

PHL 101: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

SPRING 2019

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COURSE TIME AND LOCATION: Tuesday/Thursday, 2:00-3:15, Gavett 206

TEXTS: All readings will be available for download from Blackboard, under "Course Materials".

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to philosophy. It has the following goals, roughly in increasing order of importance:

1. To give you some familiarity with just a few of the historically important and particularly interesting questions that philosophers have asked and tried to answer. They were chosen to give you a taste of each of the fields into which philosophy is often (somewhat arbitrarily) divided: metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, ethics, aesthetics and political philosophy. Because of my own limitations, the course focuses on European and U.S. American philosophy, although we will read some Buddhist and African philosophers. There are a lot of other kinds of philosophy and I welcome suggestions and questions about them.
2. To provide you with some of the most important skills for doing philosophy that are hard to learn elsewhere, so that you can go on to learn more about whatever interests you. To this end, the course will contain one "skills focus" per week, which will be discussed in class and which you should pay special attention to.
3. To get you to fall in love with philosophy. Well, you probably already love philosophy even if you don't know it. Everyone philosophizes on their own sometimes, and every field of inquiry involves philosophical reasoning, contains philosophical elements and inspires philosophical questions. When we are done I would like you to be able to do it with more confidence, more information, and more skill.

POLICIES

Please let me know right away if you need special accommodations because of a documented condition that interferes with your learning.

My pronouns are she/her/hers. Please email me at the beginning of the course letting me know your preferred gender pronoun: <https://www.gsafewi.org/wp-content/uploads/What-the-heck-is-a-PGP1.pdf>.

Please review the class schedule sometime in the next week and let me know if there are any issues.

Absolutely no laptops in class, except for students with a documented need for one. Please turn off your cell phones when you arrive; if you are texting I will ask you to leave. If you need to have your cell phone handy because of an emergency, please let me know before class.

I do not use Microsoft Word. *Please* send me all of your attachments (papers, drafts, etc.) as PDF files, preferably an informative name (i.e. not “Paper”).

Feel free to write emails to me and the teaching assistants, but please take a moment to write them in polite and thoughtful way. Start with “Dear Alison,” or “Dear Professor Peterman” or “Dear Matt” or “Dear Mike” and not “Hi” or “Hey” or no introduction. End with a signoff. I would strongly recommend taking this advice for your other professors and teaching assistants.

Audio or visual recordings of class are prohibited unless you get special permission from me.

Student success at the University of Rochester includes more than just academic performance. Please feel comfortable speaking with me about challenges you are experiencing within and outside of the classroom so that I may submit a CARE report on your behalf. A CARE report is submitted when the level of concern for a student necessitates inclusive, multi-layered support from the campus community. The CARE network administrator shares information only with staff who need to know it in order to help you.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

This whole enterprise of trying to learn about the world requires that we are honest. Both students and faculty should take this seriously. As freshmen, students read and sign an academic honesty policy statement to indicate that they understand the principles that ensure this. Sometimes the details can be hard to master, but the College Board on Academic Honesty website gives further information on our policies and procedures (www.rochester.edu/college/honesty), and I also provide guidelines for avoiding plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty in the Course Materials. Please familiarize yourself with these and ask any questions at all if you have them. I will not be lenient in these matters.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

You are required to come to every class and to have the reading for that day done before class time. In accordance with the College credit hour policy, which awards 4 credit hours for courses

that meet for the equivalent of 3 periods of 50 minutes each week, you are expected to devote at least one hour each week to developing that week's skill, working alone or in groups.

I will not enforce attendance, but you will not do well in this class if you do not come to class. I will use slides and I will not post them, in order to encourage attendance. The slides would not be very helpful to you if you did not attend, anyway. If you cannot attend for a good reason, email me with an explanation and I will send you the slides for that day.

ASSESSMENT

DISCUSSION BOARD POSTS (20%):

Each reading has a discussion forum associated with it. You are required to (1) contribute to one of the two forums each week, and (2) take a quick look at the forums before every class, although I will only enforce (1). A contribution to the forum must be about the reading for that day. It should be a question, comment, or criticism about the reading - brief but thoughtful and clearly and carefully written. Aim for 75-100 words each. They will be graded completed/uncompleted, although if there is manifestly no effort put in, or if the poster has clearly not read that week's reading, I will mark it uncompleted. You may fulfill the requirement either by creating a new thread or by commenting on a previous thread. Each forum will be visible but will be closed to new comments at noon on the day of class. Since you'll have ample time to contribute, I will strictly enforce on-time contributions unless circumstances are really extenuating.

You can find the Discussion Forum on Blackboard, in the left-hand navigation bar, under "Course Tools".

ESSAYS (40%):

There will be two essays; the first is 1000 words and worth 15% of your final grade, and the second is 1500 words and worth 25% of your final grade. These essays will be structured in a way that I will describe in class.

EXAMS (40%):

There will be two exams held during class time, each worth 20% of your final grade.

COURSE SCHEDULE

The readings listed for each day are to be read *before* the lecture on that day.

Week 1: Introduction

January 17: What is philosophy?

- * Skills focus: The use-mention distinction

Week 2:

January 22: What should I believe?

- * Al-Ghazali: *Deliverance from Error*, Sections 1-17
- * René Descartes: The First Meditation
- * G.E. Moore: “Proof of an External World”, selection

January 24: What should I believe?

- * Mandelbaum and Quilty-Dunn: “Why Liberals Shouldn’t Watch Fox News”
- * Skills focus: Validity and soundness

Week 3:

January 29: Truth and untruth

- * Harry Frankfurt: “On Bullshit”
- * Skills focus: Conceptual analysis

January 31: Truth and untruth

- * Souleymane Bachir Diagne: “Truth and Untruth”, selection
- * Ursula LeGuin: Introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*

Week 4:

February 5: How do we use words to communicate?

- * J.L. Austin: “Performative Utterances”

February 7: How do we use words to communicate?

- * Rebecca Kukla: “That’s What She Said: The Language of Sexual Negotiation”
- * Skills focus: “But how is this philosophy?”

Week 5:

February 12: What kind of stuff is there?

- * David Lewis and Stephanie Lewis: “Holes”
- * Skills focus: Argument reconstruction

February 14: What kind of stuff is there?

- * Charles Mills: “But What Are You *Really*?? The Metaphysics of Race”

- * Optional: Interview with Kim Tallbear (<https://theslot.jezebel.com/our-vote-matters-very-little-kim-tallbear-on-elizabeth-1829783321>)

Week 6

February 19: What are minds like?

- * Laura Ruggles: “The minds of plants”

February 21: What are minds like?

- * Thomas Nagel: “What is it like to be a bat?”
- * Skills focus: The uses and limits of introspection

Week 7

February 26: What are minds like?

- * Patricia Churchland: “The Hornswoggle Problem”
- * Optional: Peter Godfrey-Smith, “On Being an Octopus” (<http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/peter-godfrey-smith-being-octopus>)

February 28:

EXAM 1

Week 8

March 5: What makes me, me?

- * Daniel Dennett: “Where am I?”
- * Skills focus: Thought experiments

March 7: What makes me, me?

- * Derek Parfit: “Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons”

FIRST PAPER DUE

SPRING BREAK

Week 9

March 19: When am I responsible for my actions?

- * Harry Frankfurt: “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”
- * Skills focus: Modal concepts

March 21: When am I responsible for my actions?

- * Harry Frankfurt: “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person”

Week 10

March 26: When am I responsible for my actions?

- * Susan Wolf: “Sanity and the metaphysics of responsibility”
- * Skills focus: Careful critique

March 28: What is a meaningful life?

- * Robert Nozick: “The experience machine”
- * Susan Wolf: “The meanings of lives”, selections
- * Albert Camus: “The myth of Sisyphus”

Week 11

April 2: How should I live?

- * The *Dhammapada*

April 4: How should I live?

- * Émilie du Châtelet: “Discourse on Happiness”
- * Skills focus: The varieties of philosophical writing

Week 12

April 9: What should I do?

- * Plato: *The Republic*, selection
- * C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, selections

April 11: What should I do?

- * Plato: *Euthyphro*, selection
- * Louise Antony: “Good without God”
- * Skills focus: The ‘subjective’/’objective’ distinction

Week 13

April 16: What should I do?

- * *The Good Place*, Season 2, Episode 6: “The Trolley Problem”
- * Skills focus: Empirical data and philosophy

April 18: How should we live together?

- * Plato: *Apology*, selections
- * Plato: *Crito*

Week 14

April 23

- * Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”

SECOND PAPER DUE

April 25

- * Malcolm X: “The Ballot or the Bullet”
- * Skills focus: Making philosophy matter

Week 15

April 30

EXAM 2