

Philosophy 103: Introduction to Philosophy (Syllabus)

Fall 2019, Section 90 (Online)

Instructor: Christopher Hauser (Email: cmh313@philosophy.rutgers.edu; Phone: 847-525-9092)

Office Hours: There are no set office hours for this course; instead, I have left plenty of time in my schedule to arrange one-on-one meetings as needed. To schedule a one-on-one video chat where we can discuss any questions you have about the course content, policies, or assignments, email me at cmh313@philosophy.rutgers.edu. In your email, please (a) let me know what you'd like to talk about and (b) suggest at least three times at which you could meet to talk.

§1. Course Overview

Are there rational grounds for believing in the existence of God? Is the existence of a morally perfect, perfectly knowledgeable, and all-powerful God compatible with the existence of widespread suffering and injustice? Has modern science shown that we are not free? If not, what is the nature of our freedom? Should we even care about whether or not we're free? What is the nature of the mind? Can the rich and vivid reality of our thoughts and experiences really be explained by facts about the physical components of our brains? What is the difference between knowledge and mere true belief? Do we sense the external world directly, or do we merely know how things appear to us, not how they really are? How can we know that the future will be like the past? Are there objective facts about what is right and wrong, or is morality merely conventional? What does it even mean to say that an act is 'right' or 'wrong'? How should we decide how to live? Can our spending money on luxuries (e.g., going to a movie, buying a new suit, etc.) be morally justified, or do we act immorally when we spend money on luxuries rather than giving it to charity? Do we act wrongly when we buy meat which was produced by inflicting serious pain on animals? Can our practice of abortion be morally justified, or is abortion immoral?

This course invites students to consider some central philosophical questions and to formulate and defend their own answers to these questions after being introduced to the influential answers and arguments of other philosophers. At the same time, this course introduces students to the craft of philosophy and, more generally, effective argumentation. We'll talk about how to pose philosophical questions, how to make distinctions and formulate nuanced positions, how to find flaws in an argument, and how to construct an argument. In doing so, the course aims to sharpen students' critical thinking and writing skills, enabling them to think and communicate with greater clarity, precision, and rigor.

§2. Course Learning Goals

This course has three main learning goals:

1. Students will become familiar with several central philosophical questions and influential ways in which other philosophers have sought to answer those questions.
2. Students will learn the craft of philosophy and, more generally, effective argumentation: students will learn how to identify premises and conclusions, reconstruct other people's arguments, evaluate other people's arguments, and construct and defend their own arguments.
3. Students will have the opportunity to critically examine and rigorously reformulate their own ideas about who and what they are, what they should believe, and how they ought to live.

This course satisfies the following Rutgers SAS core curriculum requirement: 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*).

§3. Required Texts and Technology

To complete this course, you will need

1. **A copy of the course textbook.** The course textbook is Stich & Donaldson, *Philosophy: Asking Questions – Seeking Answers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019) ISBN: 978-0199329960.* You can purchase it from the Rutgers Bookstore, from Amazon, or some other Online Vendor. *If you are not able to get a copy of the textbook in a time to complete the first assignments, let me know as soon as possible. I can give you scans of enough material to get you through the first two weeks.*
2. **Access to a personal computer with a web camera and microphone, as well as a private space to take the final exam on that computer.** (For more details on the Final exam, see §5.5 below).

*[Fun Fact: Stephen Stich (Stich's [website](#)) is a Rutgers Professor, and Tom Donaldson (Donaldson's [website](#)) was once a PhD student at Rutgers. In fact, this textbook emerged from a course they taught together at Rutgers over the course of many years!]

§4. How this Course Will Work

§4.1 The Course Canvas Site

Everything in this course will run through the course's Canvas site. To access the course site, go to <https://canvas.rutgers.edu/> and login using the Red and White Buttons in the upper-right hand corner of your screen. You will need a Rutgers NetID or Email to login. Note that there is a Canvas App which you are encouraged (though not required) to download to your personal devices and use to view the course site.

At the start of the course, here are a few preparatory steps you should take.

1. Ensure your email address is up to date, in your Canvas account Profile (see Updating Your Profile in [Course Tools](#)).
2. Configure your notifications settings, making sure to enable notifications of Announcements and Conferences (see Updating Your Profile in [Course Tools](#)). Course emails may wind up in your spam filter; if so, you can usually stop the problem by adding rutgers.instructure.com to your email's whitelist or exceptions list.

If you do not yet have a Rutgers NetID/Email or have any trouble accessing the course site, please immediately do two things: (1) email me (to let me know) and (2) contact Canvas Help (Email: help@canvas.rutgers.edu; Phone: 877-361-1134).

§4.2 Course Activities

A typical week in the course will center around one Module and will involve the following activities:

1. A First-Take Discussion Forum Post (due Monday evening by 11:59pm EST)
2. A Reading assignment, a Quiz, and a Second-Take Discussion Forum Post (due Wednesday evening by 11:59pm EST)
3. Video Conferences on Monday evenings 9-10pm EST and Thursday evenings 8-9pm EST (these times are tentative and may change based on student availability). I note that Conferences are *optional*, though I strongly encourage frequent participation in Conferences.

In addition to these weekly activities, the course will involve three other kinds of less frequent assignments, namely, (a) Four Exercise assignments, (b) Two Essays, and (c) a Final Exam. More information about all of these elements of the course can be found in **§5. Course Elements** below.

Apart from the Conferences and the Final Exam, everything in this course will be *asynchronous*, which means that you may do the work at any time you wish prior to the due date.

§5. Course Elements

§5.1 Overview of the Course's Elements

The core elements of this course are the following:

1. Thirteen Modules (including 13 Quizzes, 12 First-Take Discussion Forum Posts, and 12 Second-Take Discussion Forum Posts)

2. Four Exercises
3. Two Essays
4. One Final Exam
5. Weekly Video Conferences

In what follows, I discuss each of these items in detail.

§5.2 Thirteen Modules

The course includes 13 modules. Each module covers a distinct piece of the course's content. Each module includes the following pages:

1. **Overview, Activities, and Learning Objectives** – this page introduces you to the material covered in the module, the learning objectives associated with the module, and the activities involved in the module.
2. **First-Take Discussion Forum Post** - this page is where you will complete the First-Take Discussion Forum post for this module. You will be asked to write a short, 4-6 sentence paragraph (~100-150words) in response to a question. Your First-Take Discussion Forum Post for each week will be due by 11:59pm EST on Monday. (Note there is no First-Take Discussion Forum Post for the first week/Module 1).
3. **Readings** – this page tells you what the readings are for this module. Typically, this will consist in one chapter from the course textbook and one supplemental text posted on Canvas. The readings for each week should be completed by **Wednesday evening** (in time for you to take the week's quiz, which is due 11:59pm EST on Wednesday).
4. **Second-Take Discussion Forum Post** - this page is where you will complete the Second-Take Discussion Forum post for this module. You will be asked to write a short, 4-6 sentence paragraph (~100-150words) in response to a question. Your Second-Take Discussion Forum Post for each week will be due by 11:59pm EST on Wednesday. (Note there is no Second-Take Discussion Forum Post for Module 1).
5. **Quiz** – each module has a Quiz associated with it. The quizzes consist of 10 multiple choice questions. The purpose of the quiz is to give you an opportunity to check your comprehension of the readings and, if necessary, go back to review the readings and/or email me with questions. You can use any resources you want to complete the quiz (e.g., your textbook, your notes, etc.) *though you may not copy from another person or have another person help you complete the quiz*. Note that you are allowed to **retake the quiz as many times as you want before the deadline**. Except for the first week, each week's quiz is due by Wednesday 11:59pm EST.
6. **Discussion Board** – this page provides a forum for you to post any questions you have about this module's content. You can also email me directly with your question if you feel more comfortable doing that. Feel free to consult the discussion board to see if other students have already asked your question. And if you notice a question that hasn't been answered by me already and you know the answer, I encourage you to post a response with the answer. It's nice to help one another out! (Rules: you should not post quiz questions on the discussion board or answer questions explicitly about quiz questions;

you may not post answers to Exercises on the discussion board either; however, prior to the Final Exam date, you are encouraged to discuss answers to the Final Exam Study Questions on the discussion boards).

7. **Final Exam Study Questions** – the course’s final exam will consist of 6 questions (you will be required to choose and answer 3 out of these 6 questions). The 6 questions will be drawn from 18 possible questions, all of which are given to you in advance. Each module has 1 or 2 questions associated with it. You can see those questions by clicking on the Final Exam Study Questions link associated with the module. (You are *strongly* encouraged to try to write out answers to these questions as you complete the course; then, when it comes time to study for the final exam, you will have your own study guide!)

§5.3 Four Exercises

The course also includes four Exercise assignments. The four Exercises are designed to help you develop core philosophical/analytical skills, skills which you will need to put to work in your essays. For each Exercise, before completing the Exercise, you will be instructed to read through some Lecture Notes associated with that Exercise. The Lecture Notes will introduce you to the relevant philosophical/analytical skills, provide some examples, and prepare you to complete the Exercise.

§5.4 Two Essays

You will be required to write two 4-6 page (double-spaced) essays for this course. The first essay will be due by 11:59pm EST on **Friday October 18th**. The second essay will be due by 11:59pm EST on **Tuesday December 10th**. More detailed instructions the essays will be provided when we get closer to their due dates.

§5.5 One Final Exam

The final exam will be an **online exam**. It is scheduled for **Tuesday, December 17th**. You may complete the exam anytime on **December 17th between 12:01am-11:59pm EST**. I don’t expect the exam to take more than 90 minutes, but I recommend making sure that you leave a two-hour, uninterrupted timeslot in your schedule so that you can take the exam without feeling rushed.

Your final exam will be taken using ProctorTrack. ProctorTrack monitors you to make sure that you are not using any webpages, computer files, books, or other people while taking the final exam. The software is free and available through the course’s Canvas website, but you will need to have access to a personal computer with a built-in or plug-in web-camera. In order to

take the test, you will also need to be able to use that personal computer in a private, well-lit space on the date of the exam.

If for some reason you will not be able to take the exam on December 17th (e.g., you will be traveling on an airplane that day), I expect that you contact me about this no later than September 17th (two weeks after the course begins). If you do not contact me by this date, I cannot guarantee that I can give you an alternative date to take the test.

As we get closer to the exam date, I will provide you with more information about ProctorTrack and **you will be required to take a test quiz** which will ensure that ProctorTrack is working on your computer and your space is sufficiently well-lit and private.

§5.6 Weekly Video Conferences

Every week I will host two *optional* one-hour video conferences. The tentative plan is to hold these conferences on Monday evening (9pm-10pm EST) and Thursday evening (8pm-9pm EST), though this may change depending on how many students report a scheduling conflict with these times.

I will host these Conferences through the course's Canvas webpage, using the BigBlueButton platform. At these conferences, I'm happy to

- Answer questions about the readings, lecture notes, and other course content
- Answer questions about the Exercises and Lecture Notes associated with the Exercises
- Answer questions and help you work on your Essays
- Answer questions about and help you craft answers to the Final Exam Study Questions
- Discuss anything else pertaining to the course.

Before each Conference, I will send out a reminder about the Conference and, depending on the flow of the course, will often suggest a specific discussion topic for the Conference (e.g., I may say "at the upcoming Conference, I'm happy to help students work on completing Exercise 1" or I may say "at the upcoming Conference, I will review the Final Exam Study Questions for Modules XX").

You are strongly encouraged to attend as many Conferences as you can. Past experience teaching this course has shown that students who participate in the Conferences tend to do better overall in the course.

If you are having trouble accessing a Conference, click the "help" question mark icon at the bottom of the red global navigation menu on the far left of each Canvas page or call/email the Online Learning Help Desk directly (Email: help@canvas.rutgers.edu; Phone: (877) 361-1134)

§6. Grades and Grading Policies

§6.1 Grade Breakdown:

10% Quizzes

10% Discussion Forum Posts

10% Four Exercises (if your Exercises score is lower than your average essay score, I will increase your Exercises score so that it is equivalent to your average essay score; note: I will only do this if you have completed all four Exercises on-time)

20% Essay 1

20% Essay 2

30% Final Exam

§6.2 How I will Grade Your Work (General Scale)

All grades for this course will be based on the following 40 point scale. Each letter grade has three numbers associated with it: a high, middle, and low version of that grade.

A	40, 39, 38	C	28, 27, 26
B+	37, 36, 35	D	25, 24, 23
B	34, 33, 32	F	<23
C+	31, 30, 29		

§6.3 How I will Grade Your Discussion Forum Posts

Each week I will randomly select 1/4 of the students in the class and review the discussion forum posts of those students. Since there are twelve weeks for which you will make discussion forum posts, this means that each of you will be graded on your posts for three weeks (again, which three weeks will be random). I will grade discussion forum posts using the following system (again, based on the aforementioned 40pt scale): 40/40 (outstanding), 38/40 (satisfactory), 33/40 (below satisfactory), and 0/40 (late or not completed). Your overall Discussion Forum Post grade will be an average of the scores you received on the aforementioned three weeks.

§6.4 Late Assignment Policy:

1. Late Quizzes, Discussion Forum Posts, and Exercises will not be accepted. You will receive a 0 on any such assignment. (If the assignment is just a few minutes late, e.g., you turn in it at 12:04am instead of before 11:59pm, it will be up to my discretion whether to consider it late or not).
2. It goes without saying that I will not accept a late Final Exam either. Again, if for any reason you will not be able to take the Final Exam on the scheduled date (Tuesday December 17th) (e.g., you will be traveling on an airplane that day), I expect that you contact me about this no later than September 17th (two weeks after the course begins). If you do not contact me by this date, I cannot guarantee that I can give you an alternative date to take the test.
3. Late Essays will be penalized as follows: I will subtract 1.5pts (using the aforementioned 40pt scale) for each day that the essay is late. For example, if you would have received a 35/40 (B+) but turned in the essay one day late, you would receive a 33.5/40 (B). If it were two days late, you would instead receive a 32/40 (B). In general, I strongly encourage you to complete the essays on time.
4. Special permission to turn in an assignment late will be granted only if you provide documentation/proof of the illness, family emergency, or other serious and unexpected occurrence preventing you from turning your work in on time. If the thing preventing you from turning in the assignment on time is something which you know about in advance, it is my expectation that you will contact me in advance to let me know about the conflict and ask permission to turn in the assignment late.

§6.4 Submitting Assignments

All assignments should be submitted through Canvas, following the instructions associated with that assignment's page on Canvas. **If you aren't sure how to submit an assignment or run into some trouble with Canvas, email the assignment to me. As long as you email it to me before the submission deadline, your assignment will not be considered late.**

§6.5 Academic Dishonesty: Cheating and Plagiarism

It goes without saying that you should not cheat or plagiarize. I will not tolerate any such conduct and will not hesitate to report issues to Rutgers' Office for Academic Integrity. For Rutgers' academic integrity policies, see <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>. I'm always happy to answer questions about this; you'll never get in trouble for asking a question. A general rule of thumb: if you are in doubt, just cite it.

Since this is an online course and some of you are in different time zones, there is no set time for the final exam (you can take it anytime on December 17th). You are expected to not share information about the test questions with other students. In addition to risking a serious

academic sanction, such conduct would be extremely disrespectful and unfair to other students in the course.

§6.6 Turnitin Policy

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the Turnitin.com site.

Students who do not agree should contact the course instructor immediately.

§7 Course Summary

Week	Modules	Assignments Due
Week 1 (9/3-9/6)	Module 1: What is Philosophy?	Module 0 Required Student Survey Quiz 1
Week 2 (9/9-9/13)	Module 2: Some Classic Arguments for the Existence of God	Quiz 2 Module 2 First-Take Discussion Forum Post Module 2 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post
Week 3 (9/16-9/20)	Module 3: The Problem of Evil	Quiz 3 Module 3 First-Take Discussion Forum Post Module 3 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post Exercise 1
Week 4 (9/23-9/27)	Module 4: Other Ways Belief in God Might be Rational	Quiz 4 Module 4 First-Take Discussion Forum Post Module 4 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post Exercise 2
Week 5 (9/30-10/4)	Module 5: Philosophy of Perception (or Can We Trust Our Senses?)	Quiz 5 Module 5 First-Take Discussion Forum Post Module 5 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post Exercise 3
Week 6 (10/7-10/11)	Module 6: Will the Sun Rise Tomorrow? The Problem of Induction	Quiz 6 Module 6 First-Take Discussion Forum Post Module 6 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post
Week 7 (10/14-10/18)	Module 7: What is Knowledge?	Quiz 7 Module 7 First-Take Discussion Forum Post Module 7 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post Essay 1
Week 8 (10/21-10/25)	Module 8: Do We Have Free Will?	Quiz 8 Module 8 First-Take Discussion Forum Post Module 8 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post

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Week 9 (10/28-11/1)	Module 9: How are our Minds Related to Our Bodies?	Quiz 9 Module 9 First-Take Discussion Forum Post Module 9 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post
Week 10 (11/4-11/8)	Module 10: Personal Identity (What Makes You the Same Person Over Time?)	Quiz 10 Module 10 First-Take Discussion Forum Post Module 10 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post Exercise 4
Week 11 (11/11-11/15)	Module 11: Applied Ethics – Charity and Vegetarianism	Quiz 11 Module 11 First-Take Discussion Forum Post Module 11 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post
Week 12 (11/18-11/22)	Module 12: Applied Ethics – Is Abortion Immoral?	Quiz 12 Module 12 First-Take Discussion Forum Post Module 12 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post
Week 13 (Thanksgiving)	None	None
Week 14 (12/2-12/6)	Module 13: Are Objective Truths about What is Right and Wrong?	Quiz 13 Module 13 First-Take Discussion Forum Post Module 13 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post
Week 15 (12/9-12/13)	Final Exam Review	Essay 2