

Philosophy 103 (A01): Five Big Ideas (CRN = 12742)

Course Info; Schedule; Resources for Students

1. COURSE INFORMATION

Instructor: David Scott
Classroom Location: COR 225
Class Meeting Times: Mon & Thurs, 8:30 am – 9:50 am.
Instructor's Office: CLE B320
Office Hours: Tues., Wed. 9:30 – 10:30 (by appointment)
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ABOUT THIS COURSE:

By focusing on five of philosophy's "big ideas", this course is intended to provide students with an introduction to the main areas of philosophy and to some of the main philosophers in the Western tradition. Students will be introduced to basic philosophical worldviews and classical questions concerning: (i) the reality and nature of the universe (mind/self vs. matter); (ii) the nature of knowledge; (iii) God; (iv) freedom; and (v) ethics (moral theory). The texts we examine fall under the three general headings of (a) metaphysics (theory of the nature of reality), (b) epistemology (theory of knowledge), and (c) ethics or moral philosophy (theory of value).

TEXT AND COURSE MATERIAL:

The readings for this course are available for free through the course's Brightspace site. You can find them by going first to the "Content" menu and then to the "Primary Texts" module. There you will find all the required readings for this course.

Here is a list of the course readings, presented in alphabetical order of the philosophers (and their works) who authored them:

Aquinas, "Five Proofs of God's Existence";
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I-II (excerpts);
Broad, "Arguments for the Existence of God. II";
Descartes, *Meditations* I-III, VI (excerpts);
D'Holbach, *System of Nature* (excerpts);
Hume, "Of Personal Identity";
Hume, "Origin of Ideas";
Kant, "The Good Will" & "Categorical Imperative" (excerpts);
Leibniz, *Monadology* (excerpts);
Mill, *Utilitarianism* (excerpts);
Plato, *Apology*.
Plato, *Meno* (excerpts);
Plato, *Phaedo* (excerpts);

Taylor, "Deliberation" & "Theory of Agency" (excerpts).

MARKING SCHEME AND COURSE EVALUATION CRITERIA:

(a) Marking Scheme:

- Class participation (as gauged by reflection paragraphs): 10%;
- In-class test: 20%;
- In-class test: 20%;
- Final exam: 50%.

b) Letter and numerical grades: Letter correspond to the following numerical grades: A+ = 90 - 100, A = 85 - 89, A- = 80 - 84, B+ = 77 - 79, B = 73 - 76, B- = 70 - 72, C+ = 65 - 69, C = 60 - 64, D = 50 - 59, F = 0 - 49.

c) Class participation component ("reflection paragraphs"): These are brief, i.e., single-paragraph (approximately 250 words) answers to questions about the readings covered in class. Together they comprise 10% of the total grade (over the semester) for this course. A question will be assigned *ahead of the class in which the reading is to be discussed*, and your answer to that question will be due before the class start time. Submission of the paragraph will be through Brightspace.

These reflection paragraphs are designed to test that you have done the reading for the class ahead of time, and to help prepare you for the class lecture/discussion. Your reflection paragraphs will be graded by a graduate student in the philosophy department. (All *other* work in this course, i.e., all tests and essays, will be graded the course instructor.) It is *extremely easy* to get *great* marks in these paragraphs: if you demonstrate a good faith effort to answer these questions, and if you manage to hand in all of your answers, you'll get yourself a very easy 10% for this course, and in all likelihood your overall course experience will be significantly enhanced.

d) Using resources external to the classroom: In this course you can assume that all exam topics are intended to test you on the material covered in class, as it has been covered there. In your tests you are of course permitted and encouraged to supplement class discussion of the subject with outside material, but the minimum expectation is that, when it comes to these tests, you deal with the material covered in class, and that you address the points raised there about that material. This does not mean that for these tests you are expected merely to repeat the in-class proceedings. Rather, it means that you are expected to take account of or do justice to in-class discussion. The reason for this requirement is that the tests for this course constitute part of a continuous whole with the lectures and in-class discussions. They do not float free of the work done in the classroom, though of course they can, if you wish, also provide you with room to explore topics outside of the classroom confines. Roughly speaking, "B+" and "A-" tests take account of and rise to the level of the class discussion; "A" and "A+" tests take that discussion to a higher/deeper level.

e) Evaluation Criteria: The criteria I use to evaluate tests are, I believe, criteria which common sense would suggest in the assessment of a philosophy exam. Primarily my concern is with content or substance. In indicating these evaluation criteria, I emphasize that philosophy is an arts or humanities subject, which means that assessing the merits of answers on a philosophy exam ultimately requires qualitative evaluation or judgment on my part. Therefore, I do not assign precise numerical values to the following assessment criteria; there is no mathematical formula I can employ to judge the quality of philosophical writing. However, as a rough guide, here is the list of relative values on which I rely. They are presented here in ascending order of importance:

- spelling/grammar
- organization & clarity of expression
- accuracy of exposition
- use of examples reflecting understanding of the subject
- breadth of analysis, i.e., number of points covered
- depth of analysis, i.e., how far analysis is pushed
- resourcefulness, originality and imagination
- tightness, rigor or logical coherence of analysis
- overall quality of philosophical insight and expression

I stress that the order of these criteria is not absolute. Thus, sometimes seemingly less important criteria will be given more weight than seemingly more important ones. For instance, a student's use and analysis of examples might be so good that I am led to conclude that that student has an excellent understanding of the subject. In such a case the value I attach to the use of examples might increase significantly, and I might overlook the fact that, for instance, the student has failed to cover as many points as other students.

f) Handwriting Quality: Because the assignments of this course mainly take the form of in-class written tests, please be advised that your handwriting needs to be legible for your test to be graded. If you have written a test using extremely poor / illegible handwriting, you may be required to read your paper aloud to the test's grader, for the purpose of recording, electronically transcribing, and ultimately grading what you have written. On a different but related note, students whose handwriting is poor for documented or documentable medical reasons may wish to seek accommodation through UVic's Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL).

ACADEMIC HONESTY:

Cheating of *any* kind, including collusion (working with others too closely), plagiarism from both (i) books and/or articles, etc., in print or online, and (ii) other students' papers, , and (iii) submission of AI-composed material for essays/assignments, is a serious academic offence. University regulations also prohibit students from submitting the same work for two different courses; in other words, plagiarizing or recycling one's own work is not permitted. If detected, cheating can result in dismissal from this course (with an "F"), and dismissal from the university. Here is a link to the University's Academic Integrity policy:

<https://web.uvic.ca/calendar2018-09/undergrad/info/regulations/academic-integrity.html#>

SUBMITTING AND RECEIVING BACK GRADED WORK:

(a) I will not be available to discuss test questions on the day before or on the day they are due to be written or submitted, as I need to avoid being swamped by last-minute enquiries.

(b) In general tests are returned within two weeks of submission. Tests are returned in class, not through Brightspace. When your work is returned to you it will frequently be annotated with comments. If you wish to discuss your work with me, please read those comments first. To give you a chance to do this, as a matter of policy I do not discuss returned work on the day it is returned.

(d) In cases when I return graded work in class and students are not present in class to receive it, it is *up to those absent students* to claim their work: I am not responsible for tracking down absent students to deliver them their work. Once I have returned graded work in class, I continue to bring that work to class (usually for about the next two classes), so that students continue to have the opportunity to claim it. After that, however, any unclaimed work is obtainable only by in-person appointment with me. Finally, I will not be available to discuss any work that has gone unclaimed by the time lectures have finished and the examination period has begun.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS / MISSED TESTS:

Missed tests can be made up, but only with medical or other compelling reason. Late assignments (reflection paragraphs) will be accepted, with 10% penalty, only if the assigned topic has not yet been covered in class.

OFFICE HOURS:

Office hours will be conducted synchronously (by Zoom), and there will be a total of two office hours per week dedicated specifically to this course. If for some reason you cannot meet me in my posted office-hour times, please contact me to arrange an alternative time. Because of demand (especially near test days or essay due-dates), if you wish to see me during office hours you need to make an appointment well ahead of time. To set up a meeting with me in my office hours, contact me either in class or by email, and I will send you the Zoom link for the appointment.

To get the most out of your appointment, it's best to come prepared with specific questions about the course material. While students are welcomed and encouraged to come to office hours to discuss course related matters (incl. class content, tests, essays, etc.), students wishing to make an appointment to discuss class content in particular need first to have attended class, or at least to have listened to the recordings of the relevant missed class(es) that are posted on Brightspace. This requirement is to prevent this course's office hours being used simply as a way for students to catch up on classes they have missed. Missed classes can be made up by listening to the class recordings posted on Brightspace.

CLASS ATTENDANCE:

Under the heading of “Attendance”, UVic’s Undergraduate Calendar states the following: “Students are expected to attend *all* classes in which they are enrolled.” The full policy statement in the calendar is here:

https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/index.php#/policy/ryNResf_E?bc=true&bcCurrent=03%20%20Attendance&bcGroup=Undergraduate%20Academic%20Regulations&bcItemType=policies.

In this course I will be enforcing a minimum class attendance requirement: class attendance is required for a *minimum* of 15 out of the 22 classes scheduled for the semester. (This excludes the two scheduled class days which we will be using for in-class tests.) Starting on the first day of classes (September 10, 2026) attendance will be taken in every class. For any given class, any student who arrives after half the time has elapsed will be marked absent. Any student who fails to meet the minimum overall attendance requirement of 15 classes for the semester will lose 25% of the overall semester grade (incl. final exam grade).

The main rationale for requiring that at least 15 classes be attended is that this number represents just over 2/3 of the total number) of attendable classes (excluding the 2 class days on which we have in-class tests). That approx. 2/3 of all classes be attended is a reasonable requirement if penalty is to be avoided, particularly given UVic’s requirement that “students...attend *all* classes in which they are enrolled”, but also given the nature of the subject matter and the method I employ to teach it.

To elaborate on this latter point, the underlying rationale is that all students who—for *whatever* reason—fail to attend roughly 2/3 of the course’s classes miss simply too many of those non-quantifiable but essential elements of learning. Active listening, responding to questions, etc.—e.g., the live performance of human reasoning and discourse, with its attendant experience of success and failure in the shared effort to consider philosophical positions—are essential elements of learning and doing philosophy, and they demand a student’s actual presence in the classroom. In the end, students who have missed approx. 1/3 of classes have been, in effect, significantly less involved in the course than those who have attended more regularly; and their diminished involvement should be reflected in their final grades (whatever the grades otherwise achieved in the course’s assignments/tests).

Apart from this, regular class attendance is also required for students wishing to discuss class content during office hours. While students are welcome and encouraged to come to office hours to discuss class content, to do so students must first have attended class or at least have listened to the recordings of the relevant missed class(es) that are posted on Brightspace. The reason for this requirement is that student use of office hours is intended to function primarily as *supplement* to classroom lecture and discussion, not as a *replacement* or *substitute* for class attendance.

Finally, as noted above, class attendance is extremely important in this course when it comes to tests. The reason is that, when it comes to these forms of evaluation, the minimum expectation is that you deal with *the material covered in class as it has been covered in class*. Obviously, the

best way to meet this requirement is to attend class. Material not covered in class but used by students on tests will not be recognized unless, additionally, the material covered in class has been addressed.

If you happen to miss a class, a recording of the class, along with a brief written summary of the main points covered in it, will be posted on Brightspace (usually within 24 hours of the class).

IN-CLASS DISCUSSION AND PARTICIPATION:

In general, my classes involve lots of discussion. I encourage and greatly value your in-class contributions, and I can assure you that other students do too. It is a frequently unacknowledged fact of the classroom that if you have a question or comment, it's highly likely that others have the same one too. So, go ahead and ask your question, or make your comment: it helps me, you, and your classmates. If, however, you are more reserved but still have comments or questions, please come see me during office hours.

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES AND CLASS POLICIES:

a) Emailing me: Because of problems with SPAM and viruses transmitted by email, I have to request that whenever you email me you make sure to put something in the "subject" line of your email to identify you as a student in this course. If you don't do this, and I don't recognize your name, I will delete your email without opening it.

In addition to this, I would greatly appreciate it if you observed the (still) standard courtesy of beginning your emails with a salutation, e.g., "Dear Dr. Scott", "Hello Dr. Scott", etc. (as opposed to, e.g., "Hey Dave" or "Dude", which is too informal). Use of formal salutation is social etiquette rooted in the recognition that people are not simply inanimate objects (like ATM machines), but should be addressed before being spoken to. After all, unlike ATM machines, humans have the *option* to respond, so it's wise to ask them nicely.

b) Coming late to class: The classroom is a work environment. It can be a distraction when people walk in late. So please try to be on time. If you arrive in class after half the class time has passed, you will be marked absent.

c) Visits to the classroom by non-registered students: As the instructor for this course, I am duty-bound to ensure that a work environment is preserved in class. Both students and I can find it a distraction for strangers to walk into the classroom. It takes some students time before they gain confidence to participate in the class proceedings, and the presence of a stranger can be disruptive in that regard. If, as sometimes happens, you wish to invite a friend to attend my class to check it out, you need to ask permission ahead of time.

d) Use of computers in the class: For the purpose of taking notes, you are of course welcome to use laptops or phones. Watching films and other distracting uses of these devices are prohibited.

e) For further information concerning classroom conduct, please refer to the Trifaculty Code of Professional Behaviour for Students:

<https://www.uvic.ca/services/advising/assets/docs/tri-fac-student-code-of-conduct.pdf>.

TERRITORY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: We acknowledge and respect the Songhees, Esquimalt (Lək̓ʷəŋən), and Saanich (W̱SÁNEĆ) Peoples, on whose territory the university stands and whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

2. SCHEDULE*

WEEK 1 (Class 1: Sept. 10)

1. Thurs. Sept. 10: Course Introduction & Main Areas of Philosophy. What are “Big Ideas”?

WEEK 2 (Classes 2 & 3: Sept. 14 & 17)

2. Mon. Sept. 14: Big Ideas about Reality, Knowledge, & Value: Plato’s *Apology*.

3. Thurs. Sept. 17: (a) Nature of Reality: Plato’s *Meno*. (b) Problem of Knowledge: Plato’s *Meno*; Descartes’ *Meditations* (III); Hume’s “Origin of Ideas”.

WEEK 3 (Classes 4 & 5: Sept. 21 & 24)

4. Mon. Sept. 21: Problem of Knowledge: Plato’s *Meno*; Descartes’ *Meditations* (III); Hume’s “Origin of Ideas”.

5. Thurs. Sept. 24: Biggest Idea of All?: Aquinas’ proofs of God’s existence.

WEEK 4 (Classes 6 & 7: Sept. 28 & Oct. 1)

6. Mon. Sept. 28: Biggest Idea of All?: Aquinas’ proofs of God’s existence.

7. Thurs. Oct. 1: Religious Experience: C.D. Broad, “Arguments for the Existence of God. II”.
1st draft of questions for 1st in-class test.

WEEK 5 (Class 8 & 9: Oct. 5 & 8)

8. Mon. Oct. 5: Religious Experience: C.D. Broad, “Arguments for the Existence of God. II”.
2nd draft of questions for 1st in-class test.

9. Thurs. Oct. 8: **IN-CLASS TEST #1.**

WEEK 6 (Class 10: Oct. 15)

Mon. Oct. 12: Thanksgiving Day. No classes.

10. Thurs. Oct. 15: Mind and Body: Plato’s *Phaedo*.

WEEK 7 (Classes 11 & 12: Oct. 19 & 22)

11. Mon. Oct. 19: Mind and Body: Descartes’ *Meditations* II, VI.

12. Thurs. Oct. 22: Mind and Body: Descartes’ *Meditations* II, VI.

WEEK 8 (Classes 13 & 14: Oct. 26 & 29)

13. Mon. Oct. 26: Mind and Body: Leibniz's *Monadology*. 1st draft of questions for 2nd in-class test.

14. Thurs. Oct. 29: Mind and Body: Leibniz's *Monadology*. 2nd draft of questions distributed for 2nd in-class test.

WEEK 9 (Classes 15 & 16: Nov. 2 & 5)

15. Mon. Nov. 2: **IN-CLASS TEST #2.**

16. Thurs. Nov. 5: Freedom: Baron d'Holbach's *System of Nature*.

Fri.: Last day for withdrawing from first term courses without penalty of failure.

WEEK 10 (Class 17: Nov. 12)

Mon. Nov. 9: Reading Break. No classes.

17. Thurs. Nov. 12: Freedom: Taylor's "Deliberation" and "Theory of Agency".

WEEK 11 (Classes 18 & 19: Nov. 16 & 19)

18. Mon. Nov. 16: Freedom: Taylor's "Deliberation" and "Theory of Agency".

19. Thurs. Nov. 19: Morality: Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* I, II.

WEEK 12 (Classes 20 & 21: Nov. 23 & 26)

20. Mon. Nov. 23: Morality: Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* I, II.

21. Thurs. Nov. 26: Morality: Mill's *Utilitarianism* I, II.

WEEK 13 (Classes 22 & 23: Nov. 30 & Dec. 3)

22. Mon. Nov. 30: Morality: Mill's *Utilitarianism* I, II.

23. Thurs. Dec. 3: Morality: Kant's Categorical Imperative.

WEEK 14 (Class 24: Dec. 7)

24. Mon. Dec. 7: Morality: Kant's Categorical Imperative.

Final exam period for Fall Term: Dec. 10 – 23

* This schedule is ambitious, and as such it may be subject to revision as the course progresses. Apart from this, sometimes discussion and the flow of ideas in class require us to spend more time on certain subjects, less time on others, than originally planned.

3. OTHER RESOURCES

Student Resources:

- a. UVic Learn Anywhere. UVic Learn Anywhere is the primary learning resource for students. It offers many learning workshops and resources to help students with academics and learning strategies.
- b. Library resources. Information for students wishing to use the UVic library.
- c. Indigenous student services
- d. Centre for Academic Communication
- e. Learning Strategist Program
- f. Academic Concession Regulations
- g. Academic Concessions and Accommodations
- h. Academic accommodation & access for students with disabilities – Policy AC1205
- i. Student wellness resources.
- j. Ombudsperson. A resource to help resolve disputes or complaints.
- k. Other student groups and resources.

University Statements and Policies

- a. University Calendar – “Information for all students”
- b. Creating a respectful, inclusive and productive learning environment
- c. Accommodation of Religious Observance
- d. Student Conduct and Non-Academic Student Misconduct
- e. Accessibility
- f. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
- g. Equity and Human Rights
- h. Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response
- i. Discrimination and Harassment Policy