

# ***Ultimate Questions***

PHIL 1700 Syllabus

CRN: 23156

Instructor: Jacob Huls

Email: [jacob.huls@slu.edu](mailto:jacob.huls@slu.edu)

HOW TO CONTACT: Contact via email any time. I will try to get back to you as quickly as I can.

Office hours: By appointment. There will be scheduled office hours around tests and quizzes. I will notify you about these closer to those respective assignments

10:00 am–10:50 am MWF

Beracha Hall 214

Spring 2025

## **1. Course Description**

PHIL 1700 - The Examined Life: Ultimate Questions

Credit(s): 3 Credits

This course invites students to explore enduring philosophical questions and to reflectively evaluate the various answers given them by thinkers from a range of social, historical, and religious contexts. Students will tackle ultimate questions in a range of philosophical domains, including issues such as the nature of self and ultimate reality, morality and human meaning, rationality and the pursuit of truth. The aim of the course is to give students an opportunity to critically examine their own beliefs and commitments in dialogue with each other and with great thinkers past and present. (Offered Fall, Spring, and Summer)

## **2. Schedule and Readings**

REQUIRED TEXTS: None.

REQUIRED MATERIALS: Please bring a pen or pencil and plenty of paper to class. At the very least, make sure you bring plenty of paper and a pen/pencil to all the paper writing and test writing days.

*READINGS*: All readings are either posted on Canvas under “files” or linked on the syllabus. The file names of the articles on Canvas include the date that the article is required to be read by.

The difficulty of the required readings vary. Some of the readings are relatively easy, while others are relatively difficult. You are not expected to fully grasp the readings: when you find that you are not understanding a particular part of the reading, keep going and prepare to ask questions in class.

Readings may be removed, added, or changed (although it is unlikely this will happen). But I will notify you about any changes at least two weeks before the readings are due.

***Week 1: Intro and the Existence of God (metaphysics)***

- Mon 1/13: Syllabus, What is philosophy?, logic lesson 1, facts vs. opinions  
*Reading:* None
- Wed 1/15: Logic lesson 1 cont'd, arguments for the existence of God  
*Reading:* None
- Fri 1/17: Arguments for the existence of God  
*Reading:* "A Scientific Argument for the Existence of God: The Fine-Tuning Design Argument" by Robin Collins

***Week 2: The Existence of God cont'd (metaphysics)***

- Mon 1/20: NO CLASS; MLK DAY
- Wed: 1/22: Logic lesson 2, arguments against the existence of God  
*Reading:* "Can God Allow Suffering?" by Daniel Korman
- Wed 1/24: LOGIC QUIZ 1, arguments against the existence of God.  
*Reading:* "The Paradox of the Stone et al," handout by the instructor

***Week 3: Normative Ethical Theories 1 (ethics)***

- Mon 1/27: Logic Lesson 3, Utilitarianism  
*Reading:* "What Makes Things Right" by Daniel Korman
- Wed 1/29: Utilitarianism cont'd  
*Reading:* None
- Fri 1/31: LOGIC QUIZ 2, Arguments against Utilitarianism  
*Reading:* None

***Week 4: Skepticism (epistemology)***

- Mon 2/3: Logic lesson 4, arguments for skepticism  
*Reading:* "The Lure of Radical Skepticism" by Michael Huemer
- Wed 2/5: NO CLASS; WELLNESS DAY  
*Reading:* None
- Fri 2/7: LOGIC QUIZ 3, Arguments for radical skepticism cont'd

*Reading:* None

***Week 5: Souls, minds, bodies (metaphysics)***

Mon 2/10: Logic lesson 5, the views: dualism, materialism, idealism  
*Reading:* None

Wed 2/12: Against Materialism  
*Reading:* “Against Materialism” by Alvin Plantinga

Fri 2/14: LOGIC QUIZ 4, Against Dualism  
“Minds as Immaterial Substance” by Jaegwon Kim, pp. 31–35, 46–56

***Week 6: Metaethics (ethics)***

Mon 2/17: Logic lesson 6, Metaethics: relativism, nihilism  
*Reading:* “Eleven Arguments Against Moral Objectivity” by Russ Schaefer-Landau

Wed 2/19: God and morality  
*Reading:* “Euthyphro,” by Plato  
<https://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthyphro.html>

Fri 2/21: God and morality continued

***Week 7: What is Knowledge? How much do we know? (epistemology)***

Mon 2/24: The Apology  
*Reading:* “The Apology” by Plato  
<https://classics.mit.edu/Plato/apology.html>

Wed 2/26: Justified True Belief  
*Reading:* “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” by Edmund Gettier

Fri 2/28: Some other answers  
*Reading:* None

***Week 8: Meaning of Life (ethics and a little epistemology)***

Mon 3/3: The Meaning of Life: the views  
“The Meaning of Life,” Stanford Encyclopedia Article  
LINK: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/life-meaning/>

Wed 3/5: Can Life be Meaningful Without God?  
*Reading:* “The Absurdity of Life Without God” by William Lane Craig

Fri 3/7: Evil, meaning, God  
“The Mirror of Evil” by Eleonore Stump

**Week 9:**

*3/10 - 3/14 NO CLASSES; SPRING BREAK*

**Week 10: Should we enjoy doing the right thing? (ethics)**

Mon 3/17: Ends, goods, happiness  
*Nicomachean Ethics*, book I, by Aristotle  
<https://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.1.i.html>

Wed 3/19: Paper writing time + help session

Fri 3/21: Paper writing time

**Week 11: Science and knowledge (epistemology)**

Mon 3/24: Scientism, positivism, verificationsim  
*Reading:* None

Wed 3/26: Against scientism and positivism  
*Reading:* “The Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism” by Alvin Plantinga

Fri 3/28: The evolutionary argument against naturalism cont’d  
*Reading:* None

**Week 12: The Ship of Theseus and related issues (metaphysics)**

Mon 3/31: The views and some arguments for them  
*Reading:* “Objects and their Parts” by Jeremy Skrzypek  
<https://1000wordphilosophy.com/2024/04/18/material-composition/>

Wed 4/2: More arguments  
*Reading:* None

Fri 4/4: Debunking conservatism?  
*Reading:* “Debunking” by Daniel Korman

**Week 13: Eating animals (ethics)**

Mon 4/7: Should we be vegans?  
*Reading:* “Eating Animals” by Daniel Korman, sections 1-5

(NOTE: A single file is uploaded to Canvas for this reading with the date “4.7”)

Wed 4/9: continued + Paper writing time  
*Reading:* “Eating Animals” by Daniel Korman, sections 5-6  
(NOTE: A single file is uploaded to Canvas for this reading with the date “4.7”)

Fri 4/11: Paper writing time

***Week 14: Abortion (ethics and metaphysics)***

Mon 4/14: The pro-choice view  
*Reading:* “A Defense of Abortion” by Judith Jarvis Thomson  
<https://spot.colorado.edu/~heathwoo/Phil160,Fallo2/thomson.htm>

Wed 4/16: The pro-life view  
*Reading:* “I Was Once a Fetus,” by Alexander Pruss

Fri 4/18: NO CLASS; EASTER BREAK

***Week 15: The forms (metaphysics and a little epistemology)***

Mon 4/21: NO CLASS; EASTER BREAK

Wed 4/23: The views  
*Reading:* “Properties” by Timothy Pickavance and Robert Koons

Fri 4/25: Objections to the existence of abstract objects  
“Meno” by Plato (LINK: <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/meno.html>);  
“The Allegory of the Cave” by Plato (ON CANVAS); “The Allegory of the Line” by Plato (ON CANVAS).

***Week 16: FINAL TEST WRITING***

Mon 4/28: FINAL TEST WRITING + Q&A

Wed 4/30: FINAL TEST WRITING + Q&A

Fri 5/2: FINAL TEST WRITING

## **4. Assignments and Grading**

There will be four categories of things you will be graded on:

**a. ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION (15% of total grade)**

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class every session. Attendance + participation constitutes 15% of your total grade. Participation will be determined by the instructor's impression of how often you ask questions or answer questions (the Q&A and review sessions will be a good time to make up for participation). Participation counts for exactly 7.5% of your grade and attendance accounts for exactly 7.5% of your grade. You are granted *two free* absences without excuse. After you have missed two classes without excuse, you must contact the professor to request an absence.

**TARDINESS:** Being significantly late to class will generally count as an absence. If you show up a few minutes late and miss attendance, talk to the instructor after class to have your attendance recorded.

**b. LOGIC QUIZZES (15% of total grade)**

The first six weeks of sessions will include logic lessons and 5 logic quizzes. These will be short, in-person quizzes based on the material covered in the 6 logic lessons in class. Handouts and (optional) homework assignments will be given to help you study for these quizzes. If you need to miss class on a day when one of the quizzes is due, contact the instructor about taking the quiz during office hours, or

**c. PAPERS (35% of total grade)**

There will be two short paper assignments. Each of these will ask you to formalize an argument, discuss its premises, and consider objections. Both papers will be written in class, and you will have approximately two class sessions to write each paper.

**d. FINAL TEST (35% of total grade)**

There will be one final test that will ask you to interact with the texts we read in class. There is no minimum or maximum word count for these short answers. *However:* A good length to shoot for would be 2-5 paragraphs per question. But, this is not a hard rule. You will be graded on how well you answer the questions. Some questions can be answered well with short responses, others might take more length. The test questions will be available on Canvas before the test due date, but the final test will be taken in class.

**GRADING SCALE:** This course will use the following grading scale.

A (4.0): 94-100  
A- (3.7): 90-94  
B+(3.3): 87-90  
B (3.0): 83-87  
B- (2.7): 80-83  
C+ (2.3): 77-80  
C (2.0): 73-77  
C- (1.7): 70-73  
D (1.0): 60-70  
F (0.0): 0-6

**LATE SUBMISSIONS:** Late assignments will, generally, be considered with a penalty to be determined by the instructor. The later the assignment is submitted, generally, the greater the penalty will be.

**RE-DOs:** You will be allowed to re-do one paper and one test with a 10-percentage-point deduction. Extra re-dos are up to the discretion of the instructor.

**CHATGPT and AI:** The use of ChatGPT or generative AI is strictly prohibited. As such, all assignments will be written in class. The use of ChatGPT or AI in class will result in a grade of zero on the assignment it was used for.

**EXTRA CREDIT:** There will be a number of extra credit options available throughout the semester. There will generally be one extra credit question at the end of each logic quiz and a short extra credit question at the end of each test. Students who regularly ask questions will likely receive some extra credit at the end of the course.

## 5. Academic Honesty/Integrity

*Academic integrity is honest, truthful and responsible conduct in all academic endeavors.* The mission of Saint Louis University is “the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity.” Accordingly, all acts of falsehood demean and compromise the corporate endeavors of teaching, research, health care, and community service through which SLU fulfills its mission. The University strives to prepare students for lives of personal and professional integrity, and therefore regards all breaches of academic integrity as matters of serious concern. The full University-level Academic Integrity Policy can be found on the Provost's Office website at: <https://www.slu.edu/provost/policies/academic-and-course/academic-integrity-policy.pdf>

Additionally, each SLU College, School, and Center has its own academic integrity policies, available on their respective websites.

## 6. Disability Accommodations

Students with a documented disability who wish to request academic accommodations must formally register their disability with the University. Once successfully registered, students also must notify their course instructor that they wish to use their approved accommodations in the course.

Please contact the Center for Accessibility and Disability Resources (CADR) to schedule an appointment to discuss accommodation requests and eligibility requirements. Most students on the St. Louis campus will contact CADR, located in the Student Success Center and available by email at [accessibility\\_disability@slu.edu](mailto:accessibility_disability@slu.edu) or by phone at 314.977.3484. Once approved, information about a student’s eligibility for academic accommodations will be shared with course instructors by email from CADR and within the instructor’s official course roster. Students who do not have a documented disability but who think they may have one also are encouraged to contact to CADR. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries.

*Note: due to accreditation requirements, regulatory differences, and/or location-specific resources, the School of Law, the School of Medicine, and SLU Madrid have their own standard*

*language for syllabus statements related to disability accommodations. Faculty in those units should seek guidance for syllabus requirements from their dean's office.*

## **7. Title IX**

Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, domestic or dating violence, we encourage you to report this to the University. Discrimination on the basis of sex includes discrimination on the basis of assigned sex at birth, sex characteristics, pregnancy and pregnancy related conditions, sexual orientation and gender identity. If you speak with a faculty member about an incident that involves a Title IX matter, that faculty member must notify SLU's Title IX Coordinator that you shared an experience relating to Title IX. This is true even if you ask the faculty member not to disclose the incident. The Title IX Coordinator will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.

If you are pregnant or experiencing a pregnancy related condition, the Title IX Coordinator can assist you in understanding your rights and options as well as provide supportive measures.

Anna Kratky is the Title IX Coordinator at Saint Louis University (DuBourg Hall, room 36; [anna.kratky@slu.edu](mailto:anna.kratky@slu.edu); 314-977-3886). If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the University Counseling Center at 314-977-TALK or make an anonymous report through SLU's Integrity Hotline by calling 1-877-525-5669 or online at <http://www.lighthouse-services.com/slu>. To view SLU's policies, and for resources, please visit the following web addresses: <https://www.slu.edu/about/safety/sexual-assault-resources/index.php>.

*Note: due to accreditation requirements, regulatory differences, and/or location-specific resources, the School of Law, the School of Medicine, and SLU Madrid have their own standard language for syllabus statements related to Title IX. Faculty in those units should seek guidance for syllabus requirements from their dean's office.*

## **8. Outcomes**

The purpose of this course is to provide an introduction to some of the most historically important philosophical texts, ideas, and thinkers as well as to the distinctive activity of philosophy itself. Over the course of the semester, students will:

1. Learn what great thinkers have to say in response to enduring philosophical questions and how their answers represent philosophically and dialectically distinct answers to such questions. Students will consider a range of philosophical voices and perspectives--including classic texts from Plato and Aristotle, texts from thinkers in the Catholic tradition, and texts by thinkers historically underrepresented in the western canon. In reading and discussing such thinkers and texts students will be encouraged to consider and assess both the philosophical merits and costs of the various views they encounter.

2. Learn to *explain, analyze, and evaluate* arguments for philosophical answers to ultimate questions. Students will learn to give a close reading of philosophical texts with a view toward being able to explain and analyze the arguments they contain. By the end of the semester, students should be able to (i) identify the key premises, assumptions, and conclusions present in the texts they encounter and (ii) explain the content of the arguments' premises in a way that (iii) illuminates how these premises support an inference to the conclusion. Finally, students will learn to evaluate the arguments they encounter by, among other things, assessing them according to logical notions of validity and soundness.
3. Begin to shape their own answers to ultimate questions by applying distinctively logical and philosophical ways of thinking to them. To this end, students will learn to raise philosophical questions, to identify unexamined presuppositions, and to reflect on their own assumptions and commitments. Students will also work at philosophically articulating their own views by learning how to offer evidence, arguments, and responses to objections to their own answers to ultimate questions.
4. Learn to articulate their own worldview and practices in dialogue with different answers to ultimate questions. Students will be provided with opportunities to reflect on the way in which their own commitments, values, and practices may overlap with or diverge from the perspectives they encounter in their readings, in lectures, and in dialogue with one another.

**Ultimate Questions: Philosophy** is one of 19 Core Components. The University Core SLO(s) that this component is designed to intentionally advance are listed below:

### **University Core Student Learning Outcomes**

The Core SLO(s) that this component is intentionally designed to advance are:

SLO 1: Examine their actions and vocations in dialogue with the Catholic, Jesuit tradition

SLO 2: Integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines to address complex questions

SLO 3: Assess evidence and draw reasoned conclusions

Additionally, the Core Component-level Student Learning Outcomes are listed below:

### **Component-level Student Learning Outcomes**

Students who complete this course will be able to:

Explain and evaluate arguments for philosophical answers, including those in the Catholic tradition, to ultimate questions concerning the nature of humanity, reality and God, knowledge, and/or the good life

Apply an array of analytic methods, conceptual tools, logical principles, and other resources to their own inquiry into ultimate questions

Articulate and reflect on their own worldview and practices in dialogue with different answers to ultimate questions, including answers in the Catholic tradition