



EAST TENNESSEE STATE
UNIVERSITY

College of Arts and Sciences

Department of Philosophy & Humanities

**Phil 2040: Philosophy as Conversation
Spring 2021
Course Syllabus**

Instructor: Matt Deaton, Ph.D.

Office: Home office; contact info below

Email: deatonj@mail.etsu.edu (I do not monitor email constantly, so for anything time-sensitive, please call my cell)

Phone: 865-323-9773

Skype ID: mattdeaton

Office Hours: Flexible and by appointment (available most weekdays at noon and 5:00 p.m., but please email – I'm sure we can work out a mutually convenient time to speak or Skype if you'd like the help).

Supervisor: Leslie MacAvoy, Ph.D., macavoyl@mail.etsu.edu (should you need anything addressed that I've been unable to handle, please first elevate any concerns to Dr. MacAvoy)

Required Readings

- Various philosophical articles and book chapters, all of which are available on the course site in PDF for download
- *Ethics in a Nutshell* will be provided for student use in PDF, but if you'd prefer a bound copy, it may be ordered at Amazon [here](#)
- *The Best Public Speaking Book* will be provided for student use in PDF, but if you'd prefer a bound copy, it may be ordered at Amazon [here](#).

Catalog Course Description

An introduction to philosophy as self-examination. Focus on discussion of the beliefs and values of the students in the class.

Prerequisites/Co-requisites

None

Course Outcomes

1. Improved public speaking skill and confidence
2. Conversational competence in:
 - a. The philosopher's basic aims and approach including argument construction and evaluation
 - b. Various theological arguments including those attempting to support the existence of a deity,

- the problem of evil and some responses, and competing viewpoints on the ethics of belief
- c. Philosophical ethics including constructing and evaluating arguments by analogy, the foundations and application of Utilitarianism, Kantianism, Feminist Care Ethics and Virtue Ethics
- d. Political philosophy including the foundations and critiques of Libertarianism, and Marxism and Rawlsianism
- e. Applying the methodical, reason-based approach of philosophers to a variety contemporary philosophical issues

Reading and Assignments Schedule

*In most cases organized by Thursdays, when new lecture videos and notes will usually be posted, through **Wednesdays, when reflection videos will be due by midnight** unless otherwise noted (look for underlined and bolded dates in the list below for deviations from that norm). **For any assignment due on a day ETSU is scheduled to be closed (a Break Day), you may turn it in early (you can actually always turn stuff in early), or by the date assigned here, but not late.***

T Jan 19 – W Jan 20:

- Deaton's "How to Study Philosophy" and Russell's "The Value of Philosophy"
- *The Best Public Speaking Book* Chapter 1: Swimmers Must Swim

R Jan 21 – W Jan 27:

- Deaton's "Fundamentals of Critical Thinking" and a selection from Plato's *Sophist*
- *The Best Public Speaking Book* Chapter 2: Commandments Preview

R Jan 28 – W Feb 3:

- Howard-Snyder's *The Power of Logic* Chapter 2: Identifying Arguments and McClellan's "Four Common Fallacies"
- *The Best Public Speaking Book* Chapter 3: Commandment I: Know Thy Material

R Feb 4 – W Feb 10:

- Miranda's "Philosophical Proofs on the Existence of God" and Deaton's "The Problem of Evil in a Nutshell"¹
- *The Best Public Speaking Book* Chapter 4: Commandment II: Be Thyself

R Feb 11 – W Feb 17:

- Blaise Pascal's "The Wager," Allen Wood's "The Duty to Believe According to the Evidence," and Fabio Lampert's "Can We Believe Without Sufficient Evidence? The James/Clifford Quarrel and the Response of Alvin Plantinga" (for notes this week, look for "The Ethics of Belief in a Nutshell" under Reading Notes)
- *The Best Public Speaking Book* Chapter 5: Commandment III: Practice

¹ Three optional readings summarized in "The Problem of Evil in a Nutshell" provided on the course website are Rowe's "The Problems of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," Mackie's "Evil and Omnipotence" and Plantinga's "The Free Will

Defense.”

Sat Feb 20: EXAM ONE DUE BY MIDNIGHT (will be available M Feb 15 – Sat Feb 20 – note that while the exams will show as available in the course website through the Thursday after the due date, each day taken late triggers worsening point deductions – please see Exams and Make-Up Policies sections below for additional details)

R Feb 18 – W Feb 24:

- Deaton’s *Ethics in a Nutshell* **Chapter 1:** Introduction, **Chapter 2:** What’s Ethics?, **Chapter 3:** Why Ethics Isn’t Ice Cream and **Chapter 4:** Three Key Distinctions
- *The Best Public Speaking Book* Chapter 6: Conquering Nervousness

R Feb 25 – W Mar 3:

- Deaton’s *Ethics in a Nutshell* **Chapter 5:** The Four Dominant Ethical Theories
- *The Best Public Speaking Book* Chapter 7: Involving Your Audience

R Mar 4 – W Mar 10:

- Deaton’s *Ethics in a Nutshell* **Chapter 6:** All-Things-Considered, **Chapter 7:** Argument by Analogy, **Chapter 8:** Moral Intuitions and Coherence, and **Chapter 9:** Conclusion
- *The Best Public Speaking Book* Chapter 8: Handling a Tough Crowd

R Mar 11 – W Mar 17:

- “Do We Own Ourselves? / Libertarianism” from Sandel’s *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do?* and “Marxism” from Kymlicka’s *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*
- *The Best Public Speaking Book* Chapter 9: Physical Delivery

R Mar 18 – W Mar 24:

- Rawls’s “Justice as Fairness: Political, not Metaphysical” and a selection from Plato’s *Republic*
- *The Best Public Speaking Book* Chapter 10: Oral Delivery

Sat Mar 27: EXAM TWO DUE BY MIDNIGHT (will be available M Mar 22 – Sat Mar 27 – note that while the exams will show as available in the course website through the Thursday after the due date, each day taken late triggers worsening point deductions – please see Exams and Make-Up Policies sections below for additional details)

R Mar 25 – W Mar 31:

- Tim Crane’s “The Unity of Unconsciousness”
- *The Best Public Speaking Book* Chapter 11: If You Must Use a Script...

R Apr 1 – W Apr 7:

- David Chalmers’s “The Singularity: A Philosophical Analysis”
- *The Best Public Speaking Book* Chapter 12: Using Technology

R Apr 8 – W Apr 14:

- John Hardwig's "Ownership, Possession, and Consumption: On the Limits of Rational Consumption" and Trimble's "The Desire for More is Killing Us: Lessons from Plato's *Republic*"
- *The Best Public Speaking Book* Chapter 13: Less Reading, More Speaking

R Apr 15 – W Apr 21:

- Thomas Nagel's "The Absurd"
- *The Best Public Speaking Book* Chapter 14: The Commitment to Get Better

R Apr 22 – W Apr 28:

- *The Best Public Speaking Book* Chapter 15: Mindset Revisited
- *The Best Public Speaking Book* Chapter 16: Paid to Speak?
- *The Best Public Speaking Book* Chapter 17: Tell Them What You've Told Them

Sat May 1: EXAM THREE DUE BY MIDNIGHT (will be available M Apr 26 – Sat May 1 – note that while the exams will show as available in the course website through the Thursday after the due date, each day taken late triggers worsening point deductions – please see Exams and Make-Up Policies sections below for additional details))

Wed May 5: COURSE PROJECT DUE BY MIDNIGHT (early submissions welcome)

Final Grade Scale Percentages

A = 90-100%
B+ = 87- 89.99%
B = 80-86.99%
C+ = 77-79.99%
C = 70-76.99
D+ = 67-69.99
D = 60-66.99%
F = 59.99% or below

Grade Distribution

Weekly Video Reflection Posts: 30% course grade
Exam One: 20% course grade
Exam Two: 20% course grade
Exam Three: 20% course grade
Course Project: 10% course grade

Assignments

Weekly Reflection Videos (under Evaluation -> Discussions on the course site)

Since this is an oral-concentration class, each week you'll post two videos, usually due by midnight each Wednesday per the schedule above.

1. One video (uploaded to YouTube or some other streaming service) between 4-to-5 minutes long on the assigned philosophy reading(s)
 2. Another separate video (also uploaded to YouTube or some other streaming service) 1-to-2 minutes long on the assigned public speaking reading(s)²
- *All videos should be record in one take (no editing/splicing), and you should remain on screen and the focus of attention (you can use a whiteboard or slides in the background if you like, but you're the main show). Briefly going off screen is ok. Also, please don't incorporate any outside video footage – the idea is to simulate a live presentation to better prepare you for that sort of speaking.*
 - *For all videos, unless you're reading a verbatim quote, never use a script. Script-reading is the lowest form of public speaking. It's tempting, but you're better than that. Feel free to read ahead in *The Best Public Speaking Book* with help on how to go scriptless (I'll also post a video on the same).*
 - *Include links to both weekly videos in a single Discussion Board post.*

On your weekly 4-to-5 minute philosophy reading videos, which will be worth 7/10 points of your weekly reflection grades, please read and study the material, the specific prompt (in each week's discussion board assignment), plan, rehearse and put care into recording your videos, then upload them to a streamable service such as YouTube (or Vimeo, or Google Drive – whatever you prefer so long as we can stream to view without having to download) and share the links in your post (no video files – only the links). Thank you for rehearsing and re-recording when necessary to meet the goal. Points will be deducted for videos that are too long or too short.

Online tutorials abound, but if you need technical assistance the first week, please call my cell # above. I'm most familiar with YouTube – consider using the “unlisted” option if you'd prefer your responses not be accessible via a YouTube search, but not the “private” option, which would block me from viewing it without a password.

So long as your video indicates you **read, reflected on and seriously engaged** the assigned reading(s), **you fully answer the prompt(s), and it falls within the time requirements** above, you will receive at least a 5/10. I'm not asking for perfection, just engagement with the readings and honest reflection – meaning it's obvious from your post that you read the assigned material and thought a bit about the specific prompt before replying. Demonstrate that, and you'll get a 5/10. To earn a 6/10 or 7/10, do the above and effectively apply the public speaking advice we'll cover over the course of the semester. The more your weekly reflection resembles a carefully-prepared, well-reasoned and clearly-communicated argument, and the better you demonstrate growing competence as a speaker, the better grade you'll receive. Please let me know how I can help as we go.

On your weekly 1-to-2 minute public speaking reading videos, which will be worth 3/10 points of your weekly reflection grades, the standing assignment is to *teach* what you considered the most

² Note that the last reflection will be on the final three chapters of the public speaking book (no philosophy readings that week), and 4-to-5 minutes long rather than 1-to-2.

important/insightful/helpful advice/techniques. Don't try to cover everything. In 1-to-2 minutes, you can't. Instead, read the entire chapter (not simply the bulleted summary at the end...), reflect on which tips and techniques seemed most helpful. Then figure out an effective way to teach that to your viewers, which will be me plus your classmates. I'll post some sample videos of how I teach public speaking. But feel free and encouraged to be as creative as you'd like to be in these vids. As I'll advice, after embracing your role as expert and teacher, develop your unique, sincere public speaking self, using methods and a style that feels right for you. You won't know what feels right until you try it, so feel free to experiment.

* I'll drop your lowest reflection post grade, so you can strategically skip a week if you like ☺ Just be ready for the exams.

** Since this is Philosophy as *Conversation*, you are encouraged, though not required, to respond to your peers' video posts. You can do this via video if you like, or in writing – your choice.

Exams (under Evaluation -> Assessments on the course site)

You'll take three exams **per the schedule in this syllabus**. Each will build on the previous, such that each will be cumulative, but expect the majority of the questions on each to concern the most recent readings. Unless I announce otherwise, the exams will be made up of multiple choice and true/false questions. Expect the exams to cover specifics within the readings, lectures and/or lecture notes. Expect them to be difficult and prepare as you would for any in-person test. Note that while you may consult your notes, the course texts, my notes, etc. during the exam, you may not consult with one another, or any other person – the point is to judge your mastery of the material, and yours alone. The exams will also be timed, so bring your A game.

Course Project (under Evaluation -> DropBox on the course site)

You'll complete and submit a course project with a written and spoken element at the end of the semester. Please consult the course site for specifics – will post details there no later than the second exam.

Late Work Policies

Reflections: The discussion board is a “post first” forum, meaning that you must submit your response to a given week's reflection prompt before you can see the responses of others. This is to encourage original thought and direct engagement with the course materials – to prevent being overly influenced by the thought of others before you've had a chance to develop your own initial view. Given that I'll post weekly “collective feedback” shortly after each Wednesday midnight post deadline in which I'll pull quotes from and provide commentary on select submissions, late reflection posts are not accepted, and a zero will be recorded for any that come in after the deadline.

Exams: The exams will be available during the window specified in the syllabus. Please mark those dates in your personal calendar and plan to study for and complete them with time to spare.

While make-up exams may be taken for a brief window after the official due date, doing so comes with point penalties to incentivize on-time completion. **If you miss an exam deadline, the penalty is 15 points for taking it within the first calendar day late (meaning the max score would be 85/100), 30 points if completed within the 2nd calendar day late (max 70/100), and 50 points if completed on the 3rd or 4th calendar days late (max 50). Once the 4th calendar day after an exam deadline has passed, there are no additional make-up opportunities, and a zero for that exam will be recorded.**

Course Project: Given that the course project is due right before the end of the semester (when I'll need to calculate and upload final course grades), late papers will only be accepted the day after they're due, and will incur a 25-point deduction. After that I'll be under various grade submission deadlines, and won't be able to accept your project, so please plan and budget your time accordingly. Keep in mind that the course project upload interface will close at midnight on the project's due date, and so any submission after that point would need to be sent to my email address as an attachment – a phone call to ensure I received it would also be a good idea.

**** Plagiarism Warning****

“Plagiarism” is passing off someone else’s work as your own. This includes the work of your classmates, as well as ideas you might find in books or on the Internet. Consulting outside sources is admirable. **Copying and pasting language from outside sources without noting them as a source and/or failing to place direct quotes within “quote marks” is not admirable, and will earn you a zero for the assignment, and/or an F for the course.**

Philosophy isn't the easiest when you're new. But it's definitely within your reach, especially if you ask for help. If you're having difficulty coming up with what you consider a quality submission for an assignment, email or call – promise I can help, and would like to – don't resort to plagiarism. Your dignity is worth more than the points, and your professor is here to help. Take advantage. (And sorry I have to include this... only relevant for a very small % of students, and I'm sure you're not in that group)