

# The Examined Life: Ultimate Questions

PHIL 1700 – Spring 2025

## 1 General Information

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**Course Number:** PHIL 1700 sec. 25

**Location:** Xavier Hall 122

**Pre-/Co-requisite:** CORE 1500

**Credit(s):** 3 Credits

**Meeting Time:**

TTh 8–9:15 a.m.

**Instructor:** Chris Holland

**Office Hours:** By appointment

**Email:** christopher.holland@slu.edu

**Zoom:** <https://slu.zoom.us/my/clholland>

**Course Websites:**

<https://chrislholland.com/phil1700/>

<https://canvas.slu.edu/>

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**Catalog Course Description:** 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 University Core

**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

### 3 Course Learning 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.

### 4 Course Materials

You will need to purchase *Philosophy Illustrated*, edited and illustrated by Helen De Cruz (New York: Oxford University Press; ISBN: 9780190080532). All other course materials will be available through Canvas.

### 5 Evaluation and Grading

Grades will be calculated as follows:

Daily Participation	15%
In-Class Activities	15%
In-Class Quizzes	15%
Self-Assessment Quizzes	10%
Argument Evaluations	30%
Final Exam	15%
*Extra Credit Project	3%

#### Daily Participation

Daily participation will be graded on a four-point scale. To receive a 4, you will need to come to class on time and prepared. You will also need to pay attention and contribute to the class discussion (e.g., voting in classroom polls, adding your voice

to a think-pair-share or small group activity, asking questions, answering questions). To make full participation easier for everyone, I ask that you not use laptops, phones, and other electronic devices in the classroom (exceptions are possible only for those with a note from the academic accommodations office) except as directed by instructors. On the day you violate this rule, you will not receive credit for your attendance in the class. Unexcused absences result in a 0 for the day you miss. Excused absences reduce your total number of participation grades (e.g., if we have 32 class meetings and you have 2 excused absences, then your participation grade will be based on the 30 class meetings you were expected to attend). See also §6.2 Attendance.

### **In-Class Activities**

In-class activities will be graded on a four-point scale. Most in-class activities will be group activities and require that you respond to a prompt or answer a series of short answer questions. To receive a 4 you must be actively engaged in the activity and complete all of the questions. An unexcused absence will result in a 0 for any activity you miss. An excused absence will reduce your total number of in-class activity grades.

### **In-Class Quizzes**

Most quizzes will be short reading quizzes taken at the beginning of class. Quiz formatting will vary. Most quizzes will include both multiple-choice and short-answer questions.

### **At-Home Self-Assessment Quizzes**

Throughout the semester, you will take short quizzes on Canvas. Typically, self-assessment quizzes will be available for 3 days and have 5–10 multiple-choice questions. The quizzes are not timed and you may take each quiz as many times as you like before the deadline and keep your highest score.

### **In-Class Argument Evaluations**

You will complete four in-class argument evaluations (tentatively planned for Feb 7, Mar 7, Apr 4, and May 2). We will complete a practice argument evaluation in class before the first argument evaluation. You will need a pen (or pencil) and notebook paper (or a blue book) to complete the assignment.

### **In-Person Final Exam**

You will complete an in-person final exam at the end of the term. The exam will include both objective (multiple choice, matching, true-false) and subjective (short answer/essay) questions.

### **Extra Credit Project (Optional)**

You may choose to complete **one** of the following projects; three percentage points will be added to your final grade. *Contact me for further details before you begin working on the project.*

1. Illustrate a thought experiment from Julian Baggini's *The Pig That Wants To Be Eaten* and give a 300-word explanation. Book on reserve at Pius Library.
2. Identify a philosophically interesting argument from a popular source (e.g., a scene from a film, song lyrics, a political speech) and complete a 5th argument evaluation.

## Grading Scale

A	(4.0)	93–100%	B–	(2.7)	80–82.99%	D	(1.0)	60–69.99%
A–	(3.7)	90–92.99%	C+	(2.3)	77–79.99%	F	(0.0)	below 60%
B+	(3.3)	87–89.99%	C	(2.0)	73–76.99%			
B	(3.0)	83–86.99%	C–	(1.7)	70–72.99%			

## 6 Policies and Guidelines

### 6.1 Communication

Occasionally, I will need to communicate important, time-sensitive information outside of class. With this in mind, I expect you to check your school-supplied email at least once a day.

The best way to reach me is by email. I'll do my best to respond within 24 hrs. If a matter is urgent, include the word URGENT in the subject line.

Your email should include:

- An informative subject line with your course and section number
- A greeting/salutation (e.g., "Hello Mr. Holland," or "Dear Chris,")
- A thorough description of what you are trying to inform me of or ask me about
- A signature with your first and last name.

### 6.2 Attendance

Attendance is mandatory, and we will take attendance. University-authorized absences are excused and require documentation (see the university's attendance policy for more information). Other excused absences are granted at my discretion. An unexcused absence will result in a participation score of 0 for the day you miss; an excused absence will reduce your total number of participation grades.

*Please do not come to class sick.* If you are sick, tell me as soon as you can (before or after class). Your first "sick day" will be automatically excused; additional sick days require a doctor's note. I also provide excused absences for various emergencies (again, please contact me as soon as you can).

In the event that you miss several classes and are unable to meet the course objectives you should contact me and your academic advisor to discuss a course extension (see the Incomplete Course policy) or withdrawal (see Course Withdrawal policy).

### 6.3 Late/Missing Work

I understand that sometimes, despite our best efforts, things do not go as planned. In the event of an excused absence, you may reschedule a quiz, argument evaluation, or test. I will proctor missed quizzes in the Adorjan Hall common area. Missed argument evaluations will be proctored at CADR's North Campus Testing Center.

### 6.4 Distance Education Etiquette

Distance courses often bring together students with varying degrees of experience with online education. The guidelines below help to ensure all students know what to expect and how to engage effectively in distance courses.

### **Non-Video & Asynchronous Contexts (Canvas, Online Chats, Discussion Boards, etc.)**

1. When using the “Chat” or “Discussion Board” (or similar) features of your course management system, remember that course-related communications with the instructor and other students should be professional in tone and content. Remember that course context and all related written work – including chat and discussion board transcripts – can be recorded and retrieved.
2. Be cautious when using humor or sarcasm; without the context of facial expressions or other body language, your tone or intent could be missed or misunderstood by others.
3. Respect and be attentive to the diversity of your classmates and instructor. Before communicating, consider your message in the context of the class’s diversity in race, ethnicity, religion, ability levels, gender, sexual orientation, age, social class, marital status, geography, etc. Consider the diversity you can see or know – as well as that you cannot.
4. Respect others’ time and life circumstances, which often don’t allow for an immediate response to a question or comment.

### **Synchronous Video Contexts (Zoom, etc.)**

1. Mute your microphone when you are not speaking. Remember to un-mute yourself just prior to speaking. If your screen does not display your name, identify yourself when you begin speaking. (Note: while most participants in a class will display their name on the screen, that choice may not be appropriate in particular situations. If you are not able to display your name due to privacy or other concerns, please talk with your instructor about how best to engage with the class.)
2. Expect a few seconds of delay in getting a response from the instructor or another class member to a question; wait before repeating your question or assuming it was not heard.
3. If appropriate/possible, position your camera such that your video feed does not capture too much of your surroundings or other activity/sound from your home/location. Be conscious of posters, art, or other surroundings that others might find offensive or inappropriate for an educational context. If appropriate/possible, consider using a “blurred” background during synchronous sessions to minimize distractions.
4. Use the “Raise Hand” and “Chat” (or similar) features of your video-conferencing tool. This limits verbal interruptions and the confusion that can result when multiple people try to speak at once.
5. For maximum class engagement, limit side conversations, multi-tasking (on your computer or otherwise), and use of your cell phone.
6. Temporarily turn off your video feed and mute your microphone if engaged in any non-class conversation or activity.
7. Respect and be attentive to the diversity of your classmates and instructor. Before communicating, consider your message in the context of the class’s diversity in race, ethnicity, religion, ability levels, gender, sexual orientation, age, social class, marital status, geography, etc. Consider the diversity you can see or know – as well as that you cannot.
8. Remember that video-based class sessions (including chat transcripts) may be recorded and retrieved for later viewing.

## **6.5 Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is the commitment to and demonstration of honest and moral behavior in an academic setting. Since the mission of the University is “the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity,” acts of integrity are essential to its very reason for existence. Thus, the University regards academic integrity as a matter of serious importance. Academic integrity is the foundation of the academic assessment process, which in turn sustains the ability of the University to certify to the outside world the skills and attainments of its graduates. Adhering to the standards of academic integrity allows all members of the University to contribute to a just and equitable learning environment that cultivates moral character and self-respect. 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>.

## **6.6 Generative AI**

Unless the assignment prompt states otherwise, generative AI is prohibited for assignments in this course.

**Select Assignments:** Tools such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Gemini, Midjourney, DALL-E or GitHub Copilot may be

allowed, or even required, for specific assignments. These assignments will include clear directions for how the AI tool will be used. If there are no AI directions, AI-generated content is prohibited for the assignment.

Using a generative AI tool may assist your learning by simplifying texts, helping you brainstorm, assisting you with forming arguments, providing grammar checks or feedback for structure, debugging code or creating works of art. However, becoming dependent on generative AI could undermine your learning by eroding your ability to participate fully and intentionally in the writing process and it can stunt your creativity and critical thinking. The use of generative AI can also erode your voice from your work. Generative AI still produces inaccurate information and hallucinations are still common which if left unchecked can harm your grade on the assignment. Any work generated with AI should be fact checked to ensure accuracy. You are responsible for the content of your work.

If your assignment permits the use of a generative AI tool, you need to document its use. Please follow the Chicago Manual of Style's guidelines on this point. See CMS 18 §14.112 and §3.38. There should be a clear distinction between your original work and your AI-assisted work. In addition, use of generative AI should conform to academic integrity policies for the university and regulations put forward by the College of Arts and Sciences. Please review item three in the section labeled Plagiarism in the Saint Louis University Academic Integrity Policy.

## **7 Support and Services**

### **7.1 University Writing Services**

University Writing Services offers one-on-one consultations with trained writing consultants who help with everything from brainstorming, outlining, and proposing research questions to documenting sources, revising, and implementing feedback. These consultations can take place in-person, asynchronously, or via Zoom and can be scheduled through EAB Navigate—Student. Getting feedback benefits writers at all skill levels on different writing projects (including but not limited to class assignments, conference papers, cover letters, dissertations, group projects, multimedia assignments, personal statements, senior capstone projects, short answer questions on applications, speeches, and theses). For additional information, visit <https://www.slu.edu/life-at-slu/student-success-center/academic-support/university-writing-services/index.php> or send an email to [writing@slu.edu](mailto:writing@slu.edu).

### **7.2 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.

### **7.3 Student Success Center**

The Student Success Center (SSC) supports students in reaching their goals in and out of the classroom. Providing a variety of resources, the Student Success Center houses both the Center for Accessibility and Disability Resources (CADR) and Academic Support, which includes Tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, University Writing Services, and Student Success Coaching. The Student Success Center is located in the Busch Student Center, Suite 331, and students can make an appointment with any SSC resource via EAB Navigate. To learn more about the Student Success Center and its resources, please visit: <https://www.slu.edu/life-at-slu/student-success-center/index.php>.

## 7.4 University Counseling Center

The University Counseling Center (UCC) offers free, short-term, solution-focused counseling to Saint Louis University undergraduate and graduate students. UCC counselors are highly trained clinicians who can assist with a variety of issues, such as adjustment to college life, troubling changes in mood, and chronic psychological conditions. To make an appointment for a wellness consultation, call 314-977-8255 (TALK), or visit the clinic on the second floor of Wuller Hall. For after-hours needs, please press #9 after dialing the clinic number.

## 7.5 Wellness

With our Jesuit commitment to *cura personalis*, the University sees your academic success as connected to your health and well-being and provides resources to support your holistic wellness.

All students experience stressors and challenges at some point, and seeking support is both normal and beneficial. Such challenges may be the result of academic concerns (such as those related to particular assignments or content in a course), or they may be more personal in nature (such as concerns related to relationships, mental health, medical issues, loss, identities, alcohol or drugs, housing or food security, finances, or local/world events, among other things). If you experience these or other difficulties that are impacting your well-being and/or academic work, please consider seeking support from the resources available to you.

- For questions or concerns related to this course, please contact me. I am invested in your success and will support your success in the ways I can.
- Additionally, you have access to the many resources SLU provides in support of your personal wellness. You will find a list of available resources on the Well-being page of the SLU website.

**If you or someone you know is experiencing a crisis:** please consult Crisis Support and Warning Signs on the University Counseling Center website or call the University Counseling Center at 314-977-TALK (8255) and press #9 to be connected to a behavioral health nurse 24/7.

## 7.6 Basic Needs Security

Students experiencing food insecurity, housing insecurity, and any other challenges that are impacting their personal and/or academic wellbeing are encouraged to contact the Dean of Students Office for support. Students can submit an intake form, email deanofstudents@slu.edu, or call 314-977-9378 to connect with their office. Students may also communicate directly with their instructors about any challenges they are experiencing to receive support and resource referrals.

## 8 Important Dates

Assignment due dates are subject to change.

Feb. 6	ARGUMENT EVALUATION 1
Mar. 6	ARGUMENT EVALUATION 2
Mar. 10–14	SPRING BREAK
Apr. 3	ARGUMENT EVALUATION 3
Apr. 17–21	EASTER BREAK
May 1	ARGUMENT EVALUATION 4
May 6	SPRING STUDY DAY
May 13 @ 8 am	FINAL EXAM
May 15	GRADES DUE