

Introduction to Philosophy

Syllabus (v1)

Course Info

Course Name & Number: Intro to Philosophy (01:730:103, Section 04)

Instructor: Richard Fry, richard.fry@rutgers.edu

Meeting Time: M/W, 6:10-7:30, Academic Building, Rm. 1180 (College Ave.)

Office Hours: M/W 4:20-5:20PM, Miller Hall 108 (College Ave), and by appointment

Course Website: available through <https://canvas.rutgers.edu>

Course Description

Philosophy asks us to come to see more clearly both how our lives are and how they could be. We will use a number of different philosophical readings and fictional stories to jump-start our thinking about our selves and the wider world around us. The media we look at will serve as a starting point for conversations about minds in humans, animals and machines, justice in the law and government, as well as personal identity and death. You will be assessed primarily through written papers. No antecedent familiarity with philosophy is required or expected.

Learning Goals

- Core curriculum learning goals met by this course:
 - (AHo) Students will be able to examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.
- Departmental learning goals met by this course:
 - Develop the ability to accurately and fairly present others' views.
 - Improve your analytical reading and writing skills.
 - Improve your ability to analyze, evaluate, and construct arguments.
- Other learning goals for this course:
 - Use philosophical texts to introduce you to important philosophical problems and positions.
 - Cultivate your own thinking about central problems in philosophy, especially as those issues bear on your own life.
 - Develop essential life skills such as time management, communication when encountering difficulties, and thoughtful engagement with others.

Required Texts

- All course readings will be made available through Canvas.
 - You are required to bring these readings to class.

Policies

Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism

- You are expected and required to uphold standards of academic honesty.
- Plagiarism of ideas or words is unacceptable.
- Confirmed academic dishonesty will result in automatic failure of the course.
- Familiarize yourself plagiarism is and academic dishonesty and Rutgers's policies:
 - <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>,
 - https://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/avoid_plagiarism
 - <https://wp.rutgers.edu/academics/undergraduate/plagiarism>

Personal Conduct

- You are responsible for treating your classmates with respect and courtesy.
 - In addition to the norms outlined below, it also means arriving on time and being prepared.
- Students are expected to attend all classes
 - If you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. This system will automatically email me.
- *You are responsible for helping to foster a safe and productive learning environment.*
 - Some of the topics we will address this semester can provoke powerful emotions, so be mindful of how topics under discussion may differently impact members of the class.
 - This course adheres to the Philosophy Departments policy on norms of discourse: <https://philosophy.rutgers.edu/about-us/discourse>

Laptops, Tablets and Phones

- *t.b.d.*

Accommodations

- Students needing accommodations should follow the procedures available at <https://ods.rutgers.edu>

Grades

- **LATE WORK:** For each 24 hours late after the due date for a piece of written work is submitted, 3% will be subtracted from whatever grade it earns.
 - All work more than a week late will receive no more than 70%.
- **EXTENSIONS:** If you need an extension for written work, email me with a brief description of your situation.

- If I approve an extension, we will work out an appropriate timeframe.
- Extensions must be requested at least 24 hours before the assignment is due.
- **ANONYMOUS GRADING:** The papers for this course will be graded anonymously.
 - Work submitted through Canvas should *not* have your name in the text or the filename.
 - Failure to properly anonymize your submission will result in a 10% penalty to your grade.
- **GRADE APPEALS:** If you believe your work deserves a different grade than it received, you may ask *in writing* for reconsideration.
 - Submit this request *within one week* but no sooner than *one day after* your work is returned to you.
 - Your written request must explain *why* you believe the work deserves a different grade.
 - Please note that if a change is made, the new grade may be either higher or lower.

Changes

- I reserve the right to change any part of this syllabus at any time.
- Changes will be announced in class and a new version of the syllabus posted to Canvas.

Assignments and Assessment

More details about these assignments will be distributed online and in class throughout the semester.

Short Papers - 4x @ 15% each - 60% total

- Short break-downs of arguments and positions you've been asked to examine
- The goal is to make both the structure and the individual claims of the argument clear
 - You will also consider and rebut an objection
 - You will not merely report opinions or personal experience
- These papers will be due **February 17th, March 23rd, April 6th, and April 25th**
- More details about how to do this, the format we'll use, and how they will be graded will be distributed soon

Reflections - 2x @ 10% each - 20% total

- A short letter to a friend connecting themes from the course with your experience
- Each of these papers will be worth 10% of your final grade
- Instructions and a rubric will be distributed later in the semester
- These reflections will be due **Friday, March 6th** and **Monday, May 4th**

Daily Participation Questions - 25x - 20% total

- In lieu of reading quizzes or exams, you will be given one question to answer at the beginning of each class session
 - These questions may be short answer, multiple choice, true/false, etc.
- Questions will only be available in class for the first five minutes of class
- These questions are designed to (1) ensure that you've brought the readings for the day and (2) get us started thinking about the course material for our class discussion
- Of the 25 questions, 20 of them will count toward your final grade

Course Calendar

with Topics, Readings and Assignments

*Read the material listed before the class-day listed.
Bring the material listed for a day to class that day.*

0: Introductions: What's going on here?

22 January - Intro to the Course

Read: OUP, "The Truth about Philosophy Majors"

Read: ScienceDaily, "The Mere Presence of your Smartphone Reduces your Brainpower"

Read: May, "Students are Better Off without a Laptop in the Classroom"

Read: Mills, "Against Laptops & Phones in Class"

Read: Pryal and Jack, "When You Talk About Banning Laptops, You Throw Disabled Students Under the Bus"

27 Jan - Intro to Arguments and Reading Philosophically

Read: Concepción, "Reading as a Philosopher"

Read: Fry, "How to Evaluate an Argument"

Watch: University of Auckland, "How to Evaluate an Argument"

1: Who—or what—is intelligent?

29 Jan - Do animals think?

No reading; instead, think about why it is that you believe that animals can think, reason and feel, if you do, or why it is that you don't, if you don't.

03 February - Are Animals Machines?

Read: Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (excerpt)

05 Feb - Arguments Against Animal Intelligence Continued

Read: Balcombe, "Fishes have Feelings, Too"

Read: Fitzpatrick, "Doing Away with Morgan's Canon" (excerpt)

10 Feb - Corvids and Dolphins

Read: Clayton & Emery, "Corvid Cognition"

Read: de Rohan, "Why Dolphins are Deep Thinkers"

12 Feb - Bees, Octopodes, and the Evolutionary Argument

Read: Chittka and Wilson, "Bee-Brained"

Read: Hunt, "Alien Intelligence: the extraordinary minds of octopuses and other cephalopods"

Read: Yong, "For Smart Animals, Octopuses are Very Weird"

Read: Livni, "Debate Over Plant Consciousness is Forcing us to Confront the Limitations of the Human Mind"

17 Feb - Plants and Stranger Things

Read: Livni, "Debate Over Plant Consciousness is Forcing us to Confront the Limitations of the Human Mind"

Read: Thompson, "Can Plants Think? They could one day force us to change our definition of intelligence"

Read: Jozuka, "A Brainless Blob That 'Learns' and 'Sleeps' Is on Display at the Paris Zoo"

Short Paper #1 due by 11:59PM (midnight)

19 Feb - Machine Intelligence

Watch: CNET, "What is the Turing Test?"

Read: Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" (excerpt 1)

Read: Bisson, "They're Made Out of Meat"

24 Feb - Objections to Turing

Read: Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" (excerpt 2)

26 Feb - Talking Machines? Bah!

Read: Dneprov, "The Game"

Watch: CGP Grey, "How Computers Learn"

02 March - Contemporary AI

Read: Kennedy, "Computer Learns to Play Go at Superhuman Levels Without Human Knowledge"

Read: Dvorsky, "Why it Matters that Poker Pros are Getting Trounced by an AI"

Read: Heaven, "AI Poker Bot is First to Beat Professionals at Multiplayer Game"

04 Mar - What Makes a Person?

Read: Véliz - "The Challenge of Determining Whether an A.I. is Sentient"

Read: Valente, *Space Opera*, ch.13

In Class Watch: *Star Trek: The Next Generation* s2e09, "Measure of a Man"

2: Life, death, etc.

09 Mar - Intelligence, the SAT, and Merit

Read: Zumbun, "SAT Scores and Income Inequality: How Wealthier Kids Rank Higher"

Read: Tabarrok, "The SAT, Test Prep, Income and Race"

Read: Economist, "An Hereditary Meritocracy"

Watch: Vox, "What the SAT Really Measures"

Read: Labree, "Pluck Versus Luck"

Reflection #1 due by 11:59PM (midnight)

11 Mar - Critiques of Meritocracy

Read: Markovitz, "How Life Became a Terrible, Endless Competition"

Read: Mark, "Meritocracy Doesn't Exist and Believing in it is Bad for you"

23 Mar - Workism

Read: Thompson, "Workism is Making Americans Miserable"

Short Paper #2 due by 11:59PM (midnight)

25 Mar - Who am I and How do I Stay me?

Read: Egan, "Learning to be Me"

Read: Perry, *Dialogue on Personal Identity*, "Night 1"

Read: Vance, "Personal Identity"

30 Mar - How Should my Future Death Affect me?

Read: Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus"

Read: Chuang-Tzu, "A Taoist on Death"

01 April - How About Some Immortality?

Read: Tanyi and Karlander, "Immortal Curiosity" (excerpt)

Read: Smuts, "Immortality and Significance" (excerpt)

Read: Jarrett, "Researchers have Investigated 'Derailment' as a Cause and Consequence of Depression"

06 Apr - A Meaningful Life

In Class Watch: *Sports Night* s1e9, "The Quality of Mercy at 29k"

Short Paper #3 due by 11:59PM (midnight)

08 Apr - Achievements and a Meaningful Life

Read: Bradford, *Achievements* (excerpt)

Read: BBC News, "Go master quits because AI 'cannot be defeated'"

13 Apr - Pessimism

Read: Schopenhauer, "On the Suffering of the World"

Read: Baudelaire, "Be Drunk"

15 Apr - Purposiveness

Read: Seneca, "On the Shortness of Life"

20 Apr - Togetherness

Read: Shulevitz, "Why You Never See Your Friends Anymore"

Read: Aschwanden, "Perfectionism is Killing Us"

22 Apr - The Simulation Argument

Read: Bostrom, "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?"

25 Apr - Short Paper #4 due by 11:59PM (midnight)

27 Apr - Living

In Class Watch: *Black Mirror* s3e4, "San Junipero"

29 Apr - After-Living

Read: Banks, *Surface Detail* (excerpts)

Read: Nozick, "The Experience Machine"

In Class Watch: Tom Scott, "Welcome to Life: the Singularity, Ruined by Lawyers"

04 May - Review and Open Question Time

No new reading, but think about the structure, content and assignments of the course. We'll have time to discuss any remaining philosophical issues, your feelings about the course and then there will be time for you to ask me any questions—at all!—that you might have.

Reflection #2 due by 11:59PM (midnight)

Resources

Philosophical Resources

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

<http://plato.stanford.edu>

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy

<http://www.iep.utm.edu>

Tips on Writing a Philosophy Paper

<http://goo.gl/iDzgFb>

Academic Resources

Disability Services (ODS)

<https://ods.rutgers.edu>

(848) 445-6800

Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway

The Office of Disability Services works with students with a documented disability to determine the eligibility of reasonable accommodations, facilitates and coordinates those accommodations when applicable, and engages with the Rutgers community at large to provide and connect students to appropriate resources.

Academic Support

<https://newbrunswick.rutgers.edu/academics/academic-support>

This site has links to help you find your academic advising office, understand degree requirements and your progress toward them, and links to services to help you succeed, like:

Writing Centers (<https://wp.rutgers.edu/writingcenters/writingcenters>)

Learning Centers (<https://rlc.rutgers.edu>)

Program in American Language Studies, for non-native English speakers (<https://pals.rutgers.edu>)

RU1st, for first-generation, underrepresented, and low-income students (<https://diversity.rutgers.edu/ru1st>)

Library Tutorials

<https://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/tutorials>

The library has a number of helpful tutorials to get you started with searching, understanding the difference between scholarly and popular literature, and avoiding plagiarism. Check them out!

Student-Wellness Services

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)

<http://rhscaps.rutgers.edu/>

(848) 932-7884

17 Senior Street, New Brunswick

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA)

<http://vpva.rutgers.edu>

(848) 932-1181

3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 848-932-1181.

Scarlet Listeners

<http://www.scarletlisteners.com>

(732) 247-5555

Free and confidential peer counseling and referral hotline, providing a comforting and supportive safe space.

“Just In Case” Web App

<http://codu.co/cee05e>

Access helpful mental health information and resources for yourself or a friend in a mental health crisis on your smartphone or tablet and easily contact CAPS or RUPD.