

The Examined Life
PHIL 140-07

Saint Xavier University
Department of Philosophy

Room: Warde Academic Center S201

Time: MWF 2 p.m. – 2:50 p.m.

Instructor: Sean Hannan

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Office Hours: MWF 3 p.m. – 3:50 p.m.

Please Note: Students may not receive credit for both PHIL 140 & PHIL 150.

Course Description:

Required of all first-year students, *PHIL 140: The Examined Life* reflects Saint Xavier University's commitment to the Catholic tradition of preparing students for a lifelong propensity for the critical examination of the concepts, beliefs, customs, and attitudes that shape our lives. Plato's *Apology of Socrates* (from which the course derives its title) serves as the common reading across all sections of the course. Guided by the themes of this common text, each individual section of the course will also include other primary texts that engage students with enduring questions of philosophical and ethical importance.

In this section, we'll be thinking about how an examined life can be cultivated through reflection on change and transformation. To help us reflect on the startling variety of ways our ever-changing lives can surprise us, disappoint us, and reorient us, we'll look to the *Confessions* of Augustine of Hippo. Though about fifteen centuries have elapsed between Augustine's time and our own, it's safe to say that his life remains one of the more 'examined' lives in the history of philosophy and literature. People have thought so much about this one man's life in part because of the stirring story he tells about his own journey in the *Confessions*. Our goal, then, will be to trace his footsteps down that path of self-examination and perhaps even self-transformation.

The final transition that faced Augustine—and not only Augustine!—was that between life and death. Mortality was a theme that cropped up throughout his *Confessions*. It seems that an examined life would also have to involve an examination of death, as Socrates had already hinted at with his discussion of the fear of death in the *Apology*. To build a bridge between Socrates and Augustine, then, we'll also read Plato's *Phaedo*, another dialogue that can help us in our efforts to reflect not just on life, but also on its end.

Required Texts:

Plato, *Five Dialogues*. Trans. G.M.A. Grube. 2nd ed. Hackett, 2002.

Augustine, *Confessions*. Trans. Maria Boulding. 2nd ed. New City, 2012.

Course Objectives:

PHIL 140 fulfills a course requirement in the General Education Curriculum. The broad General Education student learning outcomes associated with this course are as follows:

GE Foundational Capacity for Written Communication: Students will be able to compose a written argument that employs correct syntax and mechanics, is attentive to audience and context, and is supported by relevant evidence.

GE Foundational Capacity for Inquiry and Critical Thinking: Students will be able to identify competing claims about a problem or issue and evaluate the evidence to draw a meaningful conclusion.

GE Foundational Disposition for Propensity for Lifelong Learning: Students will be able to explain how the skills, abilities, and dispositions they are developing in the course will benefit them on an ongoing basis.

General Education Student Learning Outcome for the Knowledge-Area of Philosophy: Students will be able to read primary texts in context attentively, explicate them clearly, interpret them charitably, and reflect on what it means to be human through the act of reading.

Assignments & Grading:

The final grade for this course will be determined on the basis of three main factors:

1. Attendance and Participation (20%)
2. Ten (10) Short Weekly Reading Responses (20%)
3. Three (3) Substantive Papers (60%; 20% each)

Attending class is mandatory, so please be prepared to provide legitimate reasons if you need to miss our meeting or arrive late to it. Showing up, of course, only gets you so far. Please aim not only to have completed the readings, but also to be prepared to discuss them in person and ask informed questions about them.

Most weeks, you'll be asked to post a short (one paragraph) response to one of our readings for that week. (See the Course Schedule below for due dates.) The goal of these responses is to both demonstrate a familiarity with our source material and get some practice writing about challenging texts. This will come in handy when it's time to work on more substantive papers.

Speaking of substantive papers: you'll also be asked to write three longer pieces—4-5 pages in length—over the course of the semester. The goal here will be to address more pointed questions raised by the texts we read. I'll be supplying you with some questions in advance of the due date. Here you won't just be responding to the readings; you'll be crafting your own argument, built up around a clear thesis and evidence to support that thesis.

If you are concerned about any of these assignments, especially the writing-intensive ones, please schedule a time to meet with me. I'll be happy to work with you on writing strategies, while also

pointing you to other resources that should prove helpful to you. In accordance with University policy and best academic practices, plagiarism cannot and will not be tolerated.

If an assignment is handed in late, this will have to be reflected in the grade it receives. Once again, if there are special circumstances forcing you to hand in late work, please let me know in advance. In the event that you are in need of accommodation, please consult the following statement provided by Student Affairs:

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Learning Center and Disability Services (LCDS) in L-108 or call (773) 298-3308 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. LCDS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities “Confidential Accommodation Plan” letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact LCDS as soon as possible.

Finally, the overall grading breakdown will run as follows:

A (90-100)—Excellent work: shows not just thoughtful competence but inventiveness

B (80-89)—Good work: shows competence and thoughtfulness

C (70-79)—Adequate work: shows a sincere attempt to understand and complete the assignment

D (60-69)—Inadequate work: accomplishes the bare minimum necessary for the assignment

F (0-59)—Failing work: does not accomplish the bare minimum necessary for the assignment

Course Schedule:

Week 1: Plato, *Apology*

Monday, Aug. 24: Welcome to the Course and Introduction to its Aims

Wednesday, Aug. 26: Introducing Plato's *Apology* and the Character of Socrates

Friday, Aug. 28: Discussion of *Apology* 17a-18e

Week 2: Plato, *Apology*

Monday, Aug. 31: Discussion of *Apology* 19a-23e

Wednesday, Sep. 2: Discussion of *Apology* 24a-29e

Friday, Sep. 4: Discussion of *Apology* 30a-35e

Due before class: Reading Response for one of our Weekly Readings

Week 3: Plato, *Apology*

Monday, Sep. 7: Labor Day – **NO CLASS**

Wednesday, Sep. 9: Discussion of *Apology* 36a-42a

Friday, Sep. 11: Final Discussion of the *Apology*

Due before class: Reading Response for one of our Weekly Readings

Week 4: Plato, *Phaedo*

Monday, Sep. 14: Discussion of *Phaedo* 57a-62e

Wednesday, Sep. 16: Discussion of *Phaedo* 63a-69e

Friday, Sep. 18: Discussion of *Phaedo* 70a-75e

Due before class: Reading Response for one of our Weekly Readings

Week 5: Plato, *Phaedo*

Monday, Sep. 21: Discussion of *Phaedo* 76a-82d

Wednesday, Sep. 23: Discussion of *Phaedo* 82e-88c

Friday, Sep. 25: Discussion of *Phaedo* 88d-95e

Due before class: Reading Response for one of our Weekly Readings

Week 6: Plato, *Phaedo*

Monday, Sep. 28: Discussion of *Phaedo* 96a-103a

Wednesday, Sep. 30: Discussion of *Phaedo* 103a-115a

Friday, Oct. 2: Discussion of *Phaedo* 115a-118

Due by midnight: FIRST PAPER

No Reading Response

Week 7: Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 1

Monday, Oct. 5: Introducing Augustine
Wednesday, Oct. 7: Discussion of p. 39-48
Friday, Oct. 9: Discussion of p. 48-61

Due before class: Reading Response for one of our Weekly Readings

Week 8: Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 2

Monday, Oct. 12: Columbus Day – **NO CLASS**
Wednesday, Oct. 14: Discussion of p. 62-74

Due before class: Reading Response for one of our Weekly Readings
Friday, Oct. 16: **NO CLASS**

Week 9: Augustine, *Confessions*, Books 3-4

Monday, Oct. 19: Discussion of p. 75-91 (all of Book 3)
Wednesday, Oct. 21: Discussion of p. 92-105
Friday, Oct. 23: Discussion of p. 105-112

Due before class: Reading Response for one of our Weekly Readings

Week 10: Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 5

Monday, Oct. 26: Discussion of p. 113-119
Wednesday, Oct. 28: Discussion of p. 119-124
Friday, Oct. 30: Discussion of p. 125-133

Due by Midnight: SECOND PAPER
No Reading Response

Week 11: Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 6

Monday, Nov. 2: Discussion of p. 134-139
Wednesday, Nov. 4: Discussion of p. 139-150
Friday, Nov. 6: Discussion of p. 150-157

Due before class: Reading Response for one of our Weekly Readings

Week 12: Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 7

Monday, Nov. 9: Discussion of p. 158-167
Wednesday, Nov. 11: Discussion of p. 167-176
Friday, Nov 13: Discussion of p. 176-183

Due before class: Reading Response for one of our Weekly Readings

Week 13: Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 8

Monday, Nov. 16: Discussion of p. 184-192

Wednesday, Nov. 18: Discussion of p. 192-199

Friday, Nov. 20: Discussion of p. 199-208

Due before class: Reading Response for one of our Weekly Readings

Week 14

Monday, Nov. 23 – Friday, Nov. 27: Thanksgiving – **NO CLASS**

No Reading Response

Week 15: Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 9

Monday, Nov. 30: Discussion of p. 209-221

Wednesday, Dec. 2: Discussion of p. 221-236

Friday, Dec. 4: Final Meeting – *What does an examined life look like? (And why didn't we read the final four books of the Confessions?)*

No Reading Response

Finals Week

Wednesday, Dec. 9

Due by Midnight: FINAL PAPER