

Philosophy between Reason and Despair

PHIL 33 – Spring 2025

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00am-12:20pm

Ridge Walk Academic Complex [RWAC] 0103

INSTRUCTORS

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Hours: Mon 12:30-2pm

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CANVAS SITE

<https://canvas.ucsd.edu/courses/65702>

TEXTBOOKS

(available at the Price Center bookstore)

1 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*
Paton, trans; Harper Perennial

2 Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*
Hannay, trans; Penguin Classics

3 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*
Smith, trans; Oxford World's Classics

4 Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays*
Drinnon, intro; Dover

5 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*
Frechtman, trans; Citadel Press

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Our course starts at the end of a century of optimism (hope) surrounding the Enlightenment about our power of *reason* to arrive at knowledge of the basic theoretical truths about the world, as well as the basic practical principles that should guide human action. From here we will follow out the intellectual life in the 19th and 20th century, which came to be dominated by an increasing skepticism about whether reason really had such a power after all.

Our course will focus on some of the more important lines of debate about the power of reason in these centuries. We will begin with KANT's critical defence of reason, which, despite acknowledging that reason alone cannot yield any theoretical knowledge of the world (how things are 'in themselves'), contends that reason still must be considered to have absolute authority in the practical sphere, providing knowledge of how we should live. We will then turn to several influential successors of Kant (KIERKEGAARD, NIETZSCHE, GOLDMAN, DE BEAUVOIR) who were not nearly as optimistic about even this limited authority for reason, and who insisted instead that we face up to the irrationality (absurdity) that can seem to lie at the heart of our existence – even if this involves the experience of *despair*.

Note: PHIL 33 may be used to fulfill the Muir College breadth requirement.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. *Weekly questionnaires* (30%)

Early each week (usually end of Monday), there will be a questionnaire posted (as pdf) on the course's Canvas page, to be submitted electronically on Canvas by **the end of Friday (midnight)** of the same week (under 'Quizzes'). The form of these questions will be multiple-choice, true/false, matching, and fill-in-the-blank. The topics of the questions will be drawn from the assigned readings and the lectures from the current week, and answering them will be a straightforward affair for anyone who attends lectures and completes all the readings.

* *Extra credit:* During finals week there will be an optional extra-credit questionnaire, due Friday of exam week, 5pm.

2. *Weekly online discussion posts* (10%) & *comments* (5%)

(A) **By end of Thurs (midnight)** of each week, you will need to contribute a post to your group (divided up by last name) on our course's online discussion forum on Canvas. Your post should include:

- (1) a quote of one sentence (or two) of particular interest to you from the week's readings,
- (2) 100-word (minimum) response, including your thoughts and opinions about the subject-matter being discussed, and
- (3) at least one question about the sentence(s) you've chosen.

(B) Before the **end of Friday (midnight)**, you will also need to post one 50-word (minimum) comment on someone else's post in your discussion group.

* *Extra credit:* Each week you can earn another 0.25% toward your grade by responding to a second post or comment made by others (50-word minimum; once per week; up to an additional 2.5% toward the overall course grade).

3. *Weekly in-class worksheets* (20%)

Each week during one of the meetings there will be one short closed-book hand-written assignment distributed, completed, and discussed 'in class'; you must be present to complete this assignment.

4. *Mid-term exam* (15%)

An in-class closed-book hand-written mid-term exam will take place during our meeting on **Thurs of Week 5 (May 1st)**; a review sheet will be distributed at the end of Week 4, and there will be an exam-focused review/discussion session with the TA prior to the mid-term.

5. *Final exam* (15%)

An in-class closed-book hand-written final exam will be held during the specified window of time for our final: **Tuesday morning 11:30am-2:29am of exam week (June 10th)**; a study guide will be distributed during 10th week, and there will be an exam-focused review/discussion session with the TA in the days before the exam.

6. *Two 5-minute 'check-in' meetings* (2.5% x 2 = 5%)

Each student is required to have two meetings (via zoom) with the instructors (professor and/or TA) during the term, **one during the first half** (weeks 1-5), a **second during the second half** (weeks 6-10). The canonical scheduling time for these check-ins will be during the weekly office hours; sign up via Canvas; if neither the professor's or either TA's office hour slots will ever work with your schedule, be in touch as soon as possible to make alternate arrangements. Meeting duration will be 5 minutes, no preparation required.

NOTE: completing at least one of the one-on-one meetings is required in order to pass the class.

NOTES ABOUT REQUIREMENTS

A. No extensions will be granted for any assignment or exam, except in cases of *genuine* emergency (e.g., earthquake, flood, fire, death in the family, illness certified by a doctor). No extensions can be granted for the weekly questionnaires *at all*, due to the distribution of the correct answers shortly after the due date.

B. The UCSD Policy on Integrity of Scholarship must be observed in this course. This includes observance of the following six principles:

As a student,

1. I will not receive or provide unauthorized assistance in examinations.
2. I will not use unauthorized materials during an examination.
3. I will not use materials from sources without proper quotation, acknowledgement or citations.
4. I will not alter examinations, essays, or other assignments for regrading.
5. I will not fabricate data or references.
6. I will not use false excuses to obtain extensions of time for examinations or writing assignments.

C. *Maintaining academic integrity*: Though students are strongly encouraged to discuss the assignments with one another, each student must submit answers to the assignments independently of one another, written in her or his own words. Additionally, students agree that by taking this course, their mid-term examinations and final papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted exams and papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the terms of use agreement posted on the Turnitin.com site.

D. Any student caught cheating or plagiarizing (i) will be reported to the Academic Integrity Office, (ii) will receive a failing grade on the assignment at issue, and (iii) will be in jeopardy of failing the entire course, depending on the nature of the breach of academic integrity.

E. The use of *technology* (phones, tablets, computers, etc.) is to be limited to engagement with course material; all technology is prohibited during any closed-book assignment.

F. If any accommodations are needed due to a disability or for religious reasons, please notify me at the end of the first class period or as soon as possible. Students requesting accommodations for the course due to a disability must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) which is located in University Center 202 behind Center Hall. Students are required to present their AFA letters to Faculty (please make arrangements to contact me privately) and also to the OSD Liaison in the Philosophy Department in advance so that accommodations may be arranged.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS
{tentative}

All page numbers refer to the pagination in the 'required' editions of our textbooks.

1. Tues, Apr 1	Introduction: taking the Enlightenment seriously		Thurs, Apr 3	Kant, <i>Groundwork</i> Preface & Ch1	pp.55-73
2. Tues, Apr 8	Kant, <i>Groundwork</i> Ch2, first half (till m425)	pp.74-92	Thurs, Apr 10	Kant, <i>Groundwork</i> Ch2, second half (from m425); Ch3, second half (from 'The Extreme Limit')	pp.92-113; 123-31
3. Tues, Apr 15	Kierkegaard, <i>Fear and Trembling</i> Preface through Praise of Abr.	pp.41-56	Thurs, Apr 17	Kierkegaard, <i>Fear and Trembling</i> Preamble	pp.57-82
4. Tues, Apr 22	Kierkegaard, <i>Fear and Trembling</i> Problema I	pp.83-95	Thurs, Apr 24*	Kierkegaard, <i>Fear and Trembling</i> Problema II	pp.96-108
* mid-term study guide distributed					
5. Tues, Apr 29	Kierkegaard, <i>Fear and Trembling</i> Problema III (sel) & Epilogue	pp.109-27; pp.136-47	Thurs, May 1	in-class mid-term exam	bring blue books, writing utensils
(weeks 1-5 check-in due by end of week 5)					
6. Tues, May 6	Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy</i> Preface, First Essay	pp.3-10; pp.11-38	Thurs, May 8	Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy</i> Second Essay	pp.39-76
7. Tues, May 13	Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy</i> , Third Essay, §§1-17; 24-28	pp.77-112; 125-36	Thurs, May 15	Goldman, 'Anarchism'	pp.47-68
8. Tues, May 20	Goldman, 'Minorities' and 'Prisons'	pp.69-78; 109-26	Thurs, May 22	Goldman, 'Emancipation' and 'Marriage'	pp.213-40
9. Tues, May 27	De Beauvoir, <i>Ethics</i> I	pp.7-34	Thurs, May 29	De Beauvoir, <i>Ethics</i> II	pp.35-73
10. Tues, Jun 3	De Beauvoir, <i>Ethics</i> III.1-3	pp.74-115	Thurs, Jun 5*	De Beauvoir, <i>Ethics</i> III.4-Concl	pp.115-59
(weeks 6-10 check-in due by end of week 10)					
* final study guide distributed					
11. Tues, Jun 10	11:30-2:30 in-class final exam		Friday, Jun 13	5pm: extra-credit due	

Note: The quantity of readings per week is relatively low, because the degree of difficulty of many of the readings is relatively high. Students are very much encouraged to read all of the texts carefully at least *two* times, for greater comprehension.