

PHILOSOPHY 355: MAJOR PHILOSOPHERS AND MOVEMENTS Philosophy of Time

Time: MF 11:00-12:15
Location: SFH 204
Instructor: Thomas Blanchard
Email: tblancha@iwu.edu
Office Hours: MF 9:15-10:45
TR 9:30-10:30
and by appointment
Office Hours Location: CLA Room 128

1. Course Description and Objectives

This class will be primarily devoted to exploring certain tensions between our ordinary experience of the world and what modern physics tells us about the universe, focusing particularly on the issue of *time*. As we will see, there is a deep tension between our ordinary experience of time and what modern physics says about time. This tension is crystallized in an opposition between two theories of time, *dynamic* and *static* theories. The first part of the class (from week 1 to week 6) will be devoted to examining these two theories. We will pay particular attention to what modern physics (especially the theory of relativity) bears on the debate between static and dynamic theories.

The second part of the class (from week 7 to week 15) will be devoted to the problem of the *temporal asymmetry*. From an intuitive standpoint, our world is sharply asymmetric in time: the past is 'fixed' while the future is 'open', we know much more about the past than the future, we can influence the future but not the past, etc. From a modern physical standpoint, this sharp asymmetry between past and future is a deep mystery, as physics seems to tell us that the past and the future are in a certain sense fundamentally alike. There is an important philosophical tradition in 20th century philosophy that focuses on resolving this mystery, and which suggests that paying attention to these issues may lead to radical revisions of our ordinary the world. The second part of the class will be devoted to examining some of the most important work conducted in this tradition. This will lead us to come to grip with a wide variety of topics that are related in one way or another to the problem of the temporal asymmetry, such as causation, free will, knowledge, decision and punishment.

The first goal of the class is to give you a working knowledge of what contemporary philosophy and science tells us about the nature of time. The second goal is to help you hone your philosophical writing skills. Almost all the assignments for the class will be

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writing assignments, and will give you the opportunity to write philosophically in a wide variety of formats (short essays, longer essays involving revisions, peer reviews, etc.). Since strong writing skills are needed outside philosophy too, I hope that this course will serve all of you, no matter in what profession your future lies.

2. Prerequisites and General Requirements Met

The prerequisite for this class is the prior completion of at least one course in philosophy or consent of the instructor.

This class fulfills the IT (Intellectual Traditions) requirement and the W (Writing) requirement.

3. Readings

We won't be using any books for this class; all the readings will be posted on Moodle. It is essential that you bring a **physical copy** of the reading to class. If you do not bring a copy to class this will negatively affect your preparation and participation grade.

4. Attendance Policy

The official attendance policy for this class is that attendance is mandatory. However, I will excuse three absences without penalty. More than three absences will negatively impact your course grade. A fourth absence will lower your grade by three percent, a fifth absence will lower your grade by six percent, a sixth absence will lower your grade by ten percent, and seven absences or more will likely result in a failing grade. Please come to classes on time. If you are late repeatedly, I may count this as an unexcused absence.

5. Grading Breakdown

The grade breakdown for this class is as follows:

Preparation and Participation:	15% of the grade
Quizzes:	7.5% of the grade
Oral presentation	7.5% of the grade
First Paper:	15% of the grade
Short Responses	25% of the grade
First Version of Final Paper	7.5% of the grade
Final Version of Final Paper	20% of the grade
Peer Reviews	7.5% of the grade

Explanation of grades (from IWU's Catalog):

A, A-: Credit for work of superior quality.

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B+, B, B-:	Credit for work of good to very good quality.
C+, C:	Credit for work of acceptable but not distinguished quality.
C-:	Credit for work of marginal quality.
D:	Credit for work of poor quality.
F:	Failure.

Grading scale: 94-100 = A; 90-93 = A-; 87-89 = B+; 83-86 = B; 80-82 = B-; 77-79 = C+; 73-76 = C; 70-72 = C-; 60-69 = D; 0-59: F.

The remainder of this section is an explanation of each component of the grade.

a) Preparation and participation

Active participation is especially important in philosophy, more so than in other domains. Philosophical problems are best understood by actively thinking about them. As a result philosophy is best learnt by practicing it, which involves actively participating to the class. Participation has two main components.

First, it involves participating to discussions involving the class as a whole, i.e. raising and answering questions about the readings and the topic of discussion. I will monitor your participation during those discussions using poker groups (i.e. you will receive a poker chip when you participate, with a maximum of three poker chips during class).

Second, we will do various small-group activities during the class, and I will monitor your participation to these activities. (Note that if you come to my office hours to discuss readings or papers, this will also count toward your participation grade.)

b) Quizzes

Over the course of the semester, there will be several unannounced short quizzes on the readings. More specifically, for every class session for which you have to do a reading, there is a 1/2 chance that there will be a quiz on the reading during the class. The quizzes are designed to test your basic understanding of the readings. They will take place at the beginning of class sessions. There will be no make-up for quizzes, so make sure not to be late for class. At the end of the semester I will drop the two lowest quiz scores from your grade.

c) Oral Presentation

Once during the semester, you will do a 10-15 minutes presentation in which you will (a) succinctly introduce the material, (b) discuss its merits and demerits and (c) raise questions about it that will serve as basis for class discussion. Your presentation will be accompanied by a handout and it will be graded in part on the quality of the handout you provide.

d) First Paper

The first paper will be a short one (3-4 pages double-spaced), and will be a response to a prompt given during the first weeks of the semester. The first paper will be due on **Friday, February 17**. We will discuss the process of paper writing in philosophy during the first few weeks of the course.

e) Short Responses

During the semester you will write **five** short responses to the readings. Each short response should be at least 350 words long (that's about 1-½ pages double-spaced). A short response should focus on a specific claim or argument of the reading it discusses, and give a critical reply to it, by either (a) explaining why the author's claim or argument is problematic, confused, limited, or in some other way disputable, or (b) by making interesting comments on an issue that is brought out in the reading.

Your short response can focus on any part of the reading. That being said, for each reading I will post a few questions and guidelines that are intended to help you focus on the parts of the reading that most easily lend themselves to critical discussion. (A few of our readings do not easily lend themselves to critical responses; if you choose to write a short response on readings of that kind, you will be asked instead to write a clear and accurate summary of one of the author's claims.)

For each **new** reading that we will discuss after January 17, you will have the opportunity to submit a short response to this reading. Your response should be submitted to me by email **before** the beginning of the class during which we discuss the reading. You should not hesitate (and are explicitly encouraged) to raise the points discussed in your short response during class discussion. Thus short responses are in part intended to help you actively participate during class.

To ensure that your work is appropriately distributed throughout the semester, it is required that

- a) You have submitted at least **one** short response (and no more than two) by **February 17**
- b) You have submitted at least **three** short responses (and no more than four) by **March 24**

Finally, note that you **cannot** write a short response to the reading on which you are doing an oral presentation.

f) Final Paper and Peer Reviews

The final paper for the class will be a long essay (at least 6 pages double-spaced). It will be on a topic of your choosing, although I will suggest possible paper topics. Before you start writing the first draft of the paper you should make sure to get my approval regarding your paper topic.

The process for this final paper will be as follows. You will first write a **first draft** of the paper (at least 5 pages double-spaced). I will send the draft to two other students who will be in charge of **reviewing** your paper. Your reviewer will write comments on your

first draft (at least 1 page long, double-spaced). Using this feedback, you will then write the **final version** of the paper (at least 6 pages long, double-spaced). On the last day of class (April 24), I will meet with each of you to discuss the peer reviews and how best to proceed in order to revise your paper.

Note that the first draft of your paper shouldn't be a *rough* draft. You should write the first draft as if you were a scientist sending a paper to a journal for peer-review. That is, the draft should be polished and proofread, each of the main points should be adequately developed, and so on. Your first draft will be graded (7.5% of total grade). Although I will not apply the same grading standards as for the final draft, I will take points off if your first draft is too rough.

Note also that the final version of the paper be graded in part on how well you have taken into account your reviewer's comments in writing your paper. Each of you will also work as a reviewer, and you will be graded on the quality of your peer reviews.

Guidelines for peer review: Peer reviews should be substantive comments about the paper you are reviewing. In particular, they should address more than grammar and spelling: they should also address the content of the paper and how well the main thesis is supported by the author's argument. Don't hesitate to be harsh! You will thereby do your fellow student a favor, by helping them make their final draft as good as possible. A good rule of thumb for peer reviewing is to ask yourself why the paper you are reading is less than perfect and how it might be improved to make it perfect.

Important deadlines:

- The first draft of the paper should be emailed to me on **April 16** by the end of the day.
- **Peer reviews** should be emailed to me on **April 23** by the end of the day.
- The **final draft** of the second paper is due on **May 1** by the end of the day.

I will not accept any late first versions of the final paper. Late final versions will be penalized as follows. For each day late, I will deduct 1/3 of a letter grade from your paper grade. So an A paper would for instance become an A- paper after one day late, starting after the beginning of class on the due date.

6. Academic Integrity

I expect you to be familiar with IWU's Statement on Plagiarism, which can be found on the course webpage. It defines plagiarism as 'the intentional or inadvertent misrepresentation as one's own, the words, ideas, research data, formulae or artistic creations of another individual or collective body, without giving credit to the originator(s) of those words, ideas, data, formulae or artistic creations.' **Plagiarism is strictly prohibited.**

7. Disability Accommodation

If you have a disability, please come see me at the end of this class. We will discuss possible accommodations to help you get the most out of this class.

8. Class Content: Topics and Readings (Tentative)

Please keep in mind the following:

- a) The schedule below is **tentative**. I may alter the schedule and readings depending upon how the class deals with a topic. We may spend more time on a topic if the class finds it hard or especially interesting. If I make changes to the schedule I will of course let you know in advance!
- b) Because I wish to remain flexible, I have not included a day-by-day schedule for the readings. At the end of each class I will tell you the readings for next class, and I will also send you an email to remind you of what we're discussing next class.

Week 1: Introduction

Weeks 2-4: "Dynamic" vs. "Static" Theories of Time

- Lockwood, *Labyrinth of Time*, chapters 1-3
- Zimmermann, "The Privileged Present: Defending an A-Theory of Time"
- Williams, "The Myth of Passage"
- Maudlin, "On the Passing of Time"
- Price, "The Flow of Time"

Weeks 5-6: Time and the Self

- Ismael, "Temporal Experience"
- Velleman, "So It Goes"

Week 7: The Direction of Time and Thermodynamics

- Shenker and Hemmo, "Introduction to the Philosophy of Statistical Mechanics"
- Albert, *Time and Chance* (Selections)

Weeks 8-9: Time Travel

- Lewis, "Paradoxes of Time Travel"
- Arntzenius, "Time-Travel: Double Your Fun"

Weeks 10-12: Time, Causation and Free Will

- Russell, "On the Notion of Cause"
- Dummett, "Bringing about the Past"
- Van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will*, selections
- Hofer, "Freedom From the Inside Out"
- + Additional readings TBA

Week 13: Time and Punishment

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- New, “Time and Punishment”
- Smilansky, “The Time to Punish”

Weeks 14-15: Time and Decision

- Nozick, “Newcomb’s Problem and Two Principles of Choice”
- Lewis, “Causal Decision Theory”
- Horwich, *Asymmetries in Time*, ch. 11

Week 16: No class (Paper meetings)