

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER

Course Syllabus

Summer 2026

PHIL 1301: Introduction to Philosophy
Instructor: Gregory L. Bock, Ph.D.
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Required Learning Material:

All reading materials are provided electronically in Canvas

Catalog Description:

A survey of the major areas of traditional and modern philosophy: philosophies of knowledge, ethics, logic, aesthetics, and metaphysics.

Course Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to...

1. articulate the basic terms, methods, and questions of philosophy.
2. explain the importance of philosophy.
3. explain the job description and responsibilities of a philosopher.
4. identify key figures in the history of epistemology.
5. discuss the connection between certainty and knowledge.
6. explain the tenets of empiricism.
7. compare and contrast Eastern and Western theories of reality.
8. compare and contrast Eastern and Western theories of the self.
9. articulate and critique arguments for the existence of God.
10. discuss whether human nature is self-oriented or other-oriented.
11. describe the nature of true happiness.
12. explain the nature of human virtue.
13. discuss the idea of a social contract.
14. explain the basis for property rights.
15. explain and evaluate theories of justice.

Grading Scale Percents:

A=90-100%, B=80-89%, C=70-79%, D=60-69%, F=less than 60%

Grading:

Reading Quizzes (5@ 10 points each):	40 points (lowest quiz dropped)
Initiator Posts (5 @ 100 points):	400 points (lowest dropped)
Response Posts (5 @ 10 points each):	40 points (lowest dropped)
TOTAL:	480 points

Assessment:

Discussion Board Assignment: There is a discussion board in each module. You'll make a minimum of six contributions to each discussion board: 1 initiator post + 5 response posts = 6 total posts (minimum). The initiator post assignment has a separate due date from the response post assignment even though they are on the same discussion board.

INITIATOR POSTS: You'll write one initiator post per board. An initiator post is one that starts a thread based on the discussion prompt. A good post will make connections to the course readings and explain the philosophical ideas from the textbook clearly.

The post must be at least 300 words. There's no maximum word count, but keep in mind that grades are not based on quantity of words but on demonstrated comprehension and critical thinking. The grading rubric below shows exactly what is expected.

There must be at least three direct quotes from the course readings. Direct quotes should be word for word and enclosed in quotation marks and followed with a parenthetical citation, such as:

Russell says, "yada, yada" (Russell).

Do not use quotes from sources outside the course. If you need to use the Internet, A.I., etc. to research a topic more deeply, fine. But do not use it to write your post for you. Your post must be in your own words. I don't want you to even paraphrase what another site says. I've designed this assignment so that everything you need to perform well can be found in the readings in Canvas. Stick to the readings. Avoid A.I. (even Grammarly or similar app that rewrites for you). All should be good.

You must post first in order to view other posts. The edit function will be disabled. If you want to edit after posting, you may reply in the thread with corrections or request that I delete the post. There must be a very good reason for deletion. For grading purposes, I consider your first post to be the initiator post even if it is blank or incomplete.

Late initiator posts can be turned in for a lower grade before the board officially closes. A late penalty of half a letter grade per day applies in each case unless accompanied by a valid excuse (e.g. a doctor’s note that indicates a serious illness).

DISCUSSION BOARD RUBRIC (INITIATOR POSTS)	
0—30 points	The answer is correct and complete.
0—30 points	There are at least three relevant direct quotes from the required readings.
0—20 points	Language is respectful and polite.
0—20 points	Grammar and spelling are polished and citations are included and correct, matching the course readings

Additional points will be deducted for late initiator posts. No late initiator or response posts are accepted after the board closes.

Cases of plagiarism earn an automatic zero and a possible F in the course. Plagiarized posts may be sent to UT Tyler Judicial Affairs to receive additional consequences. In short, do your own work, and be careful to give credit to the original author when you quote or paraphrase. You may use A.I. to study in this class, but you cannot use it to write your post for you. You must be the sole author of your posts.

RESPONSE POSTS: In addition to initiator posts, you’ll write at least five response posts for each module (for a total of 6 weekly contributions: 1 initiator post + 5 response posts = 6). A response post is one that replies to a classmate’s post and continues the conversation. One that ends the conversation or just says “I agree” in so many words does not qualify as a response. Good posts carry on the conversation in an interesting and relevant way and draw other students into the discussion. For this reason, I require you to end every response post with a question.

Posts under 50 words don’t count toward the required number of response posts. If you happen to post a few that are under 50 words, just make sure to post a few extra posts that are 50 words.

You must be active on the discussion board on three separate days, meaning you might post your initiator post on Friday night and come back and reply to your classmates on Saturday and Sunday.

Late response posts will not be accepted. Once the board closes, there are no further opportunities to complete the assignment, so it’s advisable to post early to avoid unforeseen events such as last-minute technical problems. Encountering technical issues is not a valid excuse for late work unless the issues are the university’s fault.

Common penalties to avoid as you write:

1. failure to end your response posts with questions (-1 point)
2. failure to be active on the board on three separate days (-3 points)

Reading Quizzes

Reading quizzes can be found under the Quizzes tab in Canvas. There is a reading quiz for each chapter on the schedule of readings. These quizzes must be taken alone and without help from the Internet or A.I.

Tentative Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

Module 1: Philosophy in and of Itself

Module 2: Epistemology

Module 3: Metaphysics

Module 4: Ethics

Module 5: Political Philosophy

Course Policies:

Late work policy: Assignments must be submitted by the deadline. A penalty of half a letter grade per day up to two letter grades will be assessed for late initiator posts. This penalty will be waived only under special circumstances (e.g. a serious illness accompanied by a doctor's note). Late discussion board posts are not accepted after the board closes. Quizzes cannot be taken late.

Communication policy: The best way to communicate with the instructor is through UT Tyler e-mail (gbock@uttyler.edu) or in Canvas. Students can expect replies within 48 hours, excluding weekends and holidays. Students who do not receive a reply within this timeframe should attempt to contact the instructor again. The instructor communicates with the class via Canvas emails and announcements. It is important that students check their email and allow push notifications for class announcements.

Class conduct policy: The subject matter of this class can make some people hot under the collar. This said, all comments and behavior must be classroom appropriate. What does “classroom appropriate” mean? It does *not* mean that students cannot express unpopular opinions. It means practicing reasoning and logical argumentation. It means being civil and listening with respect. Insults, snide comments, name-calling, cutting someone off, derogatory tones, sarcasm, ridicule, cussing, vulgarity, personal attacks, racial slurs, misogynistic remarks, etc. will not be allowed. If you are unsure about what counts as disrespectful, consult the instructor or the Golden Rule. The instructor will act as the final word on what is or is not classroom appropriate. Violators may be ejected from the class.

Cell phone policy (face-to-face sections): Mobile devices can be used in the classroom if it is related to what is going on in class. If you have an electronic textbook or plan to take notes on your device, please let me know early in the semester. They are permissible as long as they don’t distract you or your classmates from the lesson.

Arriving late or leaving early policy (face-to-face sections): Arriving on time can sometimes be challenging, but it is better to be late than never. However, late arrivals and early departures can be disruptive to others in the classroom. For this reason, please don’t make a habit of it.

Extra credit policy: Extra credit is not available in this class.

“It is what it is” final grade policy: Grades are final once the final grade percentage has been posted in Canvas at the end of the semester. No changes will be made unless the instructor has made a mistake. Grades are not bumped up unless the student is within .5% of the next letter grade. For example, an 89.5% is an A. An 89.4% is a B. No extra credit opportunities will be given during finals week. The conditions for an “incomplete” are stated in the university handbook: “(a) the student has been making satisfactory progress in the course; (b) the student is unable to complete all course work or final exam due to unusual circumstances that are beyond personal control and are acceptable to the instructor; and (c) the student presents these reasons prior to the time that the final grade roster is due.” The terms and deadline for satisfying an “incomplete” will be set by the instructor.

UT TYLER HONOR CODE

I embrace honor and integrity.

Therefore, I choose not to lie, cheat or steal, nor to accept the actions of those who do.