

Philosophy 103: Introduction to Philosophy

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Office Hours: Wednesday 2-3
& by appointment

Course Goals:

Welcome to Intro to Philosophy 103! Our goals in this class will be to engage with some big and socially pertinent philosophical questions, interrogate some deeply-held assumptions, and learn some things about constructing logically valid, rigorous arguments along the way. I also hope to give you a taste of what philosophy is like and the main questions philosophers wrestle with to help you decide if philosophy is something you want to learn more about in future semesters and throughout your life.

We'll spend the first few classes getting comfortable with some basic tools of formal reasoning and critical thinking: getting clear on what argument someone's making, whether the conclusion follows from the premises, where its weak points might be, and what additional premises might strengthen it. We're going to be in the business of developing the strongest arguments for various philosophical views as we can so that we can see which theories are best supported by argument. You should find that these skills are useful for reasoning carefully about *any* difficult issue—in politics, in the sciences, and in everyday life—and one big goal of this course is to help us build on these skills to improve our reasoning in a variety of contexts.

Course Structure:

This class is going to involve us together exploring a bunch of philosophical issues and questions rather than me conveying to you a bunch of facts. So, we'll spend a lot of time in class in discussion, and much less time with me lecturing. To that end, it will be important for you to have read and thought a bit about the readings before class time. I'll have some main ideas and themes that I want to draw out of the reading, and some arguments that I want us to discuss, but a lot of the class is going to depend on and be driven by your questions, comments, and objections on our assigned readings.

No textbook will be required. All course readings will be posted on Sakai.

Course Requirements:

Reading and responses: Before each session, you'll post a short response to the reading on Sakai. For your responses, raise one issue from the reading that you are confused or uncertain about, or a substantive point of disagreement. For 4 of your assignments, you'll need to include a logically valid reconstruction of one of the reading's central arguments and a 1-2 paragraph evaluation of one or more of the argument's premises, as I'll show

you in class. You'll get 2 free passes if you forget to or aren't able to write a reflection. Reflections are graded pass/fail. If you make a sincere effort at the assignment, you'll pass. Otherwise, you'll fail. Reading responses should be posted by 8am on class day.

Midterm Paper: There'll be one 1,500 word paper around the middle of the term. I'll give you feedback on this draft and ask you to revise it and submit it for a second (presumably higher!) grade. A complete draft will be due October 31. The final draft will be due November 26.

Final Paper: At the end of the term, you'll write a 3,000 word final paper. This will be due December 21.

Grading:

I'd like to minimize your amount of stress around grades and formal assignments and maximize how much you actually take away from this course, so I aim to give you as much control over your final grades in this class as possible, within reason.

Here's how grading will work.

Reading responses:	20%
In-class participation:	10%
Midterm paper draft + midterm paper rewrite + final exam or paper: (The best of these grades will count for 40%, 2 nd best for 20%, 3 rd for 10%)	70%

There will also be optional assignments available (argument reconstruction, case studies in the news, attending relevant events). These will contribute extra grades which will be averaged in if and only if doing so would help you.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:

You are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the Rutgers University policies on plagiarism and academic integrity. Penalties for violations of these policies can be severe, including an automatic failing grade for the course and worse. This document provides a comprehensive overview of those policies:

https://slwordpress.rutgers.edu/academicintegrity/wpcontent/uploads/sites/41/2014/11/AI_Policy_2013.pdf

Guidelines for Civil, Inclusive Discourse:

Productive intellectual inquiry requires respectful, constructive discussion that enables all parties to participate fully. Philosophy has an especially vital role to play in facilitating such inquiry, because philosophers have been developing and honing practices of critical discussion over many centuries: techniques for uncovering, justifying, and assessing assumptions lurking behind any claim, from the most obvious to the most controversial.

Philosophy is thus a valuable tool for self-reflection and for communal debate. But like any tool, it must be used well in order to do its job. In our community we expect all participants to observe basic norms of civility and respect. This means stating your own views directly and substantively: focusing on reasons, assumptions and consequences rather than on who is offering them, or how. And it means engaging other's views in the same terms. No topic or claim is too obvious or controversial to be discussed; but claims and opinions have a place in the discussion only when they are presented in a respectful, collegial, and constructive way. There will be no tolerance for abuse, harassment, and disrespect. Students who have concerns about another student's conduct in class should email me directly at tyler.john@rutgers.edu so that we can find a satisfactory solution.

Accessibility:

I'd like this class to be a great experience for all of you, and all of you are entitled to equal access to educational opportunities at Rutgers. Disabled students are encouraged to speak with me if that would be helpful and to avail themselves of the services provided by the Office of Disability Services: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>

Student-Wellness Services

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.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS):

(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901/

www.rhscaps.rutgers.edu/

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):

(848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 /

www.vpva.rutgers.edu/

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.

Schedule:

Here's a tentative schedule for our class, subject to revision throughout the semester depending on what you find interesting, what you want to explore more of, and how fast we end up progressing. New versions will be posted to Sakai as we make changes, and I'll email you with any such updates.

Part I: Philosophy and Argumentation

Wednesday 9/5: Introduction: What is Philosophy? & First look at formal reasoning

Assignment: "A Brief Guide to Logic and Argumentation" in *The Norton Introduction to Philosophy* (no reflection required)

Monday 9/10: Formal Reasoning Part II

Assignment: Practice Problems

Part II: Gods and Atheism

Wednesday 9/12: Gods and Atheism: The Problem of Evil

Assignment: Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism"

Monday 9/17: Gods and Atheism Part II: Fine-tuning

Assignment: Collins, "God, Design, and Fine-tuning"

Wednesday 9/19: Gods and Atheism Part III: God and Moral Perfection

Assignment: Graves, "God and Moral Perfection"

Part III: Mind and Self

Monday 9/24: Consciousness

Assignment: Chalmers, "The Puzzle of Conscious Experience"

Wednesday 9/26: Consciousness

Assignment: Churchland, "The Hornswoggle Problem"

Monday 10/1: Personal Identity

Assignment: Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* Part III

Wednesday 10/3: Personal Identity

Assignment: Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* Part III

Monday 10/8: Buddhism and Personal Identity

Assignment: TBD

Part IV: Value Theory

Wednesday 10/10: How to Write a Philosophy Paper & Ethics Part I
Assignment: Schlottman and Sebo, "Moral Theory"

Monday 10/15: Ethics Part II
Assignment: Schlottman and Sebo, "Moral Theory"

Wednesday 10/17: Eating Animals
Assignment: Gruen, "Eating Animals"

Monday 10/22: Speciesism
Assignment: Singer, "All Animals are Equal"

Wednesday 10/24: Effective Altruism: The Demandingness of Morality
Assignment: Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

Monday 10/29: Effective Altruism: Choosing a Career
Assignment: MacAskill, "Replaceability, Career Choice, and Making a Difference;" Srinivasan, "Stop the Robot Apocalypse"

Wednesday 10/31: Civil and Uncivil Disobedience
Assignment: Schlottman and Sebo, "The Ethics of Illegal Food Activism"
MIDTERM PAPER DUE

Monday 11/5: Civil and Uncivil Disobedience
Assignment: King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Malcolm X, "Speech at the Founding Rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity," Baldwin, "A Talk to Teachers"

Part V: Disagreement and Uncertainty

Wednesday 11/7: Disagreement and Conciliationism
Assignment: Christensen, "Disagreement as Evidence"

Monday 11/12: Moral Disagreement
Assignment: Vavova, "Moral Disagreement and Moral Skepticism"

Wednesday 11/14: Moral Uncertainty
Assignment: Bykvist, "Moral Uncertainty"

Part VI: The Social Construction of Reality

Monday 11/19: Social Construction
Assignment: Haslanger, "Ontology and Social Construction" OR Leon, "What is Social Construction?"

Monday 11/26: Social Construction, Race, and Gender

Assignment: Haslanger, “(What) Are Race and Gender? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?”

FINAL MIDTERM PAPERS DUE

Wednesday 11/28: The Social Model of Disability

Assignment: Barnes, *The Minority Body*

Monday 12/3: The Social Model of Disability

Assignment: Barnes, *The Minority Body*

Wednesday 12/5: TBA

Monday 12/10: TBA

Wednesday 12/12: Wrap Up

