

## **COURSE #**

# **INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY**

**(OR: LOVE, DEATH, & TECHNOLOGY)**

## **INSTRUCTOR**

Alexander Englert

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Time: TBA

Location: TBA

Office Hours: TBA

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Philosophy explores foundational questions about human existence, the world, and our place within it. In this introductory course, we'll be thematically exploring philosophical questions both old and young. Love, death, and technology will be our overarching themes. And we will explore them through historical and contemporary philosophers, of both the Western and Eastern traditions. What is love? How does death shape the way we live? And in what ways is our nature changing with technology? These are just a few questions that we'll be asking over the course of the semester.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this course, you should leave with a basic understanding of fundamental philosophical questions, terms, and methods that philosophers have proposed to answer them. You should also leave the course with some practice writing philosophical papers in which you make a claim and provide support for that claim (i.e., craft an argument). Further, you will work on a semester-length project of your choosing within a small group of your peers. This project should give you a deeper insight into what it means to philosophize, as well as connect philosophy with issues and domains outside the classroom.

## **REQUIRED TEXTS**

1. Plato, *Five Dialogues*, trans. by Grube.
2. Netflix Subscription for the semester.
3. All other readings will be made available online.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

To successfully pass this course, you will need to complete all of the following requirements:

1. Short Paper 1 (4-5 pages)	15%
2. Short Paper 2 (4-5 pages)	25%
3. Think Tank Project	25%
4. Final Examination	25%
5. Attendance/Participation	10%

**SHORT PAPERS:** You must write two short papers (4-5 pages) during the semester. First and foremost, I want to see in this that you have understood and taken seriously the arguments put forth by the philosophers in question. After a brief exposition of the argument in your own words, I will

ask you to reflect on your own about the topic at hand with guiding questions. Late papers will be penalized. Plagiarized papers will receive an F.

**THINK TANK PROJECT:** In the spirit of Socratic dialogue, you will be assigned to – what I term – a “Philosophical Think Tank.” This small group will remain for the whole semester. I will randomly create them by the second week of class and you will sit in these groups for the remainder of the course. The ideal of these groups is that you develop camaraderie with people (and their views) that you don’t normally interact with on a daily basis. Also, in these groups you should be able to remember old topics and reference old points since you all will share a group memory, as it were. One aspect of your grade will be a project that you complete as a team over the course of the semester. The format is open to your own creativity and preferences as a group. However, in order to count – it must result in some sort of collective report, paper, dialogue, or piece of gradable writing. I’ll get into more detail about how these might look and how they will be graded later in the semester, but some possible ideas are: a group research paper, a group project with some local organization that connects to a philosophical theme, etc. If your think tank needs help, my door will be open to brainstorm on these. In the middle of the semester, you must schedule a meeting with me as a group to discuss your ideas and cement your project.

**FINAL EXAMINATION:** The final will be a combination of short answers and longer responses that cover content from the whole semester. There will be no make-ups for this examination if you miss the class on which it is scheduled. If you have a commitment that already keeps you from attending, speak to me immediately.

**ATTENDANCE/PARTICIPATION:** Daily attendance is required for success in this course. The first two unexcused absences will be forgiven, but each subsequent unexcused absence will affect your grade. See course policies for further details. All students are expected to contribute to class discussions consistently.

## **SCHEDULE**

### **UNIT I – LOVE**

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#### **WEEK 1 – INTRODUCTION + PLATO**

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| Day 1 | Introduction, no reading assigned                               |
| Day 2 | Plato’s <i>Symposium</i> , Prologue (pp. 172a-177e, Blackboard) |

#### **WEEK 2 – PLATO’S *SYMPOSIUM***

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| Day 3 | Plato’s <i>Symposium</i> , Phaedrus’ Speech (pp. 178a-180b, Blackboard)<br>Plato’s <i>Symposium</i> , Aristophane’s Speech (pp. 189a-193e, Blackboard) |
| Day 4 | Plato’s <i>Symposium</i> , Agathon’s Speech (pp. 194a-201c, Blackboard)<br><i>Black Mirror</i> : “Be Right Back” (Netflix)                             |

### WEEK 3 – SOCRATES’ ANSWER

- Day 5 Plato’s *Symposium*, Socrates’ Speech, part 1 (pp. 201d-206e)  
**First Paper Prompts Distributed!**
- Day 6 Plato’s *Symposium*, Socrates’ Speech, part 2 (pp. 207a-212c)

### WEEK 4 – LOVE & TECHNOLOGY

- Day 7 Film: *Her* (Spike Jonze)
- Day 8 *Black Mirror*: “Hang the DJ” (Netflix)  
**First Paper Due!**

### WEEK 5 – LOVE, THE INDIVIDUAL, AND THE “WE”

- Day 9 “Love’s Bond,” Robert Nozick (pp. 68-86, Blackboard)  
*Sense8*: episode TBD (Netflix)
- Day 10 “Love and the Individual,” Martha Nussbaum (pp. 314-334, Blackboard)

## UNIT II – DEATH

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### WEEK 6 – DIALOGUES ON DEATH & THE SOUL

- Day 11 Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates’ on Death (pp. 40a-42a)  
Plato’s *Meno*, Socrates’ on the Soul (pp. 80a-82b)
- Day 12 Dialogue 3 & 5 from *The Uddhava Gita* (pp. 44-51; 58-65)  
Excerpts from the Pythagorean tradition (Blackboard)

### WEEK 7 – PLATO’S *PHAEDO*

- Day 13 Plato’s *Phaedo*, Socrates faces death (pp. 57a-69e)  
**Second Paper Prompt Distributed!**
- Day 14 Plato’s *Phaedo*, Cyclical Argument (pp. 69e-72e)

### WEEK 8 – PLATO’S *PHAEDO* (CONT.)

- Day 15 Plato’s *Phaedo*, Recollection & Affinity Arguments (pp. 72e-84b)
- Day 16 Plato’s *Phaedo*, Objections, Replies, & Myth (pp. 84c-88c; 96a-118a)  
**Second Paper Due!**

## WEEK 9 – DEATH & TECHNOLOGY

- Day 17 Hume, “Of the Immortality of the Soul” (pp. 91-97, Blackboard)
- Day 18 *Black Mirror*: “San Junipero” (Netflix)  
Nozick, “The Experience Machine” (whole thing, Blackboard)  
**Schedule a Meeting with Me for your Think Tank Project!**

## WEEK 10 – DEATH & MEANING

- Day 19 Kant, “Postulates” from the *Critique of Practical Reason* (Blackboard)
- Day 20 Tolstoy, “My Confession” (pp. 540-545, Blackboard)  
Film: *Knight of Cups* (Malick)

## UNIT III – TECHNOLOGY

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### WEEK 11 – GENE EDITING

- Day 21 Maxmen, “The Genesis Engine,” *Wired* (Blackboard)  
See Blackboard folder for other short articles and YouTube videos.
- Day 22 Sandel, “The Case Against Perfection”

### WEEK 12 – A.I. AND THE METAPHYSICS OF PERSONHOOD

- Day 23 Kant, “The Formula of Humanity” *Groundwork* (Blackboard)  
*Star Trek*: “The Measure of a Man” S2E9 (Netflix)
- Day 24 Descartes, *Meditations*, Part IV (pp. 98-105, Blackboard)  
Film: *Ex Machina* (Garland)  
Re-Watch: *Black Mirror*: “Be Right Back”

### WEEK 13 – A.I. AND OUR RESPONSIBILITIES – DRIVERLESS CARS & DRONES

- Day 25 Visit the *Moral Machine* project of MIT<sup>1</sup> (take notes for class discussion)  
Amy Maxmen, “Self-Driving Car Dilemmas Reveal that Moral Choices Are Not Universal”<sup>2</sup> in *Nature*  
Caroline Lester, “Driverless-Ethics Offers a Troubling Look Into Our Values”<sup>3</sup> in *The New Yorker*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://moralmachine.mit.edu/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07135-0>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/science/elements/a-study-on-driverless-car-ethics-offers-a-troubling-look-into-our-values>

- Day 26            Scott Shane, “The Moral Case for Drones” (*New York Times*)<sup>4</sup>  
Tom Mockaitis, “Drones and the Ethics of War” (*Huff Post*)<sup>5</sup>

#### WEEK 14 – THE ENVIRONMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

- Day 27            Eric Posner & Cass Sunstein, “Climate Change Justice” (pp. 301-316, Blackboard)  
Kieran Setiya, “3 Questions: How Philosophy Can Address the Problem of Climate Change”<sup>6</sup>  
**Think Tank Project Due!**

- Day 28            John Broome, “The Ethics of Climate Change” (pp. 96-102, Blackboard)  
Thomas Hill, Jr., “Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments” (pp. 317-332)

#### WEEK 15 – FINAL EXAMINATION PERIOD

**FINAL EXAMINATION! DATE: TBA**

### COURSE POLICIES

**ELECTRONICS:** No electronics may be used in class unless otherwise noted. This includes laptops, tablets, phones, etc.

**OFFICE HOURS:** I encourage you to come and meet with me during my office hour. Philosophy requires much reflection and dialogue. Should my office hour be inconvenient for you, please get in touch with me and we will be able to find a time that works for us both. Also, please come by and discuss your papers as you plan them.

**CONDUCT:** It is always important to show respect to your fellow human beings, especially those with whom you disagree. Do not interrupt each other; do not make others feel small; etc. Be a mensch!

**ATTENDANCE POLICY:** Attendance is mandatory. The first two unexcused absences will not count against the attendance portion of the grade, but each subsequent absence will lead to a -.5% decrease. Students more than a couple minutes late to class will be marked late. (If you arrive after attendance has been taken, it is your responsibility to let me know at the end of class that you are present, otherwise it will count as an absence.) Three late attendances will count as one absence.

**EXCUSED ABSENCES:** Absences will be excused only for documented medical emergencies, or extreme documented family emergencies. Here are some examples of things that will not count as excused absences: “Traffic was bad and I had trouble finding a parking spot”; “I had to work”; “I had a dentist appointment”; “I was out of town with my family.”

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/15/sunday-review/the-moral-case-for-drones.html>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/drones-and-the-ethics-of\\_b\\_8961510](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/drones-and-the-ethics-of_b_8961510)

<sup>6</sup> <http://news.mit.edu/2017/3-questions-kieran-setiya-how-philosophy-can-address-problem-climate-change-0208>

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: There is a zero tolerance policy regarding violations of the university's academic integrity policy. Violations will be prosecuted to the fullest extent. It is the responsibility of the student to be familiar with the academic integrity policy. Please turn in your own work – everyone will be happier in the end. If you have questions or are concerned that something you are doing constitutes plagiarism, please contact me and we will work it out.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS: If you require special accommodations because of a disability, please get in touch with JHU's Student Disability Services: [studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu](mailto:studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu).

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