

Introduction to Philosophy

I Instructor Information

Name: Dr. Bradley Rettler

Office: Ross Hall 128

Office Hours: Tuesday 2:30ish-3:30, Wednesday 11-12, Friday 2-3, and by appointment

E-mail: brettler@uwyo.edu

Course Website: <http://intro.bradleyrettler.com>

II Course Description

Philosophy is distinguished both by its subject matter and by the methods with which it investigates its subject matter. Among its subject matter are those most basic and most important questions we can ask:

1. How should we live?
2. What is morality?
3. What do we know?
4. Are we free?
5. Is there a God?

Many other disciplines are also interested in answering these questions: theology, physics, biology, and literature, to name a few. But philosophy distinguishes itself from them by its method — logically valid arguments proceeding from things we already believe. In this class we will aim to answer the above questions by proceeding from things we believe via truth-preserving inferences. We will defend our premises with further valid arguments.

III Required Readings

You are not required to purchase any books. All readings will be available on WyoCourses and the course website.

IV Evaluation

Participation: 10% of your grade. This includes coming to class, having (i) carefully done the reading, (ii) prepared an outline of the argument, (iii) prepared questions about anything you didn't understand, and (iv) prepared objections to or arguments for the premises of the author's argument. It also includes being involved in class discussion by sharing your thoughts, and by listening to others' thoughts. More than four unexcused absences will result in a 5% deduction from your final grade per absence, beginning with the fifth. To have an absence excused, ask the Dean's Office (for participation in a

University-sponsored activity or for unusual circumstances such as a personal hardship) or the Student Health Service (for absences for medical reasons).

Position Papers: 20% of your grade (5% each). Four times during the semester you will write a one to two page paper and upload it *before* the class in which the relevant unit begins. The paper will begin with what you think is the right answer to the question at issue in that unit. Following that should be two arguments for your answer. That is, you should think about *why* you think that your answer is the right one, and state those reasons in the form of valid arguments. You should then consider one objection to your answer, and respond to it. Obviously you must write each paper on a different unit – how to live, what we know, the existence of God, right and wrong, the best life, and free will (you cannot write a paper on the voting unit).

Objections to Others' Positions: 20% of your grade. Four times during the semester you will read another student's position paper and write a response to it. Your response should be approximately one page, and should contain, for each of the two arguments of the other student, the best reason you can think of to deny a premise of that argument; then you should motivate that reason. The goal is to persuade the person that his or her reasons for his or her position are not good, either because they are false, or because they don't support the position the person holds.

Apology, aka Manifesto, aka Philosophy of Life: 30% of your grade. This paper is the integration of your four position papers. You will come to it by re-reading the position papers you wrote prior to doing any reading or discussion, and then revising them in light of (i) the readings regarding the issues, (ii) class discussion of those readings, (iii) the comments you get from your fellow students, (iv) my comments, (v) the development of your own thinking on the issues, and in particular (vi) the way that your views on each issue influence your views on the other issues. The end result is the articulation of four aspects of your worldview in a systematic way.

Final Exam: 20% of your grade. You will have a final exam comprised of some true/false, some multiple choice, some short answer, and some short essay questions on the readings and class discussions. It will take place on the regularly scheduled exam day and time. If you cannot make it or have a conflict with the scheduled exam time, you must alert me two weeks in advance so that we can make alternate arrangements.

Extra Credit: If you change your mind after reading or discussion — by reversing your position, or withholding belief about it, or by rejecting an argument you once accepted — you may write a one-page paper following up on your position paper. In it you should say why you no longer hold the position you used to hold – that is, which premise of each argument you now reject. And, if you have a new argument for your position, for the opposite position, or for withholding belief, give that argument. This will add 10 points to the grade of the original position paper. Though you are free to change your mind on every issue, it can only be used to raise your grade once.

V Grading Scale

A: 92-100
A-: 90-92
B+: 88-90
B: 82-88
B-: 80-82
C+: 78-80
C: 72-78
C-: 70-72
D: 60-70
F: Below 60

VI Honor Code

All students are expected to abide by the Academic Honor Code. Students are not allowed to write papers together, although verbal discussion of one's papers (with anyone) is not only permitted but encouraged. Any use of outside sources for specific ideas or arguments must be properly cited. Plagiarism is easily detectable and will absolutely not be tolerated. The University provides guidelines on what constitutes plagiarism here: http://www.uwyo.edu/generalcounsel/_files/docs/uw-reg-6-802.pdf. You are **strongly encouraged** to read that document. If you have any doubt about the appropriateness of any action, please check with me.

VII Students with Disabilities

I am happy to accommodate students with disabilities. Students desiring accommodations on the basis of physical, learning, or psychological disability for this class should view their options at <http://www.uwyo.edu/udss/> and contact Disability Support Services. They are located at 128 Knight Hall, and can be reached by email at udss@uwyo.edu or by phone at 307.766.3073.

VIII Title IX Office

If you or someone you know would like help related to an experience of sexual violence including sexual assault, harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking or other type of non-consensual sexual conduct, please contact Jim Osborn by phone at 307.766.5200 or by email at report-it@uwyo.edu. I am (along with nearly all faculty and staff members) a mandatory reporter; if I learn of any incident of sexual violence or misconduct, I am legally required to report it.

IX Support

There are a variety of ways to get extra academic help at UW. You can drop-in to the STEP Tutoring Center at Coe Library, get e-tutoring on your writing, and visit the Writing Center in Coe Library.

X Classroom Conduct

We are discussing topics in this class that are controversial, and may for some people be deeply personal. You have no idea how the people in the room may be personally connected to what we discuss. Because of this, we all need to be very careful how we conduct ourselves. Respect one another! Pay attention when people are speaking, listen carefully before jumping in, and speak in a respectful tone. You will almost certainly disagree with people. In this course, we will explore our disagreement *together* in a structured, collaborative atmosphere. Keep this in mind.

A note on phone/laptop usage. One way to disrespect people is to distract them from what's important. So, put your phones on silent or vibrate—texting or answering your phone in class is not acceptable. Keep your mobile devices out of sight – including your own sight! If you want to take notes on a laptop, you must approve it with me at the beginning of the semester.

Both the University of Wyoming and I value an educational environment that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive. The diversity that students and faculty bring to class including age, country of origin, culture, disability, economic class, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, linguistic capacity, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, worldview, and other social and cultural diversity is valued, respected, and considered a resource for learning.

XI Expected Schedule

The readings are to be done **by the day** for which they are scheduled.

Aug 29: Introduction: What is Philosophy?

How should we live?

Aug 31: Living Well – Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7 and II.1-4

Sept 5: Logic and Reasoning

Sept 7: Logic and Reasoning, Continued

Position papers due before class

Sept 10: The Life of Questioning – Plato, *Apology*

Sept 12: The Life of Questioning, continued

Sept 14: Leaning on Tradition – *The Annalects* of Confucius

Sept 17: Leaning on Tradition, Continued

What Do We Know?

Position papers due before class

Sept 19: The Method of Doubt – *Meditation I* of Renee Descartes

Sept 21: The Method of Doubt – *Meditation II* of Renee Descartes

Sept 24: Believing by Choice? – “The Will to Believe”, by William James

Sept 26: Believing by Choice, continued

Sept 28: Believe in God – “Pascal’s Wager” by Pascal

Oct 1: Believe in God, continued

Is There a God?

Position papers due before class

Oct 3: There is a God – “The Fine-Tuning Argument”, by Robin Collins

Oct 5: There is a God – “The Cosmological Argument”, by Thomas Aquinas

Oct 8: There is a God – *Meditation 5* of Renee Descartes

Oct 10: There is no God – “The Rebellion” from *The Brothers Karamazov*

Oct 12: There is no God – “What is the Problem of Divine Hiddenness” by Peter van Inwagen

Oct 15: There is no God, continued

What is the Nature of Right and Wrong?

Position papers due before class

Oct 17: There are no objective moral truths – “The Argument from Relativity” by Mackie

Oct 19: There are no objective moral truths, continued

Oct 22: There are objective moral truths – “Judging other Cultures” by Martha Nussbaum

Oct 24: God is the source of morality – “Morality and Religion” by Russ Shafer-Landau

Oct 26: Morality, concluded

What makes an Action Right or Wrong?

- Position papers due before class**
Oct 29: Morality is about duty – Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* Preface and Part I
Oct 31: Morality is about duty, continued

Interlude: Should we Vote?

- Nov 2: Do we have a duty to vote? – Brennan, “Arguments for a Duty to Vote”
Nov 5: Is it rational to vote? – Mackie, “Why it is Rational to Vote”

Back to What makes an Action Right or Wrong?

- Nov 7: Morality is about pleasure and pain – Mill, “What is Utilitarianism?”
Nov 9: Morality is about pleasure and pain, continued
Nov 12: Morality is about being a good person – Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 8
Nov 14: Morality is about being a good person, continued
Nov 16: Morality, concluded

Which Life is Best?

- Position papers due before class**
Nov 19: The best life is one of contemplation – Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book X
Nov 21: No Class – Thanksgiving
Nov 23: No Class – Thanksgiving
Nov 26: The best life is one of action – MLK Jr, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”
Nov 28: The best life prepares for the afterlife – Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2-2: 179-181
Nov 30: The best life, concluded
Dec 3: A good death – “Death” by Thomas Nagel

Are We Free?

- Position papers due before class**
Dec 5: Are we free? – The Consequence Argument
Dec 7: Are we free? – The Mind Argument
Dec 10: Final Exam Review
Dec 14: Final Exam, 1:15-3:15pm