Introduction to Philosophy: Phil 1301

Spring, 2026

Sul Ross State University

Professor: Evan Schmiedehaus

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Virtual office Hours: Every Tuesday 6:00 – 7:00 pm (**by appointment only**)

Course description:
This philosophy course surveys a broad range of historical and contemporary philosophical ideas and concepts. The course examines topics like the history of philosophy, logic and critical thinking, metaphysics (what is reality), freewill & determinism, knowledge & belief, applied ethics, political philosophy, existentialism, and others.

Course description for this section:
This course explores foundational principles and ideas in philosophy, tracing the evolution of philosophical thought from its origins to contemporary perspectives. As we progress, you'll encounter key thinkers and movements that illustrate how philosophical inquiry has developed over time. Special attention will be given to modern and contemporary philosophers, with an emphasis on how their ideas can be applied to everyday life. Our goal is not only to understand these concepts but also to consider their relevance to your personal experiences and decision-making.

In this course, you won't be told *what* to think or given a formulaic method for approaching all philosophical ideas and questions. Instead, the goal is to teach you how to become a more thoughtful, open-minded, creative, and deliberate critical-thinker and problem-solver. You will also be expected to carefully reflect upon the views and arguments of others, as well as giving voice to your own position and ethical arguments on a wide range of social/political topics. When examining the ideas and arguments of others, students will learn how to use concepts like dialectical and philosophical reasoning, in effort to conduct a comprehensive analysis of a given topic, rather than simply defaulting to rhetorical reasoning.
This course is reading and writing intensive.

Course Objectives: upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Communicate about the various topics that shape the discipline of philosophy
2. Think critically about philosophical ideas and concepts
3. Apply philosophical reasoning to critical-thinking and problem-solving
4. Develop and express individual philosophical ideas
5. Appreciate and respect the views of other people
6. Extend philosophical conversations that span the ages
7. Work on reaching a level of precision in individual writing expression

About the Instructor:
Welcome to Introduction to Philosophy! I am a graduate of the Texas State University Applied Philosophy & Ethics Program (MAAPE), with a graduate minor in psychology. As a philosophy professor, I have taught Phil: 1305, Philosophy & Critical Thinking, and Phil 1320, Ethics & Society, both of which are connected to many of my social and political philosophy interests. Additionally, I conduct psychology research at Texas State University on a wonderful interdisciplinary research team, and have authored multiple publications, which can be found on my faculty profile page. I also teach social psychology and other psychology courses at Austin Community College. Prior to accepting a fulltime teaching post at Texas State University, I taught leadership and organizational development at the University of Texas through the Fall 2023 term. You will quickly recognize that I am especially interested in what we *ought to do (philosophy and ethics)* and *why we do what we do (psychology).* Both questions will be repeat themes throughout the semester.

About the course work:
I want to acknowledge that philosophy can be intimidating for many students, particularly when you are unfamiliar with the material; however, please know that I do not expect you to be a subject matter expert. Rather, my expectation is that you fully engage and think deeply about the course materials, challenge yourself and others, and look for opportunities to apply the philosophical concepts we explore together. Naturally, I want you to feel intellectually challenged and stimulated during our time together, but I also want you to gain insight into why I care so deeply about philosophy. This objective is best realized through "your" commitment to thoroughly engaging with the course content, and especially, our classroom discussions. Please remember, I am always an email or zoom call away, so if you have questions, or feel stuck in any way, reach out to me – I'm happy to help!

Teaching modality
This is an asynchronous course and takes place online. That means there will be no scheduled class meetings. You will work independently through the modules and assignments exclusively on Canvas.

Student Pro-Tips

- **If you want to know how to be successful in this course, the answer is simple: do the work! If you do the work, you will do well.**
- **Engage all course materials.**
- **Exhibit flexibility in thinking (change your mind when appropriate).**
- **Be humble and exhibit a willingness to be challenged.**
- **It is always appropriate to challenge ideas and comments made in this course. However, it is expected you will attack the idea or argument, not the person.**
- **Always ask questions if you have a concern about an assignment (or any other issue).**
- **Before you reach out, consult the syllabus and assignment instructions.**
- **Read all announcements.**
- **If I send you a note through Canvas or as a direct email, respond to it.**
- **Send me direct emails rather than notes through Canvas.**
- **Submit all assignments as a word document.**
- **Do not use google docs for "any" assignment submission. For some reason, Canvas struggles with Google docs.**
- **Do not write in "text" format. Check punctuation and spelling – often.**
- **I will not accept or grade work that is submitted as a single, run-on paragraph. As an example, if I give you 3 prompts for a writing assignment, your submission should have 3 well-structured paragraphs, at minimum. In some instances, you will have more sections/paragraphs than prompts, which is perfectly acceptable. If I don't grade your work, this is likely the reason why. Expect a "zero" on all text-like submissions.**
- **I DO NOT accept AI generated OR assisted work product and content. To be clear, the use of AI in this course, in any form or fashion, is impermissible. If you need assistance with spelling or grammar, use spell and grammar check in Word documents, or pursue support from the TX State writing center (more info later in syllabus). All AI generated and assisted content, including Grammarly and all other related resources, will be flagged and given a score of "zero" until the matter is resolved (More info on AI later in the syllabus).**
- **I do not accept late work – plan accordingly.**

Materials and Minimum Technology Requirements
There are **no required textbooks** for this course. All readings and course materials will be posted on Canvas. In addition, students must have access to the online Canvas platform, which will be used to download reading assignments, submit typed assignments, and watch videos.

Assignments:
Weekly writing assignments (due every Friday at 11:59PM) – 25%
Midterm exam (3/2/2025) – 25%
Short Paper (3/16/2026) - 25%
Final exam (5/1/2026) – 25%
Consult Blackboard for additional details, including the assignment and exam due dates

Weekly writing assignments
Each week, I will post a brief prompt and some additional thoughts on Blackboard about the weekly topic. The weekly prompt is also located on the PowerPoint and lecture slides. You may be given accompanying information and supplemental questions, which will require you to **conduct a comprehensive examination of all ideas and materials under review each week**. This is also an opportunity for you to reflect on the topic as you develop additional critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Submit your weekly assignment submissions to Blackboard. **Each weekly submission should be at least 300 words**, and a maximum of 500 words.

Your weekly writing assignments will be graded as follows:
Full credit (3 points) – Direct and clear engagement with the weekly material; demonstrate a solid understanding of the material; ideas and answers are thoughtful and original; comments were crafted with depth, and care; observations are cited appropriately.
Partial credit (1.5 – 3 points) – General understanding of the material; answers and comments are accurate but lacking in precision, depth, thoughtfulness, and/or originality; shows generalized engagement with the material without specifics or an in-depth analysis; material is accurately cited.
No credit (0 points)– Failure to engage with prompts; material largely misunderstood; engagement with the text is weak or vague.

Total word count for each weekly writing assignment is 300 words minimum, 500 words maximum.

Midterm Exam: Week 8 (3/2/2026)

You have a midterm in Week 8. I will make the exam available on October 15th from 8am – 5pm. You will have 1 hour to take the exam, which is more than enough time. You only have one attempt at the exam, so make it count. The questions will cover all reading material, videos, podcasts, and assignments from the first 7 weeks. Make certain to also review the slides I provide for each module. This is not a "gotcha" test, it is simply an opportunity to verify you have assimilated the material and can respond to baseline questions about the concepts covered in the first half of the semester.

Final Exam: Week 16 (5/1/2026)

You have a final exam in Week 16. I will make the exam available on December 8th from 8am – 5pm. You will have 1 hour to take the exam, which is more than enough time. You only have one attempt at the exam, so make it count. The questions will cover all reading material, videos, podcasts, and assignments from this semester. Make certain to also review the slides I provide for each module as well. Remember, this is not a "gotcha" test, it is simply an opportunity to verify you have assimilated the material and can respond to baseline questions about the concepts covered in the first half of the semester.

Short Paper: Week 10 (3/16/2026)

For the short paper, I want for each of you to introduce "your own" personal philosophy. You can draw from some of the philosophical ideas and concepts we reviewed throughout the semester, or you can introduce ideas that are uniquely your own. I am providing you with a tremendous amount of creative freedom in this assignment, which I encourage you to use to your advantage.

I do recognize that some students struggle with creative flexibility; therefore, I am going to offer you a few suggestions, but they are just that – suggestions. You can consider the following: 1. Introduce your personal ethics 2. Describe your philosophy of art or music 3. Introduce your interpretation of a philosophy we did not review this semester, such as Animism or Shintoism. 4. Propose a philosophy of nature. 5. Write your personal philosophy on aesthetics, a concept we did not cover this semester. Simply put, aesthetics is an examination of beauty, which can be quite interesting. Perhaps you could develop qualifiers or criteria for aesthetics. Again, these are just suggestions, make the assignment your own.
Page count: 2-3 pages, double spaced, New Times font, APA or MLA formatting, and make certain to cite all sources. Minimum word count: 650 words, not including a cover page and bibliography.

Grading Format
Weekly writing assignments: 25%
Midterm: 25%
Final Exam 25%
Short Paper 25%

Grading Scale
90-100: A
80-89.9: B
70-79.9: C
60-69.9: D
0-59: F

Course Policies

Late work:
I do not accept late work. If you require special accommodations, please reach out to me, I'm happy to help find a solution. **Again, I DO NOT accept late work, so plan accordingly**.

AI generated content **(pay special attention to this policy)**

I do not accept AI generated or AI assisted content from students. The use of any form of AI in this course is strictly prohibited. I recognize and appreciate the value and multiple benefits of the various AI resources available to us, but in this course, I am interested solely in your "original" thoughts and ideas. Texas State University uses the Turnitin feature that evaluates each submission for originality and AI generated and assisted content.

Your first infraction will be given the grade of "zero" and your second infraction will also be given a grade of "zero" and result in the maximum disciplinary response available. In addition to giving your course work a grade of zero, I will also report the infraction to the Sul Ross University Honor Council. When the matter is reported to the Honor Code Council, **a hearing may be required, and potential sanctions include additional grade penalties, loss of course credit, expulsion from the university, or others.**

AI resources that have proven problematic for students are listed below, **but are not limited to the following** (remember, all AI is impermissible): ChatGPT, CoPilot, Gemini, Socratic by Google, Grammarly, Quill Bot, Jasper AI, and Elicit. If you are an ESL student using translation resources, reach out to me directly and we will review the situation on a case-by-case basis.

Hardship forgiveness

I know that times are challenging and unpredictable. I think we all have a duty to show compassion and flexibility with one another. The best way to preserve trust is with good communication. If you are starting to disconnect from this class or if work is piling up, let me know right away so that I can strategize with you about how to solve the problem – before it's too late.

Communication policy

Please be polite and tactful in all communication with me and your classmates. I am comfortable being addressed as Professor Schmiedehaus (pronounced: Shmee-du-house) or simply Evan, the choice is yours. Most students choose to call me Prof-S, Prof, or Professor, all of which work fine for me. If there is a certain way you prefer to be addressed, please let me know.
I check my email regularly, Monday-Friday, and will do my best to respond to you within one business day. Please do the same.

If I send you an email, respond to it! It can be frustrating when students neglect to respond to emails and miss critical opportunities to improve their understanding of course materials or improve their grades. So, **check your email every day and don't forget to respond**.

In addition to email**, I'll frequently use the announcement function in Blackboard**. Be sure to have your settings configured so that you receive notifications whenever announcements are posted. **Anticipate multiple announcements from me throughout the semester with critical information and updates.**

Lastly, whenever you send me an email, make certain to include your name, the course number, the course section, and your class time. Without that information, I have no way to quickly identify who you are.

Feedback, Grades, and Appealing Grades

Assignment grades are posted in Canvas as items are graded. Students can use this information to track their standing in the course. I aim to grade all assignments, including discussions, essays, and the final paper within a week. Some exceptions may arise, but this is my general timeline for grading assignments.

To solicit additional feedback on your work, feel free to email me or meet with me via Zoom during my office hours. I am typically flexible when scheduling appointments, so we should be able to find a mutually convenient time to meet without difficulty.

If you believe that I have not graded your work fairly, I would like to know. To appeal, email me and **briefly make a case for revising your grade**. Just keep in mind that if I review your work, I reserve the right to revise your grade upward or downward.

Academic Integrity

All writing should be your own. I expect that your work will be based on your thinking about the provided course materials. I've noticed that when students consult outside sources or share answers with their peers, they are often led to misunderstand key ideas from the assigned materials, and they subject themselves to a heightened risk of committing plagiarism. In other words: Do your best to work with the materials provided. I encourage you to get in touch with me if you need help understanding the content.

Honesty and integrity are central tenets associated with Sul Ross university objectives and the value of a meaningful education. It is the basis of the student-teacher relationship, the foundation of academia and virtually all social and professional practices, and it is essential for maximizing learning. The university has several resources to clarify the Sul Ross University's Policies, if you need assistance finding them, please email me. All instances of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported to the Honor Code Counsel and be penalized to the greatest possible extent.

Citation Guidelines

If it's not your "original" idea, you must cite it! If you paraphrase an idea, you must cite the author. If you take a direct quote (three consecutive words or more) from a source, you must place quotation marks around the quote, provide a page number (if applicable), and cited the author. Refer to the following site for help with citations: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/. If you are still unsure how to cite things, let me know that you'd like for me to teach you. You may cite in any style with which you are comfortable, but I prefer APA. My request is that you are consistent with citations.

Community Climate

Texas State University believes that freedom of thought, innovation, and creativity are fundamental characteristics of a community of scholars. To promote such a learning environment, the university has a special to responsibility to seek diversity, to instill a global perspective in its students, and to nurture sensitivity, tolerance, and mutual respect. I share this value and work to protect and celebrate a broad range of ideas, backgrounds, and experiences in this course. If the classroom community climate expectation feels difficult to accomplish, keep it simple: be respectful and give people the benefit of the doubt.

Divergent Points of View

My aim is to explore ideas that are interesting and life-enriching with you, to help you develop skills that will serve you in your personal, civic, and professional pursuits, and to help you discover that the most important ethical issues are far more complex than we might at first realize. My goal as a teacher is not to persuade you to hold any particular moral view, but rather to expose you to important theoretical tools and perspectives and to challenge you to reflect carefully, bravely, and sensitively about ethical matters. This classroom welcomes and takes seriously perspectives from across the ideological spectrum. I deeply value the presence and participation of all students who participate in a sincere and respectful manner.

Additional Student Resources

Accessibility

Your well-being and success in this course are important to me. I recognize that there are multiple ways to learn, and that this multiplicity should be acknowledged in the design and structure of university courses and the evaluation of their participants. Thus, I encourage students registered in this course to discuss their learning preferences and comprehension requirements with me during my office hours or at another arranged time. Every student is entitled to a meaningful and stimulating learning experience. Disabled students are also strongly encouraged to avail themselves of the services provided by the campus Office of Disability Services.

Writing Center

Please visit the Writing Center to request help if you feel that you would benefit from such assistance. In addition, you should be familiar with the SRSU Writing Center. They have much to offer students and I recommend that you take advantage of their services. You can reach the writing center via Blackboard and by calling at 432-837-8726.