

Syllabus: Major Issues in Philosophy (PHI 1500)

“We need more welders and less [sic] philosophers.”
—Marco Rubio

“One night, Zhuangzi dreamed of being a butterfly—a happy butterfly, showing off and doing as he pleased, unaware of being Zhuangzi. Suddenly, he awoke, drowsily, Zhuangzi again. And he could not tell whether it was Zhuangzi who had dreamt the butterfly or the butterfly dreaming Zhuangzi.”
—Zhuangzi

The Purpose of this Class

This class has two purposes, really:

- 1) To teach you the basic **skills** for **doing** philosophy: how to identify, read, and critique philosophical arguments written by others, and how to take your own ideas and write them into philosophical arguments.
- 2) To get you familiar with some of the important topics, arguments, concepts, and authors in philosophy, from a wide range of times, traditions, styles, and voices.

To achieve these purposes, you will be spending a lot of time reading, writing, and editing. Philosophy is hard, and demands that you become very good at these things. Good news, though: **doing philosophy makes you good at these things**. Of course, I hope you consider majoring in philosophy and taking more classes in the subject. But even if you never take another philosophy class, the skills you learn here are skills that will help you in any other major, and many professional fields.

Philosophy is kind of a byword for a useless degree, but the opposite is true: philosophical skills are some of the most useful and sought-after that you can learn.

The Format of this Class

For each class session, you'll be expected to have read about 20 pages (give or take—that's about 40 a week for those who don't do math) of philosophy. I'll let you know if it's going to be much less or more. If that doesn't sound like much, great...but you might find it takes a bit longer to read philosophy than many subjects. If that sounds like a lot...well, welcome to college. Each class session will be a mixture of lecture on and discussion about the readings. **Class participation is essential to both your grade and (more importantly) your learning the material**. And to the class being interesting, because who wants to listen to me talk the whole time?

In addition to the readings, lectures, and discussions, there will be several short, written assignments (about a page) and one short term paper (min. 5 pages) written in two drafts. There may also be spontaneous small group discussions in class. You've been warned. There **will not be** exams or quizzes of any kind.

Contact and Office Hours

Please contact me via e-mail. Alex.Steers@baruch.cuny.edu. My office is on the 5th floor, in the Philosophy Department Adjuncts' Shared Office. Office hours are: Mondays and Wednesdays 12:00-1:00pm and early morning by appointment.

Rules, Expectations, and Such

Philosophy has rules and so do classrooms. One of philosophy's best rules is called the "principle of charity." This means that when someone else says or writes something, assume they have a good idea what they're talking about, even if you disagree. When you aren't sure what they mean, interpret them as fairly as you can. In the classroom, this means take other people's comments and questions seriously, even if they don't make sense to you at first. When you do disagree, do so politely.

Bring a notebook and some pens to class, even if you mostly take notes on a laptop/tablet/phone. Just in case. Speaking of which, I've heard handwriting notes is good for retaining what you've heard. I'm not 100% sure it's true, which is why handwriting is only recommended, not mandatory.

Don't spend the whole class texting/buying stuff on eBay/Facebooking/Snapchatting/whatever else it is that people do. A quick message is one thing. Not participating in class is another.

Bring a copy of the day's readings to each class. I don't care if you print them out or not.

Especially bring the readings if you didn't read them....

It's early. Maybe have some coffee or breakfast before or during class. Don't sleep here.

Call me Alex.

Don't interrupt each other.

There are no stupid questions...but there are rude ones. Philosophy is for questions. Intro classes are for questions. The more you ask, the more we all learn. But...don't be that person who asks a question that was just answered because you weren't paying attention.

Go out on a limb. Be wrong. Have fun.

Philosophy is all about the *process* of asking questions, not about whether the answers are right or wrong. So, don't try to be right all the time and don't be afraid to be wrong. *Doing* philosophy is the important part, and learning how to do it and do it better is the point of this class.

For Students with Disabilities

Baruch College has an office dedicated to serving Baruch Students with disabilities. If you identify as an individual with a disability, and you wish to request accommodations or academic adjustments in order to meet the academic requirements of this course, please visit Student Disability Services, Newman Vertical Campus, Room 2-271, or call (646) 312-4590. Being registered with Student Disability Services is confidential, and is not recorded on your Baruch Academic Record.

Check out the SDS website: <http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/studentaffairs/ossd/disabilityServices.htm>

Students who are pregnant are entitled to "reasonable" (no idea if it is) accommodations:
http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/facultyhandbook/documents/Pregnant_Parenting_Students.pdf

If you feel or suspect (or know for sure, of course) that you have been discriminated against on account of disability, contact: diversity@baruch.cuny.edu.

Academic Support Services

Baruch College has a number of opportunities that you are encouraged to take advantage of in case you find yourself needing help in this or any class—for whatever reason—including:

Peer Tutoring <http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/sacc/>

The Writing Center <https://writingcenter.baruch.cuny.edu/>

Tools for Clear Speech (for English language learners and nonnative English speakers)

<https://tfcs.baruch.cuny.edu/>

Comprehensive academic advisement <http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/undergraduate-advisement-and-orientation/>

Are things easy for you? Some of these places are hiring...there's no better way to learn something than to teach it.

Assignments

The Term Paper

The final term paper is **due on the last day of class, Wednesday May 16**. It should be e-mailed to me by 11:59pm that night. It should be **5-7 full pages** (none of this one line on the fifth page stuff) and shouldn't be too much more than that...unless it's really good. Standard formatting applies: 12 pt. Times New Roman font, 1" margins, double-spacing.

Your paper should have your own original thesis and it should deal with one or more assigned reading from class. More details will be provided later.

The final paper will receive a **letter grade** and is worth **30%** of your final grade.

A full-length (or close to it) **draft is due on Wednesday, April 18**. The draft must be **both hardcopy and e-mailed**, so that I can give you proper comments and compare the draft to your final copy. It will be returned to you in time for you to re-write it as a final draft.

The draft will receive a **letter grade** and is worth **15%** of your final grade.

Late final papers and drafts will be penalized by one third of a letter grade per day late (about 3% of the assignment).

A 1-2 paragraph **abstract is due on Monday, April 9**. This is so that I can review your argument and make sure you're on a good track before you go and do a bunch of work. The abstract is mandatory and is graded pass/fail. It should be e-mailed. It may be turned in early. It is worth **5%** of your final grade.

The Term Paper is worth **50%** of your grade, total (Abstract: 5%, First Draft: 15%, Final Draft: 30%).

The Short Assignments: Reflection Papers and Skill Building Assignments

There are five short assignments worth a total of **40%** of your grade. Two assignments will ask you to answer a specific question; three will be open-ended. Each should be about a page long and is designed to help you get used to philosophy and build the skills you need to write your term paper. They should be e-mailed by class time the day they are due so I can easily give you feedback. They are graded **pass/fail**. Each is **8%** of your final grade.

Late short assignments will be accepted **only one** class session after the assignment is due.

Not turning in short assignments is the primary cause of D's and F's in this class.

Class Participation

Class participation will be **10%** of your grade with an extra **5% extra credit available**. I know not everybody likes to speak in class, or feels comfortable/safe doing so. However, this is an important part of succeeding in philosophy (and college, and many workplace environments), so consider it a skill to practice. Participation is not limited to speaking in front of everyone, however: working in small groups and taking notes are also participation. Obviously **not** participating is part of it too: that is, attendance and lateness count, and using your phone/tablet/laptop/whatever for non-class activities like texting or using the Internet does too. See the Assignments handout for more information on what class participation consists of and how it will be graded. **If speaking out loud in class is a problem for you, please contact me and we will work out an alternative.**

Note: you must attend at least 20 out of the 28 class sessions to receive any class participation credit.

Grades

If you kept score in the sections above, you saw that it is possible to get 105/100 in this class with a perfect score on everything, including class participation. This is meant to add a certain amount of grace into the grading process, as missing (or failing) a couple small assignments can tank your grade pretty quickly.

A	93-105
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86

B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F+	There is no F+
F	59 and below

Readings and Schedule

Most of our readings are selections taken from this volume:

Cahn, Stephen M. (Ed.) *Exploring Philosophy: An Introductory Anthology*. Fourth Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

The readings from Classical Chinese philosophy come from this one:

Ivanhoe, Philip J. and Bryan W. Van Norden (Eds.) *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*. Second Edition. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2005.

You are welcome to purchase either or both volumes, but it is not necessary. All readings are available online in PDF format.

Week	Monday	Wednesday
1	1/29 Introduction to the Introduction Zhuangzi and the Butterfly Syllabus Philosophy FAQ's	1/31 Who is a Philosopher? The Patron Saint of Philosophy Plato, <i>Defense of Socrates</i>
2	2/5 What is Philosophy? Beardsley and Beardsley, "What is Philosophy?" Mill, <i>On Liberty</i>	2/7 Philosophy and Art Weitz, "Role of Theory in Aesthetics" Prinz, "Emotion and Aesthetic Value"
3	2/12 NO CLASS	2/14 Rationalism and Empiricism Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> Hume, <i>Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> Russell, "Problem of Induction"

		Due: Argument Explanation
4	2/20 TUES Daoism <i>Zhuangzi, Zhuangzi</i>	2/21 Skepticism for Today Nagel, "What is It Like to Be a Bat?" Saul, "Scepticism and Implicit Bias"
5	2/26 Knowledge is What? Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" Nozick, "Conditions for Knowledge" DeRose, "Contextualism and Knowledge"	2/28 Belief Clifford, "Ethics of Belief" James, "Will to Believe"
6	3/5 Social Epistemology Craig, "Practical Explication of Knowledge"	3/7 Testimonial Injustice Fricker, "Testimonial Injustice"
7	3/12 Virtue and Ritual Kongzi, <i>Analects</i>	3/14 Virtue and Learning Mengzi, <i>Mengzi</i>
8	3/19 Metaethics: Who Counts? Appiah, <i>Cosmopolitanism</i> Kongzi, "Upright Gong" Mengzi, "Shun and Xiao" and "Shun and The Blind Man" Rachels, "Challenge of Cultural Relativism"	3/21 Famous Ethical Theories O'Neill, "Kant's Ethics" Kant, Selections Mill, "Utilitarianism"
9	3/26 Moral Knowledge and Moral Life Arpaly, "Huck Finn Revisited"	3/28 Emotions and Choice Solomon, "Emotions and Choice"
10	4/2 NO CLASS SPRING	4/4 NO CLASS BREAK
11	4/9 Democracy and Human Rights Dewey, "Democracy" Arendt, "We Refugees"	4/11 NO CLASS
12	4/16 Feminist Ethics and Society Held, "Non-Contractual Society" Held, "Ethics of Care"	4/18 Feminist Ethics and Intersectionality Gilligan, <i>In a Different Voice</i> Gines, "Black Feminism and Intersectionality"
13	4/23 Critical Race Theory Taylor, "Existence, Experience, Elisions"	4/25 Social Construction 1 Haslanger, "Ontology and Social Construction"

14	4/30 The Self Smart, "Case of Identity" Williams, "Self and the Future"	5/2 The No-Self Vasubandhu, "Refutation of the Theory of the Self" Due: Reflection 3
15	5/7 Metaphysics, or When Philosophy Gets Weird Chang, "Water: The Long Road from Aristotelian Element to H2O"	5/9 When Philosophy Gets Weird Leibniz, "Monadology"
16	5/14 Death and the Meaning of Life Plato, <i>Crito</i> and <i>Phaedo</i>	5/16 The Value of Philosophy Russell, "Value of Philosophy" Due: Final Paper