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**PHIL 1000H – INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY (HONORS)**  
**University of Georgia**  
**Fall Semester 2007**  
**3:30 – 4:45pm TR**

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**Instructor:** Dr. Bryan Baird  
**Office:** 23 Peabody Hall  
**Office Hours:** 1:30–3:00pm MW, and by appointment  
**Office Phone:** 542.2823 (o), 224.0106 (h)  
**Email:** [bnbaird@uga.edu](mailto:bnbaird@uga.edu)

**Required Text:** Bel-Jean packet. Bel-Jean is located downtown on Broad St.

**Suggested Source Material:**

[Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)

[Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)

Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Main Library, 1st floor. *Main Ref B51 .R68 1998*

Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Main Library, 1st floor. *Main Ref B41.E5 1972*

**Course Description:**

What is philosophy? One way of answering this question is to comment on philosophy's tools: arguments and a critical spirit. Philosophy is a discipline centered around making and responding to arguments—giving reasons for positions held and critically evaluating those reasons and positions. Philosophy is not primarily a passive, fact-gathering discipline but one where an active, imaginative, critical spirit is at home. Be careful. "Being critical" in this sense is not synonymous with being mean or tearing someone down. Such an attitude has more to do with unhealthy (and usually unfounded) arrogance than with philosophical inquiry and, for my part, has no place in philosophy. (Although, to be sure, there are arrogant philosophers!) Rather, being critical in the philosophical sense has to do with the ability to adequately understand a position and the reasons for it and to make reasonable judgments as to their worth. Whether or not you choose to adopt or cultivate such a (positive) critical spirit, by the end of the semester you will at least see it at work in many different ways.

With the above as a backdrop, this course is designed to introduce you to some key issues in different areas of philosophical study, to the works of philosophers themselves, and to ways in which philosophers interact with one another's work. By looking at a wide range of philosophical topics, you will gain a good sense (and, hopefully, an appreciation) of what philosophy is about and the seemingly boundless ways in which it can be pursued. The topics we will cover include arguments for and against the existence of God, knowledge of the external world (whether it can reliably be had), ethics, consciousness, and meaning in life. As you can see, philosophy covers a whole bunch of stuff...and more besides.

By reading a wide selection of philosophical works, both past and present, you will wrestle with what philosophers everywhere wrestle with and learn how to think philosophically. Reading philosophers is typically a difficult endeavor for anyone, even other philosophers. What will make it particularly difficult for you is that their writings assume a wealth of background information that (most of) you do not possess. Do not assume that I will provide this information, though I will try to provide a minimal amount. For the most part, the more of this background information you gain, the easier it will be to contextualize, and, as a result, to better understand, the readings. (I say "for the most part"—sometimes there is just too much information to handle. This, unfortunately, comes with the territory.) I have provided a list of easily accessible reference works that will help you with this (see "Suggested Source Material" above).

By seeing the ways in which philosophers interact, you will learn how to think more critically and deeply about the positions that others present. We will get very familiar with how philosophers respond to the positions of other philosophers. We will see the ways in which they engage themselves in the critical spirit so central to philosophy. This will give you a clue as to how to philosophize on your own.

**Course Requirements:** Presentations and homework assignments, exams, and a final paper.

**Presentations on Readings, Homework Assignments (20%).** Once the class roll is finalized, you will be assigned several of the readings over the course of the semester. Let me know ASAP whether an assigned presentation date conflicts with any university-sponsored events that will keep you from attending class. (The Georgia-Florida game does not count!) Unless otherwise noted, you will give a 5-10 minute presentation at the beginning of class on (1) the main thought/conclusion/position(s) of the reading, (2) the main argument(s) given for it (them), and (3) your assessment of the arguments. **You should not merely summarize the reading.** You should assume that everyone has already read the material. The point of these presentations is for you to wrestle and engage with the material and to tell the class about what you discover. (And to see if they are in agreement!) In addition to making use of the suggested source material listed above, I will be happy to help you organize your thoughts for the presentation.

At different points during the semester, I will ask you to do homework assignments. In these you will be asked to focus on a particular aspect of the readings. For instance, I might ask you to reconstruct a particular argument, to trace interactions between philosophers, to think more about a particular philosophical concept, to construct your own response to a position, etc. The assignments will be short (1-2 pages in length). Typically, I will ask you to submit them through WebCT.

**Exams (60%).** There will be two in-class exams and a final exam. The exams will be a combination of short answer and essay. Each exam, including the final exam, will cover *primarily* material since the previous exam.

**Final Paper (20%).** For the final paper, I will ask you to give your own personal philosophy according to the various areas of philosophy we have discussed over the course of the semester. This will be your opportunity to give your personal philosophical response to the following topics covered in the course: the existence of God, knowledge of the external world, and ethics.

For homework assignments and exams, I will not give make-ups except under the following conditions: (1) you have a valid excuse (e.g., note from a doctor or the Health Center, University-related excuse) and (2) you complete the assignment or exam before they are handed back to the class.

**Grading:** The letter grades you will receive reflect how you do with regard to three axes: understanding of the material, presentation of the material, and philosophical analysis and evaluation of the material. (By "philosophical analysis" I am referring to the task of picking out the position and the reasons offered for it in a given reading. By "philosophical evaluation" I am referring to the task of providing a reasoned judgment on the strength(s) and/or weakness(es) of the position.) The following is what I will have in mind (and in hand) when grading your work:

- A** –Your work demonstrates an **excellent** understanding of the material and presents the material clearly, accurately, and intelligibly. You have engaged in good philosophical analysis and critique of the material.
- B** –Your work demonstrates a **good** understanding of the material and presents it accurately and intelligibly. Your work shows that you are learning how to engage in philosophical analysis and evaluation and shows progress in this area.
- C** –Your work demonstrates an **average** understanding of the material and shows some problems presenting it accurately and fully. Your work indicates that you are struggling with grasping it, though you show effort in engaging in philosophical analysis and evaluation.

- D** –Your work demonstrates **poor** understanding of the material. Although you are able to present some aspects of the material and are showing evidence of struggling with it, you are having significant difficulties with the material. You fail to engage in philosophical evaluation of the material but show some attempt to do so.
- F** –Your work demonstrates very little understanding of the material and fails to present the material clearly and accurately. You fail to engage in philosophical evaluation of the material in any meaningful way.

Your final grade will be determined by averaging together the grades according to the percentages set out in the Course Requirements. I will use the following for grading purposes:

A+	100	B+	88	C+	78	D+	68
A	96	B	85	C	75	D	65
A-	93	B-	82	C-	72	D-	62
A-/B+	90	B-/C+	80	C-/D+	70	F	50

Consideration will be taken for improvement in the course: in borderline grade cases, higher grades earned later in the course, signs of real progress, and/or active participation (whether in class or on WebCT) may bump you up to the next higher letter grade.

For final *letter* grades submitted to the university, **I will be using the plus-minus system.** I will use the following scale to determine final letter grades. I will not normally round up for the final letter grades. For example, if you earn a number grade of 88.5 in the course, you will get a final letter grade of B+, a 95 will earn you an A, a 76.5 will earn you a C, etc.

#### Plus-Minus Letter Grade Scale

A	94 or higher	C+	77 - 79
A-	90 - 93	C	74 - 76
B+	87 - 89	C-	70 - 72
B	83 - 86	D	60 - 69
B-	80 - 82	F	< 59

\* The information included in this syllabus is meant as a general guideline and is subject to change at any time during the semester.