

Introduction to Philosophy

Spring 2024

PHIL102-01 T/R 2:30-3:45, 336 Hollenbeck Hall

PHIL102-02, T/R 9:30-10:45, 332 Hollenbeck Hall

Course Description:

This course is an introductory examination of the basic areas of philosophy, addressing questions like the following: How do we know if an action is right or wrong, and are any actions universally wrong? Is "beauty" really only in the eye of the beholder, or are there objective standards in the visual, musical, and literary arts? What sorts of things exist, for instance, do any non-physical things (such as minds, souls, or spirits) exist? Do we have free will, or are our behaviors and thoughts determined by chemical and physical events in our brains? Is knowledge possible and, if so, how do we know what we know? And is there a genuine difference between reasoning and coercion, between persuasion and manipulation, and how can we tell? Every year. 4 credits.

Instructor: Dr. Kelley Annesley

Instructor email: annesleyk@wittenberg.edu

Office location: Hollenbeck Hall 323

Textbook:

None! There is no required textbook for this course. All required readings will be made available via Moodle, or via paper copy by request. All assigned readings are required, and should be read and digested by the class period for which they are assigned.

Office Hours:

Wednesdays 2-4pm, Thursdays 4-5pm, and by appointment.

Course Schedule

****Our course schedule is tentative—all readings, topics and informal assignments are subject to change, and we may take more or less time than scheduled to address the topics listed below, depending on our unique class pace. Any updates will be communicated via email and posted on Moodle. You are responsible for following the new syllabus once it is updated and sent out. Days with content marked TBA will be determined in accordance with student interest.*

Unit 0: Introductions and Arguments

January 9: *Introduction to Introduction to Philosophy*

Reading due:

- Syllabus, including course schedule and policies

Unit 1: What Ought I Do (or Not Do)?

January 11: *Argument and Argumentation*

Reading due:

- Excerpt from Feldman's *Reason and Argument*

- “Cultural Relativism,” Gensler.

Homework due:

- Informal Assignment 1:
 - Which of Feldman’s examples and/or arguments do you find most interesting (as in thought-provoking or objection-provoking), and why?
 - Note at least two questions you have about the Gensler reading, from concepts to vocabulary. These will serve as the springboard for our class discussion.
- Introductory Survey

January 16: *What are normative ethical theories, and what are they for?*

- **Reading due:**
 - Excerpt from Schafer-Landau “Fundamentals of Ethics.”

January 18: *Is it permissible to eat animals?*

- **Reading due:** Norcross, “Puppies, Pigs, and People...”
 - Informal Assignment 2: In your own words, summarize Norcross’ main thought experiment, and what he wants us to take away from that thought experiment.

January 23: *What ought I to do about climate change, and why?*

Reading due:

- Sinnott-Armstrong, “It’s Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations.”

Jan 25: *How else can we argue for a duty to mitigate climate change?*

Reading due:

- Appiah, “What will future generations condemn us for?”
- Hill, “Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments.”
 - **Required: PDF p. 1-10. Recommended: whole article**

Jan 30: *How do I write philosophically? P. 1*

Homework due:

- Informal Assignment 3: What have you noticed about writing in a philosophical style from the pieces we have read so far? What kinds of choices do you notice philosophers making to make themselves clear to their audience?

February 1: *How do I write philosophically? P. 2*

Homework due:

- Paper 1 draft due at class time

February 6: *Ought humans have children?*

Reading due:

- <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/persons-of-interest/the-case-for-not-being-born> (Also available via Moodle.)

Homework due:

- Informal Assignment 4: Is it morally wrong to have children? Why or why not? Has Benatar's view changed your mind at all?

Unit 2: Who am I, and am I like a machine? Am I simulated?

February 8: *Can we know we're **not** living in a simulation?*

Reading due:

- Excerpts from Descartes' Meditations

February 13: *Does this mean we **are** living in a simulation?*

Reading due:

- Excerpt from Bostrom, "Are We Living in a Computer Simulation?"

Homework due:

- Paper 1

February 15: *Am I the same person I was when I was born?*

Reading due:

- **Required:** Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Personal Identity: <https://iep.utm.edu/person-i/#H3> (Sections TBD)
- Recommended: Locke, John (1694) "On Personal Identity," excerpt from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

Homework due:

- Informal Assignment 5: What explains why you're the same person you were when you were born? Physical continuity? Psychological continuity? Something else? Or, do you deny that you're the same person you were when you were born? Pick your position, and provide a two-sentence defense of your view, based on the considerations presented in the reading.

February 20: *What's the relationship between minds and brains?*

Reading due:

- Princess Elisabeth-Rene Descartes Correspondence

Homework due:

- Informal Assignment 6: Note at least two questions you have about the assigned reading.

February 22: Exam 1

February 27: No class, FIRE week

February 29: No class, FIRE week

March 5: No class, Spring Break

March 7: No class, Spring Break

March 12: *What is consciousness?*

Reading due:

- Excerpt from Nagel, "What is it like to be a bat?"
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGYmiQkah4o>

March 14: *Can machines be intelligent? Or conscious?*

"Reading" due:

- "The Chinese Room Experiment - The Hunt for AI" BBC video.
- "The Turing Test: Can a Computer Pass for a Human?" TED-Ed w/Alex Gendler
 - **Recommended reading:**
 - "Can Machines Think?" Daniel Dennett

Homework due:

- Informal assignment 7: Imagine you're one of the people asking a question in the Chinese Room thought experiment, and you decide to try to run the Turing Test. Would your interactions pass the Turing Test? Why or why not? If yes, what should that make us think about the Turing Test and/or the Chinese Room thought experiment?

March 19: *Can we simulate what makes life worth living?*

- **Reading due:** Nozick, "The Experience Machine"
 - Informal Assignment 8: What would you lose, if you plugged into the experience machine? In your view, would you lose anything valuable if you plugged into the experience machine?

Unit 4: Do the choices I make matter?

March 21: *What is free will?*

- "Free Will and Determinism," Ted Sider.

March 26: *Do we have free will? How can we find out?*

- "Do We Have Free Will?" Libet.

Homework due:

- Informal assignment 9: Does Libet's experiment tell us that we don't have free will? Why or why not?

Unit 5: How does the Internet affect our rational lives?

March 28: *What should I do when I encounter disagreement?*

Reading due:

- Excerpt from Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreements"

Homework due:

- Paper 2 draft

April 2: *What is the credibility economy, and why does it matter?*

Reading due:

- Excerpt from Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*

Homework due:

- Informal Assignment 10: What is epistemic injustice? What's an example of epistemic injustice you've seen or encountered in your own life?

April 4: *Ought we to deplatform harmful or problematic ideas?*

Reading due:

- Neil Levy: "Why No Platforming is Sometimes a Justifiable Position."
<https://aeon.co/ideas/why-no-platforming-is-sometimes-a-justifiable-position>

Homework due: Final paper draft due

April 9: Content review & writing workshop

Homework due:

- Informal Assignment 11: TBA based on need

Unit 6: It's up to us!

April 11: TBD in accordance with student interest.

Homework due:

- In accordance with the topic & readings chosen, this unit will contain 2 informal assignments (INF 12 & 13)

April 16: TBD in accordance with student interest

April 18: TBD in accordance with student interest

April 23: Exam 2

April 25: Last day of class, content and paper review

Homework due: TBD

- Final Paper & Required Reflection due **April 29 @ 11:59pm** via Moodle

Possible topics for our final unit:

- Aesthetics: questions about beauty, and the value of beauty. Eg. is beauty human-independent? Or human-dependent?
- Free will and moral responsibility: how does whether we have free will affect whether we can be held morally responsible for our actions?
- Justice, Racial Justice
- Consent: what is consent? Why does it matter, and in what situations?
- Cheating: is academic cheating or cheating in sports morally wrong? Is it wrong in any sense? Why or why not?
- Reasoning: Given some scientific studies about human cognition and rationality, is it possible for us to form opinions rationally?

- Applied ethical issues such as:
 - Do we have a duty to give to charity? If so, when, and how much?
 - Do we have a moral obligation to vote? Or otherwise participate in our democracy?
 - Professional ethics, i.e. engineering ethics, nursing ethics
- Epistemic issues such as:
 - Belief in misinformation and conspiracy theories
 - More on any of our previous topics

Course Policies

Course Learning Objectives:

Upon completing this course, students will be able to...

- 1) Feel comfortable thinking critically and asking critical questions
- 2) Write strong, well-supported arguments in a concise, clear, philosophical style
- 3) Understand and appreciate the motivating questions and potential answers in important debates and disagreements in historical and contemporary philosophy
- 4) Apply concepts from various philosophers and philosophical subfields to new contexts
- 5) Students will write effectively, considering audience and purpose
- 6) **LO10: Students will analyze problems, issues, or representations using knowledge, theories and/or methods appropriate to the humanities.**
- 7) **LO2: Students will write effectively, considering audience and purpose.**

Course Assessments:

Quizzes: Quizzes will be given at the instructor's discretion, **without prior notice**, and will be completed in-class. Quizzes will focus on your comprehension of the assigned readings and other key class concepts. Quizzes will be timed and short, and therefore closed note/closed book. These will ensure that students are following along with course material, which will facilitate success on papers and in class discussion.

Exams: There are two exams planned for this semester. Both exams will focus on short essays, and are meant to test your skills and competence writing in a philosophical genre, as well as your mastery of the concepts and content covered in the course.

Informal Assignments:

The purpose of informal assignments is to give you practice writing concisely in a philosophical style, and to help you to gather your thoughts prior to class to help facilitate class discussion. They are graded on a complete/incomplete basis—if you complete the assignment and turn it in via Moodle 30 minutes before class begins on the day it is due, you will receive full credit. If you are interested in feedback on or have questions about your informal assignments, you are welcome to stop by office hours or send me an email. If these assignments are not being engaged with in good faith, they will not only receive a zero, but will be replaced by quizzes and other forms of writing assignments.

Attendance and participation:

Attendance and participation is an important part of your grade in this course, and are also a crucial part of everyone's success in the course. Attendance and participation is graded holistically, and will be input as a letter grade. Significant absences and/or lack of participation will impede your ability to engage with the content of the course. Absences will of course be excused in case of illness or emergency, but only after a conversation with me in person or via email about the absence.

Participation in this course is not measured *merely* by the amount of time spent speaking in class or the number of classes during which you speak, though speaking in groups and in class is an important part of the participation and attendance grade; active listening, preparation for class, and participating in discussions are all required for full marks in the participation and attendance category. If you have any concerns about participating adequately in class, please feel free to contact me.

You may miss up to two classes without an excuse without affecting your grade for participation and attendance. If you miss more than 6 classes without communicating with me about your reasons for being absent, you will receive a 0 in the attendance and participation category.

Extensions:

I am always happy to work with you if circumstances arise that get in your way of doing and turning in your best work. But, it is crucial that, except in the case of genuine emergencies or other unforeseen circumstances, you let me know that you need an extension **at least 24 hours before the due date of a specific assignment.**

Papers:

We will write two papers in this course. Prompts for the papers will be distributed at least one week before the optional draft due date. Prompts will include a detailed description of expectations for the paper. A draft is required for each paper, and the requirements for drafts will be discussed in class, and will receive feedback. I also encourage you to schedule a time to meet with me in office hours (or outside office hours) to discuss this feedback and strategies as you move forward on the paper. At least one of the papers will be a thesis driven, argumentative paper where you will be required to construct an original argument in favor of a philosophical thesis. The first paper can be re-written and re-graded for a grade as high as an A, regardless of the original grade.

Late work:

Late informal assignments will not be accepted, except in cases of emergency or otherwise unavoidable absences. If this applies, please contact me in order to have the late penalty waived, and to make up the work missed in class.

For papers, for each day the assignment is late results in a 1/3 grade penalty. (For example, if the paper earned an A, but is turned in after the deadline, but on the day of the deadline, it will earn an A-. If the paper is two days late, it will earn a B+ ... etc.) Turning in a draft late will accrue a late penalty for the final paper.

If you suspect that you cannot turn in an assignment by the deadline, it is crucial that you reach out to me ahead of time to arrange an extension. Except in cases of true emergencies, it is unlikely that late penalties for work turned in after the deadline will be waived without a previously arranged extension.

Expectations for Time Outside of Class:

In this course, students should expect to spend *at least twice as much time out of class doing work for each course as they spend in class.* Readings are assigned for almost every course period. You need not approach each reading aiming to completely

understand on your first read– we will discuss this, and strategies for reading philosophical articles– in detail on the first day of class. Informal assignments are designed to guide your reading, and should not be longer than a few sentences. Papers and paper revision will take more time and concerted effort.

Additional Direct Instruction: Students will also engage in an average of one hour a week of out-of-class direct instruction. This hour outside of class will consist of meeting with me during office hours, discussing writing feedback with your instructor and peers, and attending events held by the university related to philosophy, including this semester’s philosophy conversation series. I will notify you of qualifying events, and we will discuss expectations for attending those events in class.

Grading Scheme:

Out of 1,000 possible points:

Attendance and participation: 200
Informal assignments & in-class writing: 150
Paper 1: 200
Exam 1: 100
Paper 2: 200
Exam 2: 150

Grading Scale:

Your final grade in this class will be assigned using letter grades A-F:

940 - 1000 = A	730 - 760 = C
900 - 939 = A-	700 - 729 = C-
870 - 899 = B+	670 - 699 = D+
830 - 869 = B	630 - 669 = D
800 - 829 = B-	600 - 629 = D-
770 - 799 = C+	Below 600 = F

Grades on papers will be assessed using a letter grade, and will be input as that letter grade’s total point equivalent.

Instructor Communication:

I welcome it! Please feel free to stop by office hours any time, or to schedule another time to meet with me outside office hours if my regularly scheduled hours don’t work for you. Please also feel free to send me an email with any questions you have and I will get back to you as soon as possible. I always aim to respond within 24 hours during the work week. I do not guarantee a response over the weekend. I do not respond to Moodle messages.

****Important notes:**

- 1) I do not guarantee a response to emails about assignments or exams within 24 hours of the due date for that assignment. For example, our first paper will be due by class time on February 13

So, I will not guarantee a response to questions related to the paper starting at our regular class meeting time on February 12.

- 2) **I welcome talking about feedback and grades, but I will address questions on feedback and grades only once you have read through the feedback thoroughly, and once 24 hours have passed since you received the feedback.**
- 3) I am also happy to give feedback on drafts of papers, in addition to the more formal optional draft feedback. But, this feedback will only be given via an office hours meeting (during my regular office hours or during a meeting made by appointment). I do not guarantee or generally offer additional written feedback.

Email Etiquette:

- For maximum clarity and efficacy, please be sure to include all of the following components in emails (to all professors/instructors/staff!), in this order:
 - A greeting (e.g. "Dear Dr. X, Hi Dr. X, Dr. X")
 - A message communicated concisely in complete sentences
 - A signature (e.g. Best, [Your Name], Sincerely, [Your Name], Thanks [Your Name], etc.)

Electronic Devices:

Devices will be allowed for **proper use** in class. You have a good sense already about what counts as proper use. Because this class is small and discussion based, your improper use of electronic devices will distract your classmates, and impair your ability to participate in class and understand course material. Improper use of electronics during class, especially cell phones, **will result in a deduction of your participation/attendance grade.**

I also reserve the right to instate a ban on **all** electronic devices in the case of widespread improper use. In the case of a blanket ban on devices, exceptions will be granted for those with confirmation of need or disability accommodations, or individual permission granted after a conversation with me. I'm happy to talk through any questions about device use on an individual basis!

Respect:

I expect that we will discuss issues on which we disagree, and will have strong opinions about those disagreements. It is absolutely crucial that our disagreements are respectful. Respectful engagement with our peers includes actively listening, refraining from distracting behaviors in class, taking others seriously, and respecting each others' time.

Inclusivity:

Please know that this classroom respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities, and that I invite you to talk with me about any concern or situation that affects your ability to complete your academic work successfully.

Content warning:

Please note that we will be discussing some controversial and potentially upsetting material as a part of this course. If you have any concerns about this content or anything else on the syllabus, please contact me as soon as possible.

Academic Honesty:

Any form of academic dishonesty is unacceptable in this course; it will not be tolerated. This includes (but is not limited to) plagiarizing by failure to include proper citations on a written work, cheating on assignments, and acquiring pre-written essays. Please ensure that you are familiar with Wittenberg's code of academic integrity, which you can read at the following link:

<https://www.wittenberg.edu/sites/default/files/media/honorcouncil/CodeOfAcademicIntegrity-Rev2022.pdf>. If you have any questions on what constitutes academic honesty, or especially any questions about how to cite properly (and when citations are required), please feel free to get in touch with me.

Addendum: Any use of ChatGPT or other generative AI constitutes academic dishonesty in this course. Using these resources to assist you in writing in this class takes away from the chance to develop proficiency with the crucial learning outcomes of the course. If and when generative AI is allowed, I will explicitly let you know, and it will be indicated in an assignment prompt. If you are found to have used generative AI at any stage of the process for assignments where it is not allowed, you will receive a 0 and will be reported for a violation of the academic integrity code. We will discuss in class further reasons to avoid using generative AI in this course, and we will also discuss in what senses generative AI is and is not "AI"!

On Campus Resources:**Accessibility and ADA Accommodation**

Wittenberg University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, learning, chronic health, physical, hearing, vision and neurological, or temporary medical conditions, etc.), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, you must register with the Accessibility Services office by emailing accessibilityservices@wittenberg.edu. You can also find information on the Accessibility Services webpage found at www.wittenberg.edu/success. Please note that services are confidential, may take time to put into place, and are not retroactive. The Accessibility Services Office is located in the COMPASS: Sweet Success Center, Thomas Library, on the first floor.

Counseling Services:

Please check out the following website to see what is available to you in terms of on-campus counseling services: <https://www.wittenberg.edu/administration/healthwellness/tiger-counseling-services>. The counseling center is a fantastic resource for many different issues related to university life.

Writing Center:

The writing center is an excellent place to get more support on your writing projects, like the papers we will be working on in this class. For more information, and to make an appointment for writing assistance, check out the following link:
<https://www.wittenberg.edu/administration/writingcenter>

Syllabus Revision Policy:

The instructor reserves the right to change ***any content on the syllabus and/or course policies, including grading scheme and course assignments at any time during the semester.*** Changes will be announced in class, and a new syllabus/course policy document will be distributed via email and via Moodle if and when they are made.