

FORM E-1-A FOR BOSTON COLLEGE CORE CURRICULUM

Department: Philosophy

Course: Philosophy of the Person

- 1) **Have formal learning outcomes for the department's Core courses been developed? What are they?**

Yes. By introducing students to the great philosophical questions, philosophy offers a perspective which makes possible an integrated vision of physical, human and spiritual reality; it weighs propositions fundamental to personal identity, dignity, religious belief, and social responsibility, and examines moral issues facing individuals and communities. The Philosophy core teaches analytical and interpretive skills so that students develop an intellectual and moral framework for considering questions of ultimate value and significance, challenging them to translate philosophical principles into guides for life. Thus, the philosophy core reflects the Jesuit commitment to the advancement of knowledge in ways that evince a concern for the whole person.

Students completing the Philosophy core will be able to:

- 1) Understand the historical origins of values and principles that ground, and are questioned, in contemporary culture
 - 2) Reflect on their individual, social, and religious identities and relationships
 - 3) Examine their values in light of their reflection on philosophical views
 - 4) Develop the ability to analyze arguments in order to create a moral framework for considering questions of ultimate value
 - 5) Consider the nature of notions like reason, evidence, belief, and certainty such that they are able to think critically about the kinds of claims made in different disciplines from the natural sciences to theology
 - 6) Critically engage with contemporary problems and questions using the tools of philosophical reflection and argument
- 2) **Where are these learning outcomes published? Be specific.** (Where are the department's expected learning outcomes for its Core courses accessible: on the web, in the catalog, or in your department handouts?)

Expected learning outcomes for Core courses in Philosophy are published on the 'Philosophy Core' section of our departmental website: <https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/mcas/departments/philosophy/undergraduate/core-in-philosophy.html>

They are also included on faculty syllabi for Core courses.

- 3) **Other than GPA, what data/evidence is used to determine whether students have achieved the stated outcomes for the Core requirement?** (What evidence and analytical approaches do you use to assess which of the student learning outcomes have been achieved more or less well?)

In school year 2021-2022, our department began a new, multi-year initiative to assess the success of the Philosophy of the Person program. In 2021-2022, the members of our undergraduate committee decided to begin by focusing on the first learning goal: “Students completing the Philosophy core will be able to understand the historical origins of values and principles that ground, and are questioned, in contemporary culture.”

In 2022-2023, we shifted our focus to the second learning goal: “Students completing the Philosophy core will be able to reflect on their individual, social, and religious identities and relationships.”

To assess the program’s degree of success in meeting this learning goal, we asked all instructors teaching Philosophy of the Person to provide two things: (1) The assignment prompt from their course that, in their view, was most relevant to this learning goal, and (2) A numerical self-assessment for how well their course did in meeting this learning goal.

Here are the directions sent out by the DUS to Phil Person instructors:

As part of our department’s process of self- assessment, we are looking at the second stated learning goal for Phil Person. It states that students will: “Reflect on their individual, social, and religious identities and relationships.” To assist with this, I am requesting that you please send me two things:

- 1) A copy of the prompt for the assignment from your class that you think best addresses this learning goal -- i.e., pick whichever assignment, in your judgment, speaks to this learning goal the best, and send me the prompt / assignment description (not the submitted assignments).
- 2) Your own self-assessment of how successful your class was in meeting this learning goal, on a scale from 0 (not successful at all) to 10 (extremely successful). If you wish, you may provide a few sentences to explain your answer to #2, but that is up to you. Again, this is simply your self-assessment. No need to provide evidence or explanation.

I wish to stress three things. First, your answers will be **treated completely anonymously**. The goal of this is to learn more about the program, **not to assess individual instructors**. Second, this will help our department get a better picture of how things are going in the Philosophy of the Person program. So thank you for helping with this.

The results we received were then anonymized and collected into a single document that was distributed to the members of the philosophy department undergraduate committee. (The results are also at the end of this document.)

- 4) **Who interprets the evidence? What is the process?** (Who in the department is responsible for interpreting the data and making recommendations for curriculum or assignment changes if appropriate? When does this occur?)

This evidence was reviewed by the DUS and undergraduate committee.

- 5) **What were the assessment results and what changes have been made as a result of using this data/evidence?** (What were the major assessment findings? Have there been any recent changes to your curriculum or program? How did the assessment data contribute to those changes?)

See below for further results. Our department has not yet made any concrete changes on the basis of these results: discussions are ongoing about how to improve both the Philosophy of the Person course and our assessment of that course.

- 6) **Date of the most recent program review.** (Your latest comprehensive departmental self-study and external review.)

External review in 2009-2010

Summary of Evidence Collected and Reviewed

Instructor Numerical Self-Evaluations

9, 8, 8, 6, 8, 8, 9, 7, 7, 8, 8, 9, 6, 8, 9.5, 7

Submitted Prompts

At the end of the semester, we read Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Gabriel Marcel, and Viktor Frankl on freedom and hope. For each reading, the students had to answer the following Daily Question: "After reading today's assigned selection, choose your favorite quotation from the text. What does this quotation mean, and why did you choose it? Your answer should be 3-5 sentences in length." My students' responses to this prompt, which I used to open class discussion for the last few weeks of class, provided the best reflections from my students on their own individual, social, and religious identities and relationships.

Every year, I assign a few movies to watch. The students have to connect them with the philosopher/philosophy we are studying and write a paper. Of the 6 movies, 3 might be linked with the topic of identity (I say "might" because the students have the liberty to answer the prompts using a personal or impersonal approach).

- Jakob the Liar

Define the meaning of "lying" in this movie. Define the meaning of "faith" in this movie. In what sense lying/faith is connected with hope and love? In what way this movie could (not) be connected to Augustine's *The City of God* and *Confessions*?

- Name of the Rose

Why is laughter so dangerous? In what way love can be disruptive? Is perfection possible?

- The Matrix

Why I must (not) change my life?

At the outset of the semester, I have them write a 5-page paper, double-spaced, answering the question "Who am I and Why?" There are no further instructions and no references are required. Then, at the close of the semester, I ask them to answer the same question again, also in a 5-page essay, but now with reference to two thinkers in the class. I also ask them to notice the change from their original answers, and to reflect on how further study of philosophy might serve to help them continue develop (or not).

This is the first paper students have to write in my class. For many students, this is the hardest assignment due to the following reasons. (1) For the majority of students, this is the first paper written in the context of philosophy. (2) The paper is relatively short, with a strong emphasis on the structure. Students have to clearly and concisely present their thesis, supported by arguments and counter-arguments. (3) The topic of this paper is based on our reading of Plato's Dialogues, which do not offer clear one-sided answers, but challenge the reader to take their own position.

Aside from in-class participation (during small and large group discussions, where we openly reflect on these identities and relationships), the aspect of my course that best addresses this learning goal is the journal/blog entry component. Students tend to use these journal entries as a way to connect course materials to their personal lives, identities, and relationships. The prompt for this on my syllabus reads as follows:

Journal/Blog Entries

*These are your adult playground; write about whatever (and however) you think will help you learn and process course materials.

*Can include commentaries on readings, Perusall discussions, and/or in-class discussions; can include connections between course materials and contemporary events, your own life, films and TV shows, popular and unpopular culture, etc.

*At least one journal/blog entry must be recorded each week.

*Unless otherwise specified, these are due every Sunday night at midnight.

*20% of course grade.

In addition to regular class engagement, in-class contributions include one in-class group presentation (about 10-15 min, once during the term). Group presentations are designed to help you reconstruct, explain, and apply the concepts and theories you learn about and discuss in class. By working with your peers, you will be able to strengthen and deepen your understanding of the course material. Presentations will be held in class and posted on Canvas afterwards. You can use the format that is most convenient to you and your group (e.g. PowerPoint presentation, video, photo slideshow, etc.). The final grade will be based on peer self-evaluation.

#Group project 4: *On the basis of Mary Wollstonecraft's and Frederick Douglass' respective narratives, how would you define dehumanization today? What should schools do to meet the requirements of equality and humanity in education? [for this specific project you'll need to also watch the documentary "I am not your Negro" under Kanopy]*

1. A daily reflection on the readings.

"There will be a 225-word reflection paper due before each class period—the first reflection paper will be due before class on Friday, January 20th. You will be asked to reflect on some aspect of the reading that you find interesting. While addressing a point of the reading you will use your own experiences to connect to the questions discussed in the text (how they are relevant to you and how you understand them). Alternatively, you will be asked to respond to a specific prompt given in class. You will also be asked to formulate one question at the end of each reflection that you had about the reading."

2. A paper where they connect a reading with their major.

Instructions

1. Think about your favorite reading. Choose a topic, argument, philosopher, reading, etc. from the course that you liked, which intrigued you, which questioned you, etc. You can choose one or several philosopher(s)/topic(s).
 2. **If you are more or less settled on your career for the future (declared major)**, think about how it could apply to your job (How it will affect the way you do X or Y? How will this help me by a better X or Y?). **If you are undecided about the future (undeclared major)**, consider how the topic you selected might help you to discern your path in life. (Why this topic attracts me? How could this topic inspire my choices in life?)
 3. **Talk to me if you need help in generating possible questions that could help you develop your thoughts.**
 4. Specific instructions: in your paper you must explain why you choose the topic, you must explain the topic with all the relevant information surrounding it (key concepts, historical background, etc.) in order to demonstrate that you have some understanding of the topic. But most importantly is that you connect this discussion with #2.
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Twice over the course of the semester, you will submit to Canvas a reflection paper (2 pages, double spaced) connecting something in the readings for that week to something in your personal life. Write about what interests you, and use a specific passage from the readings as your starting point. Provide at least two lines of quoted text from the readings in your reflection.

Reflection papers will be graded on a normal grading scale. The goal here is to help make the course content existentially relevant specifically to you. **A good grade on this assignment will involve demonstrating that something in the text has personally impacted the way you look at and live in the world. Do not simply explain material from the text, even by providing analogies from your life. Instead, specifically show how you have been *changed* by the text. Tell a story.** I would discourage papers which relate course content to politics, pop culture, or current events, unless you can demonstrate how your personal worldview and/or your relations with others have been impacted by such an insight.

To #1, there was an essay question on my midterm which I think speaks to this particular learning goal pretty nicely: *'The class opened with a question, which defines the class as philosophy 'of the person.' That is, we asked 'what are you?' (Or, reflexively: 'what am I?'). When beginning this class, we provided a series of immediate answers. How has your thinking developed since that point? By what means (there might be several) do you think we should go about answering the question? Why these and not others (what are some other approaches which you take to be dead ends? why so?)'*

"You will write a comparative paper about political philosophy comparing two of three authors: Marx, Sartre, and Arendt around a specific issue (prompts listed below)."

This prompt, as well as the individual possible topics they could choose from, invited students to reflect on the phenomena of alienation and community from different perspectives. Central to all three authors was the idea that the project of realizing freedom can never be exclusively individual and instead people must see themselves as essential members of a community in order to feel and be free.

Second Paper

Topics: With the help of at least two of the philosophers we have studied over the last month (i.e., Locke, Hume, and Kant), answer **one** of the following questions:

- Is it true that without God all things are permitted, or in other words, does moral philosophy depend on the existence of God?
- Is the goal of moral philosophy to make human beings happy? If not, what is it supposed to achieve? If so, what does it mean to be happy?

Be sure to address the best and most apparent counterarguments to your position.

Nietzschean Life Affirmation

1. What is Nietzschean life affirmation? Why does Nietzsche think that many philosophical systems, like Plato's, Kant's, or Mill's, amount to a contingent valuation of life? What might a non-contingent valuation of life look like? Provide 1-3 means of answering 'yes' to the 'Eternal Recurrence' or 'Eternal Return' demon from 341 of *The Gay Science*.

Nietzsche vs. Kierkegaard

2. Discuss what Nietzsche and Kierkegaard might say in defense or opposition to N's claim that God is dead. Explain Nietzsche's stance towards God, and the role religion plays (or has played) in our valuation of life. How are these views different from those expressed by Kierkegaard. Which theorist characterizes our relationship towards God most correctly? Or, does neither theorist capture what you take to be most important about theism?

Sartrean Bad Faith

What is bad faith, why is it a kind of self-deception, and why, for Sartre, is it bad? Do you agree with Sartre that bad faith is a means of failing to recognize, or trying to hide, one's own freedom? What does it mean to validly coordinate or synthesize the dual aspects of bad faith? In answering this, provide an example of a character/person in bad faith, and then ways in which they could amend their conception of their scenario to *not* be in bad faith. On your view, would the transition from bad-faith to freedom-recognition always be valuable, right, or warranted?

Examined Life (2008)

Directed by Astra Taylor 1hr. 27 min.

(Zeitgeist Films)

Films about philosophy are rare because philosophy is not a subject that readily lends itself to that medium. But once in a while a filmmaker is able to successfully approach the subject of philosophy, and Astra Taylor's Examined Life is an example of this.

Examined Life is a unique and thought-provoking documentary that features a series of interviews with philosophers living and working in the U.S. in the contemporary period. Cornel West is the featured philosopher, and he appears in the film several times. The other thinkers are: Avital Ronell, Peter Singer, Judith Butler, Martha Nussbaum, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Sunura Taylor, Slavoj Zizek and Michael Hardt. Each philosopher presents a brief discussion of an issue that they think is of pressing concern within our current social and cultural situation. Conventional documentaries about intellectuals usually present their subjects as "talking heads", seated at their desks, emphasizing their social position as academic experts. However, Examined Life noticeably departs from this format. The filmmaker conducts her interviews with each thinker in some real-world setting: an international airport, Times Square NYC, a park next to Lake Michigan in Chicago, a garbage dump, a taxi-cab moving through the streets of Manhattan, etc. For this assignment I want you to watch the film -- possibly more than once -- and write a 3-page essay in response. Please select one of the thinkers in the film and summarize the moral issue they speak about and the position they take with respect to that issue, and give your response to what he or she says about that issue. In your paper you should: (a) identify the thinker whose ideas you are writing about; (b) accurately state the problem or issue that they are addressing; (c) accurately state why the philosopher believes that issue is important; and (d) state your response to the philosopher's ideas. Additionally, address the question of why the filmmaker chose to make this movie about philosophy in the way she did, conducting the interviews in settings and situations drawn from everyday life.

1. In class essay exam prompt reflecting the learning goal: Reflect on their individual, social, and religious identities and relationships.

According to the view of human psychology that one finds in Plato's Republic, what is the basic nature of the soul, and what are the characteristics of a healthy soul (Greek: "psyche")? In light of this understanding, which aspect(s) of contemporary American society do you think significantly contribute to psychological health, and which do you think significantly contribute to psychological illness? Be specific about how the soul is affected by the aspects of society you identify.

In our search for meaningful and fulfilled life, Socrates claims that "the unexamined life is not worth living" (Apology 38a).

We live in time of iPhones, Internet, limitless communication with the entire world, fast advancement of technology, and continuous gazing after success. One might find Socrates' claim pointless. Perhaps it is just a matter of time before modern sciences find even better answers for our life. Is Socrates' claim: "unexamined life is not worth living" still relevant today?

Goals: Writing the paper forces you to grasp a particular question better. By writing, you can lay out your thoughts clearly and logically. Having to explain clearly what you think, and to support your interpretation with evidence, reveals the gaps in your understanding and the difficulties with your interpretation. This forces you to come to a better understanding of the question, and, importantly, the matters that the question is about.

Please write 250 words expressing your philosophy of the person, using at least one of the philosophers we've read this semester. Try to be as specific as possible, avoiding clichés and generalizations (like "everything happens for a reason" or "live and let live.") The following questions are meant to be prompts for thinking--don't feel like you have to answer them all. You'll be prompted to do one peer review, as well. We will share responses in class Wednesday and Friday.

1. Does your life have meaning or purpose? How might you discover it? What practices might help you do that (Hadot)?

2. How do you understand your responsibility to other persons? Do one of the political philosophers we've studied express your thinking about what it means to be part of a society (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Marx)?
3. Are persons free? Are persons determined by their inner drives (like Freud might say)? Or are they subject to unavoidable mimetic pressures (Girard)?
4. Can persons know the reality of the world they live in? Or is the world more complex?
5. Does belief in God shape the way you think about persons? Ought it (Nietzsche)?
6. Are all persons worthy of the same dignity and respect (Maritain)?
7. What constitutes human happiness? Is happiness achievable in life? Is happiness a matter of maximizing pleasures and minimizing pains, as Mill might say?
8. How ought persons understand their inner life? Are dreams important (Descartes, Freud)? Is prayer important (Teresa of Ávila)?
9. Is gender important to a person's understanding of themselves? In what ways (Wollstonecraft, Beauvoir)?
10. What is your definition of "person"? Does it include all humans?

Reflection: this assignment came at the end of the semester and was meant in part to help students review in preparation for oral exams. We discussed all student responses over two class meetings, and I found that the quality of responses was quite good. We grouped them by the philosophers that each student selected. A large number chose Pierre Hadot, in part because he was in recent memory, but also (I think) because the chapter from his work *Philosophy as a Way of Life* elicited reflection on the practice of philosophy as a kind of life- or even soul-shaping.

Prompt:

In this assignment you will summarize and reflect on a section of text that we've studied so far in the course (at this point, Descartes' *Meditations*). You will do two main things in this assignment:

1. You will summarize a section of the text (for example, Descartes' method of doubt in the 1st Meditation or the proof of God in the 3rd Meditation). Since we're practicing *reading well*, this summary should consider:
 1. What the author is trying to show
 2. What they argue
 3. How they argue
2. You will reflect upon the text—your reflection depends upon having read the text well and should consider:
 1. How successful the author is showing what you think they're trying to show
 2. How this text could relate to some aspect of your life
 3. How this text might get at something that bugs, bothers, interests, challenges, or supports what *you* think about the world and your place in it

Another aspect of this assignment is that it does not have to be a paper. Offer your summary and/or reflection in a form of your choice including: an essay; a dialogue; a podcast (with a partner); a puppet show (I'm not sure how this would work but it would be fun).

Prompt: Of the theories of personal identity we studied in this class (psychological continuity, spatiotemporal continuity, traditional African theories, the Buddhist non-self view), which one, if any, do you ascribe to, and why? In the course of your essay, be sure to:

1. Carefully explain the theory you've chosen and what you take to be the strongest argument(s) in its favor;
2. Consider and explain at least one (strong) objection to that theory, and
3. Respond to that objection on behalf of the theory you've chosen.*

*If you don't find any of the theories we've looked at satisfactory to account for numerical personal identity, choose the theory you think is the best/most plausible, and then try to show why you think it nevertheless cannot be maintained in light of the objection you raise.

Note: this paper has both an expository component—carefully and accurately explain arguments, including all relevant terminology, from the text(s)—and an argumentative component—evaluate whether these arguments are persuasive. Successful papers will do all of the following:

- Address all parts of the prompt
 - Accurately, clearly, and completely explain the arguments in question, including relevant details and examples
 - Use direct and concise language
 - Use select, well-integrated quotations from the text
 - Raise a strong objection to the theory in question (this can be an objection we read in one of the texts or an original objection)
 - Present an original response to the objection(s) considered
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“Everything is Illuminated”

Due in Canvas by 9:00 PM Thursday, April 20th

The film "Everything is Illuminated" considers some aspects of human existence, in relationship to beings.

1. Choose a character in the film OR choose one scene, to discuss.
2. Choose one philosopher (Sartre, Arendt, or Levinas) and use one or two ideas from the philosopher to analyze and interpret the character or the scene. In philosophical terms, how does the philosopher contribute to and illuminate your understanding of the character or the scene?

Format

--At the start, state which character or scene you chose and the philosopher you chose.

--one and a half pages, 11-12 pt. font, Times New Roman

--No direct or indirect quotes are needed.