

## Introduction to Philosophy Spring 2020

Instructor: David Sorensen

Dates: 1/22-5/4

Location: Ruth Adam Building Room 207

Sessions: MW 3:55 PM - 5:15 PM

email: [dss170@scarletmail.rutgers.edu](mailto:dss170@scarletmail.rutgers.edu)

Office hours: MW 1:00-2:00 (Location TBA) or by appointment

**Required Text:** *Philosophy: Asking Questions--Seeking Answers*

By Stephen Stich and Tom Donaldson, Oxford University Press

ISBN: 9780199329960

Recommended (optional) text: Nagel, T. (2004). *What does it all mean?* : a very short introduction to philosophy. Oxford University Press.

### **I. Course Aims and Outcomes:**

#### ***Aims***

This course is an introduction to Western philosophy: what philosophy is, its objectives, its major areas of focus, and its methods. The course is organized around the study of a number of important questions in philosophy, including the nature of reality, the extent of human knowledge, the relation between the mind and the brain, the existence of god, ethics, and the meaning of life. Throughout the course, we will study a wide range of philosophical theories and arguments developed throughout the history of Western thought.

#### ***Specific Learning Objectives:***

- to understand and appreciate philosophical debates within the Western tradition
- to develop and enhance the student's critical thinking skills
- to properly articulate and defend/critique arguments and viewpoints
- to understand the relationship between philosophy, science, and religion
- to become a clear and effective writer and thinker

#### **Class format:**

Mixture of lecture (PPT), discussion, debates, film excerpts, in-class writing, and group exercises.

### **Course Requirements:**

#### **1. Course readings:**

(a) Required text: 1) *Philosophy: Asking questions—Seeking answers* by Stich and Donaldson

(b) Supplementary readings available on Canvas (go to “pages” and then “reading and homework”)

**1)** You are expected to read the assigned articles and chapters **before** the class session the readings are scheduled for. However, I recommend doing the readings both before and after the class session, as the material may at times be difficult, unclear, or confusing the first time reading it. After having a session discussing the reading, with plenty of opportunity for questions and clarity, the material should be much easier to understand. The tests will

assume that you have understood the readings. If you do not understand them, please send me an email or visit me during office hours.

**(c)** Lecture powerpoints will be made available on Canvas

**2. Course evaluation:**

(a) Exams: There will be one midterm comprised of multiple choice, true or false, short answer, and essay questions.

(b) Low stakes assignments: Canvas quizzes (based on lecture and readings), homework assignments, group work (submitted on Canvas)

**Comprehension questions:** At the end of each chapter (Stich and Donaldson), there are around a dozen questions to test your understanding of the material. I will post homework assignments on Canvas specifying the questions that are due for each session. You will be required to submit at least 8 sets of comprehension questions by the end of the semester. Failure to do so will negatively impact your homework grade.

(d) Paper: There will be one (6-8 page double spaced) paper due near the end of the semester (**November 19<sup>th</sup>**). A term paper prompt can be found in the "Files" section of the Canvas site.

**Grade breakdown:**

Low-stakes assignments (homework, online quizzes): 25%

Midterm: 25%

Final paper: 25%

Final exam: 25%

**Expectations of students:**

Students are expected to carefully read the syllabus, regularly attend class, do the readings, keep notes, and complete all course assignments. Students should also regularly check your email (every day), and log onto Canvas to check for course updates or revised deadlines. If any problems arise, you should contact me ASAP.

**Attendance policy:**

Attendance will be taken daily, but I will not count it towards your grade. However, it is in your best interest to attend class. Missing lots of classes will most likely result in low grades on exams and you won't receive credit for any of the in-class quizzes missed or homework assignments collected.

**Classroom conduct:**

- 1) Please show up on time. I will not repeat information for those who are late.
- 2) Please raise your hands if you'd like to contribute to the discussion or have questions/comments during lecture
- 3) No talking over other students
- 4) Discussion will consist of comments, questions, and objections, not speeches
- 5) Respect other students, even if you disagree with their views
- 6) Be mindful of how your comments may affect others
- 7) Don't play on your phone or disrupt the class

Policy on electronic devices: Laptops will be permitted only for notetaking or reading course materials (e.g. assigned readings, syllabus). Phones may be used for research purposes when permission is granted (e.g. debate preparation).

**Unexplained absences and late work:**

If you are unable to make it to the midterm or final exam, you need to let me know in advance.

For example, if you do not show up for the midterm, and then email me two weeks later asking to make it up, I will probably not allow you to make it up. Similarly, a failure to submit the final paper on time, without contacting me, will likely result in an automatic “F” for that assignment.

### Detailed Course Schedule

	Topic(s)	Readings to be discussed
1/22	Course introduction	Course syllabus <b>E</b>
1/27	Philosophical methodology, the nature of truth	Ch. 1
1/29	Logic and argumentation	Ch. 2 (pgs. 7-13) Pryor articles
2/3	Logic and argumentation II	Ch. 2 (14-27)
2/5	Appearance vs. Reality	Allegory of the Cave by Plato (E)
2/10	The nature of knowledge and justification	Ch. 8
2/12	Skepticism I	Ch. 5 (pgs. 77-83) + Meditations pt. 1
2/17	Skepticism II	Ch. 5 (pgs. 83-91) + Meditations pt. 3
2/19	Knowledge of the external world	Ch. 6
2/24	Philosophy of mind	Ch. 10 (pgs. 179-187) Meditations pt. 2 and 6
2/26	Philosophy of mind II	Ch. 10 (pgs. 197-203) Excerpt from “The Mind Body Problem   Fodor
3/2	Artificial Intelligence I	Excerpt from “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” (E) Screening of Ex Machina
3/4	Artificial Intelligence II	Minds, brains, and programs John Searle (E)
3/9	Midterm	
3/11	Free will I	Ch. 9
3/23	Free will II	The Maze of Free Will (Strawson) Optional: <a href="#">There’s no such thing as free will</a> (The Atlantic)
3/25	Free will III	Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person   Frankfurt
3/30	Existence of God I	Ch. 3
4/1	Existence of God II	Ch. 3
4/6	Existence of God IV	Ch. 4
4/8	Existence of God V	Prepare for in-class debate: Theism vs Atheism
4/13	The Meaning of Life	Ch. 13
4/15	Metaethics	Ch. 12   <b>Paper due</b>
4/20	Normative ethical theories	Ch. 14
4/22	Ethical decision making	Ch. 15
4/27	Applied ethics: Animals	Day 1 & 2 from “Dialogues on Ethical Vegetarianism” (E)
4/29	Applied ethics: Animals II	Day 3 & 4 from “Dialogues on Ethical Vegetarianism” (E) Prepare for in-class debate: Veganism vs. Carnism
5/4	The Value of Philosophy	The Value of Philosophy   Russell

## **Additional Resources:**

If you are having any trouble understanding the concepts or if you would like to learn more about some of the topics, I highly recommend the following two internet encyclopedias. They are peer reviewed by experts in the field and are both accessible and very detailed.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/> *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/> *Internet encyclopedia of philosophy*

**Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy:** *Principles of academic integrity require that every Rutgers University student:*

- *properly acknowledge and cite all use of the ideas, results, or words of others*
- *properly acknowledge all contributors to a given piece of work*
- *make sure that all work submitted as his or her own in a course or other academic activity is produced without the aid of unsanctioned materials or unsanctioned collaboration*
- *obtain all data or results by ethical means and report them accurately without suppressing any results inconsistent with his or her interpretation or conclusions*
- *treat all other students in an ethical manner, respecting their integrity and right to pursue their educational goals without interference. This requires that a student neither facilitate academic dishonesty by others nor obstruct their academic progress*
- *uphold the canons of the ethical or professional code of the profession for which he or she is preparing.*

*Adherence to these principles is necessary in order to insure that:*

- *everyone is given proper credit for his or her ideas, words, results, and other scholarly accomplishments*
- *all student work is fairly evaluated and no student has an inappropriate advantage over others*
- *the academic and ethical development of all students is fostered*
- *the reputation of the University for integrity in its teaching, research, and scholarship is maintained and enhanced.*

*Failure to uphold these principles of academic integrity threatens both the reputation of the University and the value of the degrees awarded to its students. Every member of the University community therefore bears a responsibility for ensuring that the highest standards of academic integrity are upheld.*

**Disability services:** 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 lastly engages with the Rutgers community at large to provide and connect students to appropriate resources (e-mail: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>, phone: (848) 445-6800). Students with disabilities requesting accommodations must follow the procedures outlined at <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/applying-for-services>. Please give your letter of accommodation to me as soon as possible, and we will coordinate the accommodations privately.