

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy

Fall 2020

Grainger 1100

Tu/Th 7:50pm - 8:40pm

Instructor: Greg Nirshberg

Email: nirshberg@wisc.edu

Office: Doesn't matter. You're not allowed there anyway! (but its 5146)

Office Hours: Wednesdays 1:30pm – 3:30pm (on BBCollaborate or Zoom)

Course Description

Philosophy begins with curiosity about the world around you, about yourself, and about what might happen if things were different. In that sense, I hope that you have all already begun a philosophical exploration of the world. This class is designed to help you further that philosophical exploration by helping you to become a more nuanced and careful thinker, exposing you to philosophical topics you may not have thought about before, and introducing you to the ideas of people who *have* thought a great deal about these philosophical issues. At the end of the course, you may not have all the answers, but you should at least understand your reasons for holding the beliefs that you do, as well as better appreciate the reasons that others have for holding perhaps contrary beliefs.

Contact Information

Please email me at the address listed above. I check my email regularly and will do my best to respond within 24 hours (often much quicker than that), but if you don't hear back from me within those 24 hours, email me again as a reminder. If you have a conflict with my office hours, email me and we can set up an appointment for an alternate meeting time. I'm happy to accommodate!

Readings

Required text: *Exploring Philosophy: An Introductory Anthology (Sixth Edition)*, Steven M. Cahn

All other readings and supplemental material can be found on Canvas. Any handouts, including this syllabus, will be posted there.

Grade Composition

Critical Assessment 1	10%
Critical Assessment 2	12%
Critical Assessment 3	15%
Final Paper	20%
Online Discussion	30%
Reading Questions	10%
Logic Worksheet	3%

Grading Scale

A	92.5% - 100%
AB	87.5% - 92.5%
B	82.5% - 87.5%
BC	77.5% - 82.5%
C	70% - 77.5%
D	60% - 70%
F	0% - 60%

Grading

Assignments will be given numeric grades, which will be converted to a final letter grade according the scale above. I also will not impose a curve on any individual assignment, or your final grades.

Course Requirements

The following is a breakdown of the various requirements which determine your grade for the course.

All assignments will be posted to, and submitted via, Canvas.

Critical Assessments (CAs)

You will be required to submit three CAs throughout the semester. These are short, focused papers in which you will critically engage with an argument from an assigned reading. These CAs will be an opportunity for you to practice several skills we will focus on developing throughout this course. This includes careful and critical reading, argument reconstruction and argument evaluation. ***Though short, successful CAs will require a larger investment of time than the length might suggest to you.*** For this reason, the requirements for a CA will build and develop over the course of the semester. With each new CA, you will be asked to incorporate a new skill you have learned. **Length: Variable (1-3 pages)**

Final Paper

For this paper you will put the skills you've acquired throughout the semester to work by writing a longer paper in response to one of a set of prompts I will post to Canvas. **Length: ~2000 Words**

Online Discussion

Our class is a 4-credit course, but we only have 1 hr 40 min of class time per week. That's half of what is required to meet a 4-credit requirement. Since we have less class time, but the same amount of content and expected hours of work as your other 4-credit classes, the online component for our class will likely involve a more significant commitment of time than for some of your other classes. Each week you will be asked to engage in one of three different online activities. The details of these are below.

Extra Readings (ERs)

You will be assigned four readings throughout the semester that we will not discuss in class. Our discussion of these will take place fully online. For each reading, I will break the class up into groups of approximately 10 students. **I will then assign two or three members from each group to (individually) post a CONVERSATION STARTER on Canvas by 12pm** (guidelines and schedule for these are detailed in a separate document). In this post you will raise a question or critical point about the reading. **Each group member is then required to write (at least) TWO RESPONSES to these posts and the discussions that ensue. You have until the next afternoon at 12PM to post your responses.** Your posts must demonstrate that you have read the relevant reading and critically engaged with your classmate's post. Doing so *may* require you to include a quote, or to reference a page, from the reading. You will receive full credit for responses that help make some progress in the discussion (e.g., you answer a student's question, respond to a criticism, add something new that hasn't been considered yet, etc.).

If you do not receive feedback to suggest otherwise, assume that your posts and responses are receiving full credit. **However, I will NOT simply deduct points without giving you a chance to earn full credit.** Periodically, I will respond to student posts. If I ask you a *direct* question, I expect an answer in return. If I never ask you a question or if you respond satisfactorily to any questions I do ask, you will earn full

credit for discussion (yay!). This means that, even after you have completed your two responses, you should check back in to make sure I have not asked you a question. A detailed weekly schedule is below.

NOTE: Conversation Starters are *also* required to write at least two responses, so you will write at least three total posts on the day you post a Conversation Starter. Each student will be responsible for only ONE Extra Reading Conversation Starter for the semester.

Critical Assessment Discussions

On weeks where you have a CA due, we will have an online discussion similar to our Extra Reading discussions, but about the content of the article you read for your CA. **This discussion will follow the EXACT SAME format as ER discussions, so see above if you have any questions.** Like above, each student will be responsible for only ONE Critical Assessment Conversation Starter for the semester.

Online Reflections (ORs)

You will have five Online Reflections throughout the semester, each of which will focus on a set of questions relevant for a new section of our course. **For these assignments, I will post a short reading and/or prompt on Canvas, with questions I will ask you to address.** The format here will be similar to the format of the ER and CA discussions, with two exceptions: 1) ALL students will be required to make an initial post and 2) at least ONE of your response posts must NOT be to your own Reflection. Group sizes for this assignment will be smaller (5-6), so that you won't be required to read 10-15 initial posts before choosing what to respond to!

NOTE: Conversation Starter posts will be worth 2.5 points each. Each online discussion is otherwise worth 2.5 points total. With 12 of these assignments, this adds up to 35 points. What this means is that you have two freebies. I.e., you can miss two discussions, for *any* reason, and still earn full credit for this part of your grade. However, freebies CANNOT be used on Conversation Starter posts. If you miss your conversation starter, you will lose the relevant points even if you have freebies available!

Logic Worksheet

At the beginning of the semester, we will spend a bit of time working through a logic worksheet. Students will be required to take an online quiz upon completion of this worksheet.

General Course Participation

Acquiring a new skill requires practice, and active participation during class will be an integral part of this process. As such, class lectures will be VERY discussion heavy. I will not prepare slides or deliver anything like a quintessential lecture on our readings. Rather, I want our lecture discussions to be driven by the questions you all have about our readings. In light of this, I will ask students to submit weekly questions for the readings under discussion. The question can be as simple as a clarificatory question, but it must demonstrate that you have thoughtfully engaged with the reading. Your questions will be due by 5pm on the day the reading is due. **The class will be split up into two groups. Group 1 will submit questions for Tuesday readings. Group 2 will submit questions for Thursday readings.** This way, no student is ever required to submit more than one question in any given week. There are 12 weeks in

which questions must be submitted. However, you will have two freebies. Meaning, you can miss up to two questions, for *any* reason, and still earn the entire 10 points for this section of the course.

Though there is no official classroom participation grade, it should be clear by now that I value active participation quite a bit. I want you to feel comfortable participating without worrying about its effect on your final grade. As you'll quickly see, there's no substitute for talking as much as you can about the difficult questions we'll be considering. **Think of lecture (and online discussion) as a free space to try out ideas and clear up confusions. I will *never* penalize someone for making a mistake in discussion.**

A note about discussion etiquette: Disagreeing with others is absolutely fine. And you should feel free to voice your disagreement with your fellow classmates *and* with me. We philosophers thrive on *reasoned* disagreement. However, it's important to keep in mind that no matter what view you hold, or how strongly you hold it, what we're interested in are the *reasons* to believe that view. It is not enough that what you say is true; we are interested in why it is true and why we should also believe it. It can be difficult and frustrating to figure out, articulate, and explain the reasons that support your strongly held views—and it can be difficult to hear objections to them. But it also can be intellectually exciting! Finally, it's crucial that we all treat each other with the highest respect when we disagree. Make sure you listen carefully to what others say, reply respectfully to them, and be willing to accept criticism of what you say. The goal of philosophical argumentation is not to win, but to strive towards understanding.

Administrative Requirements

Course: Philos 101: Introduction to Philosophy

Credits: 4

Repeatable for Credit: No

Instructional Mode: Blended

How credit hours are met by the course

This class meets for a total of 4 class period hours, 2 in lecture and 2 online, each week over the fall semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, studying, etc.) for about 2 hours out of classroom for every class period.

Course Designation

Breadth - Either Humanities or Social Science

Level - Elementary

L&S Credit - Counts as Liberal Arts and Science credit in L&S

Requisites

Open to all students but preference will be given to Freshmen and Sophomores who have had no previous philosophy course other than 210, 211, 253 or 254.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, students will have developed the ability to think critically about arguments, interpret complex texts accurately and analyze them logically, communicate precisely and concisely in

both writing and speech and have become familiar with a diversity of philosophical ideas and arguments about topics in different areas of philosophy.

Class Policies

Covid Policies

Students' Rules, Rights & Responsibilities

During the global COVID-19 pandemic, we must prioritize our collective health and safety to keep ourselves, our campus, and our community safe. As a university community, we must work together to prevent the spread of the virus and to promote the collective health and welfare of our campus and surrounding community.

UW-Madison Badger Pledge

UW-Madison Face Covering Guidelines

While on campus all employees and students are required to [wear appropriate and properly fitting](#) face coverings while present in any campus building unless working alone in a laboratory or office space. Students with disabilities or medical conditions who are unable to wear a face covering should contact the [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#) or their Access Consultant if they are already affiliated. Students requesting an accommodation unrelated to disability or medical condition, should contact the Dean of Students Office.

Quarantine or Isolation Due to Covid-19

Students should continually monitor themselves for COVID-19 [symptoms](#) and get [tested](#) for the virus if they have symptoms or have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19. Reach out to me as soon as possible if you become ill or need to isolate or quarantine, in order to make alternate plans for how to proceed with the course. You are strongly encouraged to communicate with me concerning your illness and the anticipated extent of your absence from the course (either in-person or remote). I will work with you to provide alternative ways to complete your course work.

Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison's community of scholars in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review. For more information, refer to studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/. Note that you need not intend to plagiarize in order to do so. You are guilty of plagiarism if you represent the ideas of others as your own or if you present, as new, ideas derived from an existing source regardless of intending to do so.

Special Accommodations

McBurney Disability Resource Center syllabus statement: "The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus

life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.”

<http://mcburney.wisc.edu/facstaffother/faculty/syllabus.php>

Diversity & Inclusion

Institutional statement on diversity: “Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.” <https://diversity.wisc.edu/>

Late Work Policy

Late assignments will not be accepted, except for certain unusual, extremely good reasons. If you know that you won't be able to hand in an assignment, please contact me asap about it.

Class Etiquette

The use of all laptops will be provisionally allowed in this class. However, there is a lot of research that suggests the use of laptops in class has a negative impact on learning outcomes. See here, for instance: <http://tinyurl.com/laptopsarebad>. So while I will allow laptops, I ask you to carefully consider whether using one is indeed necessary. It should go without saying that you should not be using your laptops for any unrelated activity. This means no texting, tweeting, facebooking, instagramming, receiving a telegraph, sending smoke signals, etc. I reserve the right to change the laptop policy at any time. The use of cell phones is prohibited in class.

Course Calendar and other miscellaneous remarks

You will find the course calendar on the next page. You will notice a column for both “assigned readings” and for “suggestions.” These suggestions are truly optional and may consist of anything from a short video or podcast of relevance to a secondary reading of interest. I have them on the syllabus for your benefit, but, I emphasize, they are optional.

Here are a few more resources that you might find helpful: [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) (like a comprehensive Wikipedia for philosophy, high level), [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) (same, lower quality, but more accessible), [Philosophy Bites](#) (Podcast with great interviews with philosophers).

Note: The below schedule is tentative, and subject to change. I will inform the class of any changes in lecture and by posting an announcement on Canvas.

Course Calendar Key

ER = Extra Reading

OR = Online Reflection

CA = Critical Assessment

LOGIC = Logic Worksheet

Sample Weekly Schedule

Sundays by 12pm	Conversation Starters complete their discussion post
Mondays by 12pm	All students complete their two responses
Monday by 5pm	Greg will have completed responding to student discussion
Tuesdays by 5pm	All students complete responding to Greg's questions
Tuesdays by 5pm	Group A students submit their question for the day's reading
Tuesdays at 7:50pm	Lecture
Wed 1:30-3:30PM	Greg holds office hours on BBCollaborate/Zoom
Thursdays by 5pm	Group A students submit their question for the day's reading
Thursdays at 7:50pm	Lecture
Fridays and Saturdays	TRY TO PUSH PHILOSOPHY OUT OF YOUR MIND (BUT FAIL)

Course Calendar

Date	Content	ONLINE	Assigned Reading	Suggestions
September 3 rd	Introduction to Philosophy and Philosophical Methodology	ER1		
September 8 th			Christina, "Are We Having Sex Now or What?" (C)	Examined Life: Cornel West
September 10 th			Danaher, " The Gamer's Dilemma "	David Foster Wallace: This is Water
September 15 th	<i>"What is philosophy? What kinds of questions do philosophers ask?"</i>	LOGIC	Wi-Phi: Deductive Arguments & Implicit Premises	Logical Fallacies
September 17 th	<i>"How do I think clearly about difficult problems?"</i>		Collingwood, "Philosophy as a Branch of Literature" (C)	Concepcion, "How to Read Philosophy" (C)
September 22 nd	Epistemology	OR1	Ayer, "What is Knowledge?"	Wi-Phi: Theory of Knowledge & The Value of Knowledge
September 24 th			CA1	Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy: First Meditation"
September 29 th		Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy: Second Meditation"		
October 1 st		OR2		Blackburn, "The World" (C)
October 6 th			Hume, On Miracles (C)	
	<i>"What can we know about the world?"</i>			
	<i>"How can we know if the world is as it seems?"</i>			

October 8 th	Philosophy of Religion <i>"Does God exist? What would count as evidence for God's existence?"</i> <i>"How can God be all good and yet allow such evil in the world?"</i>	ER2	Anselm and Gaunilo , "The Ontological Argument"	Crash Course: Anselm
October 13 th			Paley , "Natural Theology"	Crash Course: Intelligent Design
October 15 th		CA2	White , "The Argument From Cosmological Fine Tuning" (C)	
October 20 th			Swinburne , "Why God Allows Evil"	Crash Course: The Problem of Evil
October 22 nd		Meta and Normative Ethics <i>"Is morality objective?"</i> <i>"Why should I be moral?"</i> <i>"Who or what determines what is right and what is wrong?"</i>	OR3	Rachels , "Must God's Commands Conform to Moral Standards?"(C)
October 27 th	Shafer-Landau , "Ethical Relativism" (C)			Appiah , "Moral Disagreement" (C)
October 29 th	ER3		Mill , "Utilitarianism"	Wi-Phi – Utilitarianism: Part 1 & Part 2 , Pojman , "Assessing Utilitarianism"
November 3 rd		Kant , "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals"	O'Neill , "Kant's Ethics"	
November 5 th	Freedom of the Will and Moral Responsibility <i>"What is free will?"</i> <i>"Can our actions be free if all events are predetermined?"</i> <i>"When is justifiable to hold people morally responsible for their actions?"</i>	OR4	Norcross , "Puppies, Pigs, and People" (C)	Crash Course: Non-Human Animals
November 10 th			Nagel , "Free will"	Waking Life: Free Will
November 12 th		CA3	Stace , "Free Will and Determinism"	Crash Course: Compatibilism
November 17 th	Frankfurt , "The Principle of Alternative Possibilities"			
November 19 th	ER4	Strawson , "Luck Swallows Everything" (C)	Crash Course: Moral Luck , The Atlantic: Why Luck Matters	
November 24 th		Singer , "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"	Examined Life: Peter Singer	
November 26 th	Philosophy of Mind <i>"What is the mind? Is the mind a physical thing?"</i> <i>"What kinds of things have minds? Could a robot have a mind?"</i>	OR5	THANKSGIVING BREAK	
December 1 st			Churchland , "The Mind-Body Problem"	Philosophy Bites: David Papineau on Physicalism
December 3 rd			Turing , "Computing Machinery and Intelligence"	Radiolab: The Turing Problem
December 8 th			Searle , "Do Computers Think?"	Short Film: They're Made out of Meat
December 10 th			Nagel , "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?"	Interview: Chalmers on Consciousness

FINAL PAPERS DUE ON CANVAS BY 11:59PM ON December 18th