

PHIL 100: PHILOSOPHIES OF LIFE
Fall '25 | Online | 3 credits

Professor Information:

- Dr. Deke Gould
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- Office Hours: by appointment, typically arranged 24 hours in advance

Course Description:

Catalog Description

This introductory level course addresses the question, "What does it mean to live a good or meaningful human life?" as well as questions about the nature of the human person and the person's relation to the world. Using literary, documentary, and philosophical sources, students identify and clarify their own values and beliefs.

Course Theme: Technology and the Examined Life

Many highly influential figures claim to be inspired by ancient philosophies of life such as Stoicism. Some claim that their prosperity is due, in large part, to their adoption of Stoic doctrines. But do those "influencers" give an accurate account of those theories? Can we learn how to navigate our increasingly fast-paced, complicated lives by "retrieving the Ancients"? In this course, we will look carefully at what the great texts actually say, followed by more recent works in the philosophy of technology, and we will end with a critical examination of the claims of high-profile "techbros".

Course Orientation (Week 1)

Unit 1: The Examined Life: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Diogenes the Cynic, Zeno the Stoic, Epicurus the Hedonist, and Marcus Aurelius (Weeks 2 - 5)

Unit 2: Contemporary Philosophy of Technology (Week 6)

Unit 3: Pop Philosophy and Techbro Stoicism (Week 7)

Final Presentations (Week 8)

Course Objectives:

Philosophy Learning Outcomes

In this course students will

1. Analyze, critically evaluate, and compare multiple perspectives on what it means to live a good life.
2. Use philosophical methods to better understand, test, and further develop their own views about what it means to live a good or meaningful life.
3. Connect philosophical ideas to their personal lives and real world contexts.
4. Clearly communicate their ideas about the good life orally and in writing.

General Education Learning Outcome

This course satisfies the lower level philosophy general education requirement and learning outcome: So they can develop more clear and logically coherent worldviews, students will use reasoning to evaluate philosophical arguments.

The primary objective of this class is *to do* as much philosophy as possible. We will not merely talk about the works of great thinkers and memorize what they have said. Rather, we will aim for

an *understanding* of the various positions and, what's more important, we will evaluate others' reasons for their views and our own reasons as well. Thus, we critically engage the texts and our own arguments. To be clear, **this will not be an easy course**. Students will exercise and hone their critical thinking abilities through our study of philosophical ideas and arguments, but these skills will continue to be very valuable long beyond this course.

Required Course Materials:

- All required course materials will either be posted on Blackboard or are available free on legitimate streaming services. See the course schedule below for details.

Grading:

This is the breakdown by weight for the overall grade:

- Weekly Online Forum Participation: 30%
- Examined Life Journal: 35%
- Final Project on Influencers: 35%
 - meeting to discuss final project: 20%
 - presentation of final project and discussion in Week 8: 15%

Each portion is explained in more detail below.

In general, grades in this class will reflect the following standard scale:

- 100-98%: A+, 97-93%: A, 92-90%: A-
- 89-87%: B+, 86-83%: B, 82-80%: B-
- 79-77%: C+, 76-73%: C, 72-70%: C-
- 69-60%: D
- 59-0%: F

Credit Hour Requirement and Time Management

Plan to spend 12-14 hrs/week on this course.

Per federal guidelines, a 3 credit hour course is defined as no less than 112.5 hours of coursework (direct faculty instruction + out-of-class work). In an eight week course, 112.5 hours comes to about 14hr/week.

The assignments and weekly structure of this class are designed to comply with this federal guideline. The accreditation status of the university (and therefore whether or not your degree counts) depends on our compliance with federal guidelines and the quality controls of our external accrediting boards.

Class Participation (Online Forum Participation):

As the backbone of our regular class group interactions, we will have online virtual class forum discussions via BlackBoard. Each weekly forum will have its own corresponding thread: at the start of each thread, I will initiate our discussions with a list of questions about the material assigned for that week. Students will need to post in each thread at least three times: once by the end of Monday, once by the end of Wednesday, and once by the end of Friday (more times each day is encouraged, but not required). Students do not have to wait until Monday, Wednesday, and Friday: they are welcome to post as early as they wish, but they must return to the thread and

read their colleagues' responses and respond for the second and third posts. In general, the students' posts should follow this pattern:

- First post: the student posts an initial reaction to the readings, either a question or remark about a specific idea or argument in the texts assigned for that week, or an answer to the instructor's initial questions.
- Second post: the student should post a follow-up to a colleague's earlier post in the thread. Follow-up posts could include an answer to a clarification question, an additional argument to support a colleague's earlier argument, an objection to a colleague's earlier post, and so on.
- Third post: similar to the second, the student must reply to another colleague's earlier post in the week.

Posts will be graded on quality as well as quantity. Posts should be free of grammatical and typographical errors, and should be at least 50 words long, but no longer than 200 words. In your post, you should aim for insightful questions, comments, objections, arguments, etc. In other words, the posts should be *thoughtful*: a post should not be easily addressed by a careful re-reading of the text, e.g. It is also important that you read all of the earlier posts before you post either of your contributions to the thread—if a post merely repeats something that was said earlier, that is a detraction from that post's quality. Each post is worth 5 potential points. I will keep a record of discussion board participation grades on a private spreadsheet, and will update the BlackBoard grade book each weekend to reflect these records. Late forum posts will not be accepted for credit.

Examined Life Journal:

At the end of each week, students will complete an electronic journal entry where they examine sources, draw connections between sources, and draw their own conclusions. Journal entries demonstrate active and thoughtful examination of sources. Entries are due by 11:59pm Sunday each week. No late journal entries will be accepted for credit.

Final Project on Influencers and Stoicism:

At the end of the term, students will present their own findings on influential Internet trends that appeal to any of the Ancient Greek philosophies we are studying. The students will find a source, write a brief summary of that source, write a brief critical response to that source, and share a brief audio-visual presentation on their findings on BlackBoard for the Week 8 forum. Other students will be required to watch and share their responses to their colleagues' presentations. In Weeks 5 and 6, students will schedule one-on-one virtual appointments with the instructor to discuss their plans, potential sources that they are considering, and the initial views on that subject matter. The instructor will grade the students on preparedness and quality of the proposal. The student's presentation will be graded on clarity, efficiency, connection with the assigned texts, and plausibility and creativity of their own critical responses. Everyone else will need to respond with their own critical responses to their colleague's work in order to earn participation credit for Week 8.

Statement on Academic Dishonesty:

All members of the St. Ambrose community are called upon to uphold the standards of academic integrity. Academic dishonesty in any form (cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized assistance, multiple use, falsification or fabrication, complicity, and/or abuse of academic materials) is not

tolerated. The academic integrity policy can be found on the following link
<http://web.sau.edu/registration/documents/AcademicIntegrityPolicy.pdf>

Academic Dishonesty Policy

- First instance of academic dishonesty will result in a 0 for the assignment.
- Second instance of academic dishonesty will result in a 0 for the assignment and a formal write up that goes on your academic record.
- Third instance of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for the course with no option to withdraw and a second formal write up that goes on your academic record.

Plagiarism

According to the SAU Student Handbook, “Plagiarism is the intentional or unintentional presentation of another’s words, ideas or data as one’s own. Examples include using phrases, sentences or paragraphs from a source without quotation marks, paraphrasing or using information (verbal or visual), views, or concepts from a source without proper citation.”

Generic statement on the use of AI in this class: unless your instructor notes otherwise, all written work submitted in your classes is assumed to be your work, and not the product of an AI system. Suspicious cases will result in a one-on-one meeting between the student and the instructor, in which the student will demonstrate their understanding of the content or an explanation of the generation of the work. Cases of blatant use of AI in order to pass off its products as one’s own **will count as plagiarism**, and the penalties listed above will apply. Further details will be discussed in class.

Statement on Accommodations:

St. Ambrose welcomes and is committed to supporting an inclusive community of learners, valuing individuals with disabilities and those who are neurodiverse. It is University policy and practice to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law. The Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) provides accommodations for learners experiencing either a temporary or permanent disability.

- If you have a disability that requires accommodations (including but not limited to acute or chronic conditions related to mental health, attention, learning, vision, hearing, or concussion) and you have not previously registered with the ARC, please contact ARC directly at ARC@sau.edu or 563-333-6275 to register for accommodations.
- If you have already registered with the ARC, please provide your instructor(s) with your VISA form so you can discuss how accommodations will be implemented in this class.
- For more information, please visit the [ARC webpage](#).

PHIL 100 ONLN Course Schedule:

YT: video on YouTube, link on BlackBoard, estimated time

text: assigned reading, on BlackBoard, estimated length in pages

WEEK 1 (13 - 17 October) Course Orientation: What is Philosophy?

- [Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave”](#) (YT 8m)
- [CrashCourse Philosophy: “What is Philosophy?”](#) (YT 10m)
- [Modern Philosophy: “An Introduction w/Isaiah Berlin & Bryan Magee”](#) (YT 45m)

WEEK 2 (20 - 24 October) The Examined Life: Socrates and Plato

- [“Who was Socrates? 8-bit Philosophy”](#) (YT 3m)
- Plato, “~~Apology~~ Legal Defense of Socrates” (text 20p)
- Plato, “Crito” (text 12p)
- Plato, “Phaedo” (text 52p)
- Xenophon, “Memoirs of Socrates” (text 32p)

WEEK 3 (27 - 31 October) The Examined Life: Aristotle

- [“Aristotle & Virtue Theory”](#) (YT 9m)
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (text 12p)
- Aristotle, *Politics* (text 24p)

WEEK 4 (3 - 7 November) The Examined Life: Diogenes the Cynic, Epicurus the Hedonist

- [“The Philosophy of Cynicism”](#) (YT 5m)
- Diogenes, “Fragments” (text 34p)
- Epicurus, “Letter to Menoeceus” and “Leading Doctrines” (text 26p)
- Trujillo, “Possessed: The Cynics on Wealth and Pleasure” (text 14p)

WEEK 5 (10 - 14 November) The Examined Life: The Stoics, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius

- [“The Philosophy of Stoicism”](#) (YT 5m)
- Ingwood & Gerson, “Stoicism” (text 26p)
- Seneca, “Letters from a Stoic” (text 28p)
- Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (text 28p)

WEEK 6 (17 - 21 November) Contemporary Philosophy of Technology

- [“AI, Self-Improvement, and Technologies of the Soul”](#) (YT 45m)
- Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities* (text 30p)
- Coeckelbergh, “Human Development or Human Enhancement?” (text 12p)

WEEK 7 (1 - 5 December) Pop Philosophy and Techbro Stoicism

- [“Ryan Holiday - Making Stoicism Philosophy More Accessible”](#) (YT 18m)
- [“Stoicism in Silicon Valley”](#) (YT 42m)
- [“Marcus Aurelius: The Man Who Solved the Universe”](#) (YT 14m)

WEEK 8 (8 - 12 December) Final Project Presentations & Discussion

- post short videos, respond to colleagues’ work