

Philosophical Analysis

Last Updated: Mon, 12/29/2025

Course prefix: PHIL

Course number: 2025

Section: RK

CRN (you may add up to five):
29454

Instructor First Name: Robert

Instructor Last Name: Kirkman

Semester: Fall

Academic year: 2025

Course description:

This is a practical course in philosophical analysis for students pursuing a degree in Public Policy.

It is *practical* in that the real work of the course will be in grappling with concrete, practical problem situations, taking them as opportunities to acquire and practice skills in rigorous critical inquiry.

Such inquiry is *philosophical* in that we will focus mainly on the *normative* aspects of public policy – matters of value, obligation and character – which extend downward to more basic philosophical questions regarding knowledge and hope, and outward to questions of political legitimacy.

Course learning outcomes:

The overall goal of the course is to change how you perceive and think about the kinds of problems that might call for a public response, and about public and private responses to those problems.

Along the way, you should acquire some basic tools from the philosophical tradition for use in critical inquiry. This means you should be better able to ask – and perhaps begin to answer – questions of knowledge, value and obligation, and hope.

For our purposes, these goals should be enough for us to go on. For administrative purposes, though, the syllabus must include some more determinate “outcomes,” which align with our aims.

Required course materials:

There are no required texts for the course. Readings will be provided on Canvas as PDFs, accessible through the Modules page.

Grading policy:

With the exception of the Engagement assignments, written assignments will be assessed on a 3-point scale, built around the *expectations* of each assignment as specified above: 3 = exceeds expectations; 2 = meets expectations; 1 = does not meet expectations; 0 = not submitted.

To meet expectations, accomplish the basic work of the assignment or exam prompt, demonstrating a solid understanding of the matter at hand, making the necessary distinctions and/or connections, and no more.

To exceed expectations, do more than just put in effort: take a risk; reach for some new connection among ideas; try an unusual angle, a shift in perspective; or, really, just do anything that demonstrates full engagement with the process of inquiry aimed at understanding.

The final grade will be determined by an accumulation of points, up to a maximum of 74:

- 12 Engagement Assignments, dropping the lowest two for a total of 10 points;
- 9 Exercises, dropping the lowest one for a total of 24 points;
- 2 Exams, up to a total of 50 points.

Final grades will then be determined by the following scale:

A = 66-74

B = 57-65

C = 48-56

D = 40-47

Please note that the gradebook on Canvas will be of limited use to us: while it may provide a record of how many points you have earned on each assignment, it will attempt to calculate your final grade as a weighted average. Ignore that.

Attendance policy:

[There is no explicit attendance policy for the course. The assumption is that students are adults who may make their own choices . . . and confront the natural consequences of those choices.]

Academic honesty/integrity statement:

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. For information on Georgia Tech's Academic Honor Code, please visit <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/policies/honor-code/> or <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/18/>.

Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarizing on a quiz, exam, or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, which will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations of the Honor Code.

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

Core IMPACTS: Humanities

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- How do I interpret the human experience through creative, linguistic, and philosophical works?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:

- Students will effectively analyze and interpret the meaning, cultural significance, and ethical implications of literary/philosophical texts or of works in the visual/performing arts.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help student develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Ethical Reasoning
- Informational Literacy
- Intercultural Competence