

# INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

## RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

### FALL 2020

#### INSTRUCTOR

Wes Skolits (Wes.Skolits@Rutgers.edu)

#### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides a broad introduction to academic philosophy. This discipline is notoriously hard to define; however, we can say that philosophy—which etymologically derives from two greek words meaning “love of wisdom”—concerns thinking hard about life’s most important questions. Particularly, in this course we will examine the following questions: Do we know there is an external world? Does God exist? How one ought to live? Moreover, we will learn the tools by which philosophers answer these questions.

#### OFFICE HOURS

Office hours are optional, and will take place via Skype, Zoom, or Webex. Please feel free to email me anytime to book an appointment or discuss anything of concern. Please do allow 48 (weekday) hours for a response to emails.

#### COURSE TEXTS

There is no course textbook. PDF copies of the readings are uploaded to Canvas.

#### COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the main areas of philosophy—particularly, epistemology, philosophy of religion, and ethics.
2. To evaluate the arguments for the main positions which we will consider in the above subdisciplines.
3. To write two substantial, argumentative papers in philosophy.

#### EVALUATION

Exams: Final (25%) = 25% total

Papers: 3-5 page paper (15%), 3-5 page paper (15%) = 30% total

Weekly Discussion Board posts: 15 = 20 % total

Weekly Quizzes: 15 = 25 % total

Exams: there will only be a final exam, which will be cumulative.

Papers: there will be two papers of the same length. The information on how to prepare and complete them will be uploaded to Canvas early in the semester.

Discussion Posts: You will be required to write 14 posts in the Discussions section on Canvas.

Weekly Quizzes: There will be weekly quizzes on the readings on Canvas.

Important Dates:

Quizzes: (one each week by Sunday, with the date indicated on the syllabus)

Discussion Forum Posts: (one each week, generally by Sunday but with specific dates indicated on Canvas)

**Paper 1: October 18th**

**Paper 2: December 4th**

**Final: December 15th (Time to be noted on Canvas)**

Note: You'll notice that the readings in this course are short. This is intentional; philosophy is hard, and you should read every assigned article (slowly) twice. Please take the time to follow this requirement. (Additionally, you must watch every assigned unit video, taking notes.)

Finally, this syllabus is not comprehensive, and you are responsible for paying attention to further information that is provided on Canvas and via email.

## GRADING SCALE

> 90.00 A

88.00 - 89.00 B+

83.00 - 87.99 B

80.00 - 82.99 C+

70.00 - 79.99 C

60.00 - 69.99 D

<= 59.99 F

## SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Sept 1-6): Introduce yourself

Tasks:

- Write a discussion post stating your name, major, and why you are interested in philosophy in the indicated Discussion section on Canvas
- Start reading the papers: Jim Pryor, "Philosophical Terms & Methods," "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy"

## I. PHILOSOPHICAL PRELIMINARIES<sup>1</sup>

E.J. Coffman, "Finding, Clarifying, and Evaluating Arguments" (read twice!)

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<sup>1</sup> This schedule is not a contract and is subject to change as per the instructor's judgment.

Reread:

Jim Pryor, "Philosophical Terms & Methods"

Jim Pryor, "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy"

Quiz 1: Coffman/Pryor, by Sept 13

Watch videos 1-6 in the following playlist:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtKNX4SfKpzWFvj7ZF6v0shrCdL0XcdrJ>

## II. SKEPTICISM

Readings:

Rene Descartes, *First Meditation* and *Second Meditation*

Peter Unger, "An Argument for Skepticism"

Douven and Olders, "Unger Revisited"

G.E. Moore, "Proof of an External World"

Barry Stroud, "The Problem of the External World"

Watch Videos 7-13 in this playlist:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtKNX4SfKpzWo1oasZmNPOzZaQdHw3TIE>

Quiz 2: Descartes, by Sep 20

Quiz 3: Unger, by Sept 27

Quiz 4: Douven and Olders by Oct 4

Quiz 5: Moore's "Proof" by Oct 11

Quiz 6: Stroud, by Oct 17

## **PAPER 1 DUE: Oct 18th, 11:55PM (Canvas)**

## III. PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

### THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Readings:

Thomas Aquinas, "The Five Ways"

Conee, Ch 4 "God" in *Riddles of Existence*

William Rowe, "The Cosmological Argument"

- "Religion: Cosmological Argument 1 and 2" or numbers 5-6 on the following playlist:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtKNX4SfKpzWO758QwHqq1pJkbb4LaRZ>

- "Aquinas and Cosmological Arguments" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TgisehuGOyY>)

- Critical review of the above PBS video by Joshua Rasmussen, Notre Dame PhD:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04dUwWsgbvc>

Quiz 7: Aquinas Oct 25

Quiz 8: Conee Nov 1

Quiz 9: Rowe Nov 8

## THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Readings:

Anselm, "The Ontological Argument"

Gaunilo, "On Behalf of the Fool"

William Rowe, "The Ontological Argument"

Conee, Ch 5 "Why Not Nothing?" in *Riddles of Existence (OUP)*

Videos:

- "Anselm and the Ontological Argument" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmTsS5xFA6k>
- Critical review of the above PBS video by Daniel Rubio, PhD Rutgers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEUsLnDfool&t=633s>
- "Anselm's Ontological Argument" [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CP5Lgj9\\_oj8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CP5Lgj9_oj8)

Quiz 10: Anselm, Nov 15

## RATIONALITY OF THEISM

Readings:

W.K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief"

([http://people.brandeis.edu/~teuber/Clifford\\_ethics.pdf](http://people.brandeis.edu/~teuber/Clifford_ethics.pdf))

William James, "The Will to Believe"

(<https://www.mnsu.edu/philosophy/THEWILLTOBELIEVEbyJames.pdf>)

Kelly James Clark, "Without Evidence or Argument"

([http://people.brandeis.edu/~teuber/without\\_evidence\\_or\\_argument.pdf](http://people.brandeis.edu/~teuber/without_evidence_or_argument.pdf))

Videos:

- "The Will to Believe" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzmLXIuAspQ>
- "Faith and Reason" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTPHXNMI9tA>

Quiz 11 Clifford, Nov 22

Quiz 12 Clark, Nov 29

## THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Fyodor Dostoevsky, "Rebellion"

J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence"

Richard Swinburne, "Why God Allows Evil"

Watch videos 1-4 on the following playlist:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtKNX4SfKpzWO758QwHqq1pJkbbba4LaRZ>

Quiz 13: Dec 6

#### IV. ETHICS

Conee, "The Metaphysics of Ethics" in *Riddles of Existence* (OUP)

LaFollete "Theorizing About Ethics"

([http://www.normanrschultz.com/ethics/LaFollette\\_intro.pdf?i=1](http://www.normanrschultz.com/ethics/LaFollette_intro.pdf?i=1))

Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck"

<https://www.iep.utm.edu/ethics/>

Videos 10, 12-19, 26,27 in the following playlist:

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-V8t8beCnnY&list=PLtKNX4SfKpzWO2Yjvkp-hMS0gTI948pIS)

[V8t8beCnnY&list=PLtKNX4SfKpzWO2Yjvkp-hMS0gTI948pIS](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-V8t8beCnnY&list=PLtKNX4SfKpzWO2Yjvkp-hMS0gTI948pIS)

Quiz 14: Conee, Dec 13

Quiz 15: Freebie

**PAPER 2 DUE: Dec 4, 11:55 PM (Canvas)**

**FINAL EXAM: FRIDAY, December 15 (ONLINE)**

#### STUDENT WELLNESS

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/](http://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/](http://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. Disability Services (848) 445-6800 / Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854 / <https://ods.rutgers.edu/> 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.

#### Scarlet Listeners

(732) 247-5555 / <http://www.scarletlisteners.com/> Free and confidential peer counseling and referral hotline, providing a comforting and supportive safe space.

#### HELPFUL PHILOSOPHY RESOURCES

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu>

Dictionary of Philosophy of Mind: <http://philosophy.uwaterloo.ca/MindDict/>

David Chalmers' bibliography of Philosophy of Mind: <http://consc.net/biblio.html>