

PHL 101: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

SPRING 2020

INSTRUCTOR: Alison Peterman
EMAIL: alison.peterman@rochester.edu
OFFICE HOURS: Wednesday 12:00-2:00 pm
Meeting ID: 964 1560 5015

TA: Tessa Brunnenmeyer
EMAIL: tbrunnen@ur.rochester.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday 3:00-5:00 pm
<https://rochester.zoom.us/j/2142760885>
Meeting ID: 214 276 0885

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

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to philosophy. My main goal is to get you to love philosophy. 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.

One subordinate goal to that is 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, 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. A second subordinate goal is 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.

POLICIES

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

My pronouns and Tessa's are she/hers. Please email us at the beginning of the course letting us 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.

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 Tessa” 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.

Please do not share any of the course materials, especially the podcast chats, without written permission from me and the guest.

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.

COURSE MEETINGS AND CONTENT DELIVERY

This course will be entirely online. You will be divided randomly into four discussion groups and each week your group will meet once. Your moderator will alternate each week between me and Tessa.

The Wednesday before each week, the week’s asynchronous content will be posted on Blackboard, which will include (1) topic slides and (2) a podcast chat about that week’s topic and reading. You should do the reading, listen to the podcast, and (this part is optional) review the slides before you post to Yellowdig each week, and before your discussion section.

ASSIGNMENTS

There are three kinds of assignments, designed to get you to engage with a topic in three different levels of detail. The first is weekly engagement on Yellowdig and in your class section. The second comprises four reflections, which are open-form assignments that engage in somewhat more detail with five topics over the course of the semester. Third are two papers of 1000 words each.

INTERNAL ENGAGEMENT (30%):

You'll be expected to participate each week in two ways: first, by posting and replying on Yellowdig, and second, by participating in your weekly discussion meeting. You will only receive credit for participation which is on-topic and informed by the reading for the week, the podcast, and your classmates' comments and questions. Yellowdig (15%) is graded on an automatic point system by Yellowdig, and the in-class portion of your grade will be self-graded (details will be provided).

EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT (30%):

Four times during the semester you will prepare a short assignment engaging with a reading in a bit more detail than a Yellowdig post. I strongly encourage you to submit something that engages non-class-members in your reflection. You can post on Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram and engage with the comments; you can record a short video, perhaps for something I am told is called "Tik Tok"; you can record or write up an interview or a debate with a roommate, parent, or friend; you can have an email exchange with someone about a topic; you can write a blog post; you can write a song or perform a short play; you can choose an article or an artwork (a song, poem, comic, novel, whatever) that relates to the topic and comment on it. Whatever you do, you should aim for 100 words of writing (for a blog post, it would be the text; for an interview, it might be questions and follow-ups; for a Twitter or Facebook post, it might be posts and replies; for a written or taped debate, it would be your contributions; for a song or a poem, it would be the lyrics or content). If you do something non-verbal, write a paragraph explaining it. This assignment is very open-ended, but please take its goal seriously: to engage philosophically with others about the topic.

These should be emailed to me and cced to Tessa. You may do them on any of the topics, but each of the four should be on a different topic and none should be on the topic of your papers (below). They do not have to be sent on the week we discuss the topic; however, two must be submitted sometime before 3/15 on topics discussed before 3/15, and two must be submitted after 3/15 and by 5/2, on topics discussed after 3/15.

PAPERS (40%):

You will submit two essays of 1000 words each; Paper 1 due on 3/15 and Paper 2 is due on 5/2. For Paper 1, you should choose any topic from Weeks 1 through 7, and for Paper 2, you should choose any topic from Weeks 7 through 14. You should choose topics that you did not choose for your reflections. You should read the supplementary material for the topics on which you write Papers 1 and 2, although you do not have to discuss all of them.

Your papers should be emailed to Tessa and cced to me as PDFs named "[YourLastNamePaperX]" where YourLastName is your last name and X is 1 or 2, and the email should be titled YourLastName PaperX.

The point of a 1000-word paper is that it doesn't contain any filler. It should be as clear and to-the-point as possible, and there should be no quotations unless they are very short and absolutely necessary. Some examples of that kind of writing can be found here: (<https://1000wordphilosophy.com/about/>), although these do use more quotes than I would like to see, and are more introductory than argumentative. You are encouraged to use yours to argue for a point about the topic.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (2/1): Knowledge

Primary readings:

- * Al-Ghazali: *Deliverance from Error*, Sections 1-17
- * René Descartes: The First Meditation

Podcast guest: Elliot Samuel Paul

Secondary readings:

- * William James: “On Mysticism”
- * G.E. Moore: “Proof of an External World”, selection

Week 2 (2/8): Knowledge

Primary readings:

- * Podcast with Cassim Quaassam
- * Podcast with Rosenblum and Muirhead
- * Rachel Fraser: “Epistemic FOMO”

Podcast guests: Zeynep Soysal and Jens Kipper

Secondary readings:

- * C Thi Nguyen: “Escape the Echo Chamber”
- * The Daily: The Georgia Runoffs, Part 2

Week 3 (2/15): Knowledge

Primary readings:

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

Podcast guest: Justin Steinberg

Secondary readings:

- * Baruch Spinoza: Preface to the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*
- * Daniel Gilbert: “How Mental Systems Believe”

Week 4 (2/22): Language

Primary readings:

- * J.L. Austin: “Performative Utterances”
- * Rebecca Kukla: “That’s What She Said: The Language of Sexual Negotiation”

Podcast guest: Laura Papish

Podcast guest: Brett Sherman

Secondary readings:

- * Tom Dougherty: “Sex, Lies, and Consent”
- * Hallie Liberto: “The Problem with Sexual Promises”

Week 5 (3/1): (Un)Truth

Primary readings:

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

Podcast guest: Jody Azzouni

Secondary readings:

- * Rachel Barney: “On Trolling”
- * “Truth”: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/truth/>

Week 6 (3/8): World

Primary readings:

- * McTaggart: “The Unreality of Time”

Podcast guest: Geoff Gorham

Secondary readings:

- * David Lewis and Stephanie Lewis: “Holes”
- * Sara Bernstein: “Nowhere Man: Time Travel and Spatial Location” (if you were more excited about time) or “The Metaphysics of Omissions” (if you were more excited about holes)

* Week 7 (3/15): World

PAPER 1 DUE

Primary readings:

- * Leibniz, *Theodicy* selections
- * Voltaire: *Candide*, Chapter 1
- * Voltaire: Poem on the Lisbon Earthquake
- * Rousseau: Reply to Voltaire

Podcast guest: Justin E.H. Smith

Secondary readings:

- * Parfit: “Why Anything? Why This?”

Week 8 (3/22): (Social) World

Primary readings:

- * Chike Jeffers: “What Is Race?”, Chapter 2

Podcast guest: Chike Jeffers

Secondary readings:

- * Sally Haslanger: “What is Race?”, Chapters 1 and 5
- * Chike Jeffers: “What is Race?”, Chapter 6

Week 9 (3/29): Minds

Primary readings:

- * Thomas Nagel: “What is it like to be a bat?”
- * Laura Ruggles: “The minds of plants”
- * Peter Godfrey-Smith: “On Being an Octopus” (<http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/peter-godfrey-smith-being-octopus>)

* **Podcast guest:** Bryce Huebner

Secondary readings:

- * Bryce Huebner, “Minimal Minds”
- * Tim Crane: “The Mechanical Mind”, Chapter 1

Week 10 (4/5): Persons

Primary readings:

- * Star Trek Episodes (TBA)

Podcast guest: Lewis Powell

Secondary readings:

- * John Locke: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, selection
- * David Hume: *Treatise of Human Nature*, selection
- * Thomas Reid: *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, selection

Week 11 (4/12): The Good

Primary readings:

- * The *Dhammapada*
- * Epicurus: “Letter to Menoeceus”
- * Émilie du Châtelet: “Discourse on Happiness”

Podcast guest: Jessica Frazier

Secondary readings:

- * Lectures on Hinduism

Week 12 (4/19): The Good

Primary readings:

- * Robert Nozick: “The experience machine”
- * Susan Wolf: “The meanings of lives”, selections
- * Leo Tolstoy: *A Confession*

Podcast guest: Marcy Lascano

Secondary readings:

- * Susan Wolf: “Sanity and the metaphysics of responsibility”

Week 13 (4/26): The Good

Primary readings:

- * C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, selections
- * TBA

Podcast guest: Jason Raibley

Secondary readings:

- * TBA

Week 14 (5/3): Justice

PAPER 2 DUE

Primary readings:

- * Plato: *Apology*, selections
- * Plato: *Crito*
- * Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”
- * Malcolm X: “The Ballot or the Bullet”

Podcast guest: Abraham Singer

Secondary readings:

- TBA