

Philosophy 120-881: The Adventure of Ideas

Course Syllabus

Christopher M. Brown, Ph.D.

The University of Tennessee at Martin

Office Hours: by appointment (and encouraged)

e-mail: cbrown43@utm.edu

GSH 2021

Meeting time: M-F, 9:15-10:45am; T, 6-8pm

Office phone: 881-7471

Office: HU 322c

Meeting place: HU 215

Zoom: <https://tennessee.zoom.us/j/2210259163>.

Required texts:

Augros, Michael. *The Immortal in You: How Human Nature is More than Science Can Say*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017). (I'll make select parts of this book available on Canvas at the appropriate time.) (A)

Creel, Richard E. *Thinking Philosophically: An Introduction to Critical Reflection and Rational Dialogue* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001). (C)

Feser, Edward. *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009). (F) (I'll make a selection from this book available on Canvas at the appropriate time.)

Hart, David B. "God, Gods, and Fairies." *First Things*, June 2013. (H) (I'll make this essay available on Canvas at the appropriate time.)

Jensen, Steven J. *The Human Person: A Beginner's Thomistic Psychology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2018). (J) (I'll make a chapter of this book available on Canvas at the appropriate time.)

Postman, Neil. *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992). (P)

Professor's Course Summary: This introductory course in philosophy will address fundamental questions in (a) *metaphysics*, (b) *epistemology*, (c) *the philosophy of religion*, and (d) *the philosophy of technology*. We will be entertaining the following sorts of questions: how does knowledge differ from opinion? What is the nature of God? Given our dependence on modern technology, and the consequences of such dependency, are we as happy, all other things being equal, as our ancestors living one hundred years ago—or even fifty years ago? Does a good explanation of some phenomenon have to be a scientific explanation? How should we characterize the relationship between the human mind and the human brain? Is human being qualitatively or merely quantitatively different from non-human animal being? Are there good reasons for answering any of these questions in one way rather than in others?

Course goals:

- (1) To acquaint the student with the timeless sorts of questions asked in three of the major sub-disciplines of philosophy—metaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophy of religion—as well as possible strengths and weaknesses of some answers to those timeless philosophical questions.
- (2) To provoke the student to think about whether certain modern technologies are fundamentally changing—or have already changed—the way we think about topics important to human happiness such as God, family, community, and education by reading and reflecting upon Neil Postman's *Technopoly*.

- (3) To give the student an opportunity to philosophize in a manner more rigorous than she is accustomed. My genuine hope is that disciplined philosophical thinking might (begin to) become a habit for some of the students.

Requirements for the course:

- (1) Class participation, 20%. This part of the grade will take into consideration class participation in a broad sense. Examples of ways the student can participate include the following: turn in homework assignments; participate in in-class projects; ask the professor to clarify some point in a lecture; answer questions posed to the class by the professor; raise questions about a topic under discussion that have not been posed by other students in the class, the professor, or the authors of the texts we are reading for the course; e-mail the professor questions, objections, and comments. Students will not always get a chance to share their questions, objections, or comments in class. In that case, e-mail the professor (cbrown43@utm.edu) and he can comment privately or else in the next class session. See also the following headings below: *on being prepared for class*, *Tech-fasting assignment*, *some ground rules for classroom participation*, and *Zoom class etiquette*.
- (2) Mid-term Exam, 40%. Exams are cumulative and thus may cover any material from previous lectures, discussions, and assigned readings. Exams will be **closed book** and **closed note**, and multiple choice and/or short answer/essay in format. The professor will make available a review sheet for the exam approximately seventy-two hours before the exam is given.
- (3) Final exam, 40%. See description of the mid-term exam above.

Course Student Learning Outcomes:

- (1) Students should be able to recognize the professor's descriptions of the nature of, as well as the similarities/differences between, *philosophy*, *revealed theology*, and *the experimental sciences*. We'll talk about these descriptions very early in the course.
- (2) Students should be able to demonstrate recognition/understanding of key figures, terms, theories, and arguments in *epistemology*, including (but not limited to) the following: Plato, Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Rene Descartes, Edmund Gettier, Alvin Goldman, Alvin Plantinga, the traditional definition of knowledge, belief, sources of belief/ truth/knowledge, evidence, Gettier counter-examples, justification, conclusive justification, causal theories of knowledge, externalism, internalism, warrant, proper function, and reliabilism. We'll talk about these figures, terms, theories, etc. in the first quarter of the course.
- (3) Students should demonstrate recognition/understanding of key figures, terms, theories, and arguments in *the philosophy of religion*, which may include some of the following: St. Anselm of Canterbury, St. Thomas Aquinas, G. W. Leibniz, William Lane Craig, Alvin Plantinga, classical theism, neo-theism, pantheism, atheism, agnosticism, the cosmological argument, Kalam cosmological arguments, non-Kalam cosmological arguments, the design argument, the ontological argument, the logical problem of evil, the evidentialist objection to belief in God, evidentialism, properly basic belief, and the evolutionary argument against naturalism. We'll talk about these figures, terms, etc. in the second quarter of the course.

- (4) Students should be able to demonstrate recognition/understanding of key figures, terms, theories, and arguments in the *philosophy of mind*, including (but not limited to) the following: Plato, Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Rene Descartes, substance, interactionism, the interaction intuition, the interaction problem, substance dualism, dualistic interactionism, epiphenomenalism, reductive materialism, eliminate materialism, hylomorphism, form, matter, and the internal senses. We'll talk about these figures, terms, theories, etc. in the third quarter of the course.
- (5) Students should be able to demonstrate recognition/understanding of the key terms and ideas in Neil Postman's book, *Technopoly*, including (but not limited to) the following: the judgment of Thamus, tool-using cultures, technocracies, technopoly, scientism, and the offering of a balanced assessment of the value of any given piece of technology. We'll talk about these terms and ideas in the last quarter of the course.
- (6) Students should be able to make use of (distinctively) philosophical methods such as conceptual analysis, fielding and responding to objections to a philosophical position, offering counter-examples to a proposed philosophical theory, and defending a philosophical position by deductive argument.

A note on the professor's teaching methods: there are various approaches to teaching philosophy. Some professors like to try to remain completely neutral while teaching about philosophical matters. I won't do that, and for two reasons. First, I think it is impossible for teachers to present philosophical ideas from a completely neutral standpoint. Second, it is actually problematic to try and do so, since teachers aiming at total neutrality tend to both encourage students to think the judgments of the professor are without bias, when they are not, and encourage students to adopt relativistic, skeptical, or indifferent stances towards the subjects under discussion. In addition, teachers aiming at total neutrality encourage students to hang on to the idea that we can decide what is true about philosophical matters *all by ourselves*. I don't want to encourage those stances or ideas, because I think they are false and morally pernicious. This does not mean I won't present thinkers, ideas, and material with which I disagree. Indeed, I will often go some distance towards offering evidence or defenses for views I don't espouse—sometimes even for positions I think are *foolish* to believe. Nonetheless, students shouldn't be surprised if I defend some positions more vigorously than others.

On being prepared for class. First, the professor will be using Canvas in this class for the purposes of up-dating students, distributing homework assignments, and making handouts available to the students. Therefore, any student who hasn't used Canvas should familiarize herself with it right away. Also, in order to keep up with homework assignments for the class, the student should make it a habit of checking Canvas at least once a day. I probably won't post anything new between 5pm-5am; I will often post new things between 11am-5pm. Second, the professor expects his students to carefully read and reflect upon the assigned readings for the day—*before class has begun*. Third, when the professor posts a list of questions for a particular reading, the student should use those questions to guide her reading. In addition, the student will be expected to come to class ready to offer oral responses to these questions in the class period in which the reading is to be discussed. Finally, the student will be expected *to take notes on class lectures and discussions*.

Tech-fasting assignment. From sunrise on Wednesday, June 16th, until sunrise on Thursday, June 17th, the student should refrain from using social media of any sort, with some obvious exceptions (in some cases), e.g., Zoom, Canvas, and e-mail. Also, the student should refrain from using their phones, watching television, watching movies, and listening to any music that requires the use of electronic technology, etc. (The student should feel free to make exceptions for the purposes of completing school work.) The student will then write a one to two page essay about her experience. The student will turn in the essay by Monday, June 21st at 5pm (the student should feel free to turn in the essay earlier if that works better for the student's schedule).

Some ground rules for classroom participation: (1) Be courteous to other students, e.g., do not talk while another student is talking; (2) Be courteous to the professor, e.g., do not talk, sleep, or exit the classroom while he is talking; students who come to class late or leave class early will be counted absent; also, all electronic devices, e.g., cell phones, text-messaging devices, MP3 players, computers, etc., should be turned off as soon as the student enters the classroom; take notes in class; (3) If the student wants to offer a comment or ask a question, the student should raise her hand and wait for the professor to call on her. Allowing the professor to function as a moderator allows for greater order and fairness in the classroom; (4) Feel free to raise questions and objections to claims and arguments advanced by the authors of the texts we're reading in class, the professor, and other students. However, please always do so with a generous measure of kindness and civility. (5) In a class with this many outstanding students, it will sometimes be difficult to hear from all the students who want to ask questions or make comments on any given subject. If students have questions or comments we don't get to in class, or students want to ask questions or make comments without taking up class time, students should feel free to write down those questions or comments and turn them in to the professor before leaving class for the day. Alternatively, students can e-mail questions or comments to the professor (cbrown43@utm.edu). The professor will do his level best to respond to those questions or comments privately, or else work those questions or comments into future class lectures or discussions.

Zoom class etiquette. Students who are taking the class via ZOOM: (1) must have their cameras turned on for the duration of the class; (2) are obliged to take the ground rules for classroom participation above as seriously as students taking the class in person, e.g., ZOOM students should not make use of other media devices or view other web pages during class time unless they are otherwise instructed; (3) should make an extra-effort to think about classroom decorum, e.g., students should not Zoom from bed, or dress inappropriately; (4) If the student wants to offer a comment or ask a question during class, the student should raise her hand, whether physically or by using the hand-raising icon in Zoom, and wait for the professor to call on her. However, students should not use the chat function on ZOOM in this class.

Academic dishonesty: academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated in this class. If the instructor has evidence that a student has cheated on an assignment or exam, the student will receive an automatic 'zero' on the particular assignment or exam in question and the matter *will* be brought to the attention of the administration. Note: I pay careful attention to what students are doing during exams.

On extra-credit work: No extra-credit work will be given in this class (it's not only unfair but it's also counter-productive). If the student is concerned about posting a particular grade in this course, she is advised to take all lectures, reading assignments, and exams seriously from the very start of the course.

A final note on requirements for the class: the two exams must be completed in order to receive a grade in the course.

Grading scale for the course: 100-90%—A; 89-80%—B; 79-70%—C; 69-60%—D; 59-0%—F

Final note: any student eligible for and requesting academic accommodation due to a disability is hereby requested to provide a letter of accommodation from the Student Success Center within the first two weeks of the semester.

Tentative Class Schedule:

Date	Subject-matter	Read these texts
June 7	(a) On the sub-disciplines of philosophy (b) Knowledge: different senses of, two traditions concerning, and belief	Lecture and discussion
June 8 am	(a) Knowledge: and hope, faith, and evidence (b) Postman on the judgement of Thamus	C, chs. 10 and 11 P, intro and ch. 1
June 8 pm	Knowledge: faith, evidence, justification, and Gettier counter-examples	C, ch. 11, cont.
June 9	Knowledge: externalist accounts of knowledge	C, ch. 11, cont.
June 10	(a) Knowledge, cont. (b) David Hart on the philosophical significance of atheism	C, cha 11 cont. H
June 11	(a) Omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence (b) Postman on technology and taxonomy	Lecture and discussion P, chs. 2-3
June 14	(a) Divine simplicity, immateriality, immutability, and eternity (b) Postman on information, schools, and modern medicine	“ P, chs. 4-5
June 15am	(a) necessary existence, creation ex nihilo, and God's relation to other things discussion (b) Postman on modern medicine and computers, and invisible technology	Lecture and P, chs. 6-8
June 15pm	(a) classical theism and neo-theism (b) philosophy of religion, TBA	“ “
June 16	(a) philosophy of religion, TBA	“
June 17	(a) philosophy of religion, TBA	“
June 18	(a) Mid-term examination	
June 21	(a) The mind/body problem: substance dualism and dualistic interactionism (DI) (b) Postman on scientism	C, ch. 16 P, ch. 9
June 22 am	(a) The mind/body problem: occasionalism and parallelism	C, ch. 16

	(b) Postman on the Great Symbol Drain	P , ch. 10
June 22pm	(a) The mind/body problem: objections to substance dualism and DI	“
	(b) The mind/body problem: dualism and epiphenomenalism	“
June 23	(a) The mind/body problem: physical monism	“
	(b) The mind/body problem: A Thomistic perspective	A , prologue, F (selection), lecture, and discussion
June 24	The mind/body problem: A Thomistic perspective	J , ch. 4
June 25	The mind/body problem: A Thomistic perspective	F and A , pp. 54-114
June 28	(a) The mind/body problem: a Thomistic perspective, cont.	A , pp. 54-114, cont.
	(b) Postman on solutions	P , ch. 11
June 29am	(a) The mind/body Problem: a concluding argument	Lecture and discussion
June 29pm	(a) The mind/body problem, wrap-up	“
	(b) On Postman’s <i>Technopoly</i>	P , chs. 1-11
June 30	On Postman’s <i>Technopoly</i>	“
July 1	(a) Final examination	