grade based on the UCLA 4.0 scale. Papers and presentations are due at the time and date specified. Work turned in late is considered to have been turned in the next day and will be penalized 1/3 of a grade (A to A-, B- to C+, etc.) for each day late (including weekend days). Email submissions will not normally be accepted. Unless otherwise noted and under appropriate circumstances, short extensions on papers may be granted so long as they are arranged 36 hours in advance of the deadline. Extensions will not be granted within

36 hours, short of a documented emergency. **The second and third essays must be submitted to pass the course.**

Electronics Policy

Phones, tablets, computers, and other electronic devices are great and all, but not for our classroom (except in cases where permission is arranged). Sustained attention in the classroom does a world of good for counteracting the state of distraction we are too often in, and studies have shown that taking notes by hand increases comprehension over laptop note-taking.¹ There is also emerging some excellent data suggesting that students who multitask do significantly worse (statistically speaking) than those who don't. Another recent study shows that "heavy" multitaskers are (1) worse at switching between tasks and (2) more prone to distraction than those who don't multitask. In short, we all think we're pretty good at multitasking, but we really aren't. And of course, there is a respect issue.

Since there are not any assigned textbooks for the class, all readings should be printed out and brought to class in hard copy (unless permission is granted in advance).

Of course, you require accommodations for personal reasons, or this policy does not work for you, please feel free to come and see me and we will work something out.

Covid

According to Pitzer's current protocols, masking is recommended but not required on campus. However, faculty can require masking by students. I will not require masking at the outset of the course; however, if there is an uptick in cases, I may decide to require masking. If you are uncomfortable with this policy for any reason, don't hesitate to get in touch.

Accommodations

If you are a student with academic accommodation needs based on learning differences, chronic illness or other needs please contact the Pitzer Office of Academic Support Services (PASS) at academicsupport@pitzer.edu or (909) 607-0213. In cases where a need may conflict with the course policies, students are also invited to discuss this with me.

Academic Integrity

All student work must be of original creation. It is always better to turn in an essay of your own creation than to plagiarize. Cases of plagiarism will be reported to the administration for disciplinary

¹ Pam A. Mueller and Daniel M. Oppenheimer, "The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking," *Psychological Science* 2014.

action. Please review the Academic Policies and Procedures, as well as the Guide to Student Life, for information on what counts as plagiarism. <https://www.pitzer.edu/tlc/academic-integrity/>

If you have any question about what counts as a violation of academic integrity or how to cite your sources, please consult with me. Err on the side of caution. Any standard citation style will do (Chicago, APA, MLA, etc.). If you aren't sure which to use, consider Chicago style author-date format: https://www.chicomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html

Writing Center

I strongly encourage you to utilize the Pitzer Writing Center, which is an invaluable resource for this course and beyond. The Writing Center is located in 131 Mead Hall, just across from the fountain, and offers virtual and in-person consultations with peer Fellows trained to work with writers on assignments in any discipline and at any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming ideas to polishing a final draft. The Writing Center is one of Pitzer's most popular academic resources, holding close to 2,000 one-on-one consultations per year. To book a 50-minute session or learn more about workshops and other resources and events, visit <https://www.pitzer.edu/writing-center>. All Pitzer students may use the Writing Center for any writing need. Students from the other 5Cs are welcome to book appointments for courses taken at Pitzer.

Course Readings and Schedule

As you may already know, reading philosophy is challenging. Here are some resources students report they've found useful in improving their reading experience (but feel free to contact me for more guidance about reading):

- <https://www.blogs.ppls.ed.ac.uk/2017/02/28/read-philosophy-step-step-guide-confused-students/>
- <https://philosophy.arizona.edu/sites/philosophy.arizona.edu/files/Rosati%20C%20How%20to%20Read%20a%20Philosophical%20Article%20or%20Book.pdf>
- <http://melissajacquart.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/How-to-Read-Philosophy-Handout.pdf>

~ *Note: this schedule below is tentative and liable to change as the class progresses* ~

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment
M 8/28	Intro.	N/A	
W 8/30	The Good: Justice	Plato, <i>Republic</i> : Book I, 327a1-335b10 (10 pp.)	Reflection
M 9/04	~ <i>Labor Day (no class)</i> ~	~ <i>Labor Day (no class)</i> ~	

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment
W 9/6	The Good: Justice	Plato, <i>Republic</i> : Book II, 357a1-366a5 (10 pp.)	
M 9/11	The Good; What is an Argument?	Watch : Mini-lecture part I (posted to course website)	Quiz
W 9/13	The Good: The Cave and the Sun	Plato, <i>Republic</i> : Book 5, 475b5-480a13; Book 6, 505a1-517a5 (20 pp.)	Levels Writing Attempt 1 <u>Assigned</u>
M 9/18	The Good; What is an Argument?	Watch : Mini-lecture slides on logic part II (posted to course website)	Reflection EC 1 Assigned: <i>The Matrix</i> (Lana and Lily Wachowski); <i>Jiro Dreams of Sushi</i> (David Gelb)
W 9/20	The Good: The Human Function	Aristotle, <i>The Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book I (20 pp.) <u>Recommended but not required</u> : Victor Fabian Abundez-Guerra and Nathan Nobis, "Responding to Morally Flawed Historical Philosophers and Philosophies"	
M 9/25	The Good: Habit and Virtue	Aristotle, continued (no new reading)	
W 9/27	The Good: Happiness	Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine," from <i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i> (3 p.p.) David Sosa, "The Spoils of Happiness" (3 pp.)	Levels Writing Attempt 1 <u>Due</u> EC 1 <u>Due</u>
M 10/02	What am I?: Human Nature	Mengzi, <i>Mengzi</i> : Book 6A (15 pp.)	Quiz
W 10/04	What am I?: Human Nature	Xunzi, <i>Xunzi</i> : Ch. 23, "Human Nature is Bad" (10 pp.)	EC 2 Assigned: <i>Existenz</i> (David Cronenberg)
M 10/09	What am I?: The Human Mind	Stephan Blatti, "We Are Animals" (12 pp.) Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> : Meditations 1 & 2 (18 pp.)	Levels Writing Attempt 2 <u>Assigned</u>
W 10/11	What am I?: The Human Self	Vasubandhu, <i>The Abhidharmakośabhāṣya</i> : "atmavāda-pratiṣedha" (or: "The Refutation of the Self") (11 pp.)	Reflection
M 10/16	~ Fall Break (no class) ~	~ Fall Break (no class) ~	EC 2 <u>Due</u>
W 10/18	What am I?: The Human Self	Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> : Meditations 1 & 2 (18 pp.)	Levels Writing Attempt 2 <u>Due</u>

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment
M 10/23	What am I?: Buddhism	Vasubandhu, The <i>Abhidharmakośabhaṣya</i> . “atmavāda-pratiṣedha” (or: “The Refutation of the Self”) (11 pp.)	EC 3 Assigned: <i>Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind</i> (Michel Gondry)
W 10/25	What am I?: The Human Self	David Hume, <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> : Book I, part I, sections 1-7 (30 pp.)	Quiz
M 10/30	What am I?: The Human Self	David Hume, <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> : Book I, part IV, sections 5-6 (18 pp.) <u>Optional</u> : Alison Gopnik, “How David Hume Helped Me Solve My Midlife Crisis” (20 pp.)	Levels Writing Attempt 3 <u>Assigned</u> EC 3 <u>Due</u>
W 11/01	What am I?	Catch-Up Day! (No new reading)	
M 11/06	Social & Ethical Relations: Introduction	Kwame Anthony Appiah, “What Will Future Generations Condemn Us For?” Dustin Locke, Handout, “Nihilism, Authorityism, Objectivism”	Reflection
W 11/08	Social & Ethical Relations: Relativism	Harry Gensler, “Cultural Relativism” Carole Rovane, “Moral Dispute or Cultural Difference?” Mary Midgley, “Trying Out One’s New Sword”	Levels Writing Attempt 3 <u>Due</u>
M 11/13	Social & Ethical Relations: Utilitarianism	Jeremy Bentham, “The Principle of Utility” John Stuart Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , Ch. 2 Ursula K. Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”	Quiz
W 11/15	Social & Ethical Relations: Applied Utilitarianism	Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” Watch : Beth Barnes “Effective Altruism” <u>Optional</u> : Peter Singer, “The Singer Solution to World Poverty”	EC 4 Assigned: <i>Contagion</i>
M 11/20	Social & Ethical Relations: Critical Perspectives on Applied Utilitarianism	Peter Buffet, “The Charitable-Industrial Complex” Amia Srinivasan, “Stop the Robot Apocalypse”	EC 4 <u>Due</u> Levels Writing Attempt 4 <u>Assigned</u>
W 11/22	~ <i>Thanksgiving Break (no class)</i> ~	~ <i>Thanksgiving Break (no class)</i> ~	
M 11/27	Social & Ethical Relations: Oppression	Marilyn Frye, “Oppression”	Reflection
W 11/29	Social & Ethical Relations: Oppression	Iris Marion Young, “The Five Faces of Oppression” (excerpted)	Levels Writing Attempt 4 <u>Due</u>

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment
M 12/04	Social & Ethical Relations: Liberation	Angela Davis, <i>Lectures on Liberation</i> . "Introduction," pp. 1–20	Final paper <u>assigned</u>
W 12/06	The Meaning of Life	Richard Taylor, "The Meaning of Life" Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus" Nietzsche, <i>The Gay Science</i> , §341	Levels Writing Attempt 5 <u>Assigned</u> EC 5 Assigned: <i>Groundhog Day</i>
W 12/13	~ <i>Finals Week (no class)</i> ~	~ <i>Finals Week (no class)</i> ~	EC 5 <u>Due</u> Levels Writing Attempt 5 <u>Due</u>
M 12/18	~ <i>Finals Week (no class)</i> ~	~ <i>Finals Week (no class)</i> ~	Final Paper <u>Due</u> (you can also submit it sooner!)