

Introduction to Philosophy

01:730:103-003

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Syllabus (v1)

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Basic Info

DETAILS

Course Format: Asynchronous Online

Office Hours: Tuesday, 2:00-3:00 and weekly by appointment

- If you plan to come to Tuesday office hours, you must email me beforehand to establish a particular time

Course Website: 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 seminal topics in philosophy, such as intelligence, consciousness, free will, personal identity, death and what makes life worthwhile. 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 readings will be made available through Canvas
- You will also be required to watch several episodes of television programs.
 - These are all available through Netflix, though you can find them elsewhere online, too.
- You will be responsible for securing access to these episodes.

Policies

ACADEMIC HONESTY

- You must uphold standards of academic integrity
 - Plagiarism (of words or ideas) is unacceptable
 - Confirmed academic dishonesty will result in automatic failure of the course.

- Familiarize yourself with what plagiarism and academic dishonesty are, 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 courtesy and respect
 - At a minimum, this means respecting their time and effort by putting in time and effort yourself
- We will struggle with intellectually and emotionally difficult material this semester
 - Just as your classmates owe you careful attention and engagement, you owe those things to your classmates as well
 - Be mindful of how topics under discussion may impact different members of the class differently
- This course adheres to the Philosophy Departments policy on norms of discourse:
 - <https://philosophy.rutgers.edu/about-us/discourse>

ACCOMMODATIONS

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

GRADES

LATE WORK

- There are two types of assignment in this course, papers and participation.
 - Papers will be assessed a -3% penalty per day late, up to ten days late, at which point the penalty stops accruing. (After 10 days, a paper can earn at most 70% credit.)
 - Participation assignments may be completed late, but will be assessed at 1/2 credit, up to one week later. After one week, they cannot be completed for credit.

EXTENSIONS

- If you need an extension for either sort of work, email me with a brief description of your situation
 - If I approve an extension, we will work out an appropriate timeline
- Extensions must be requested at least 24 hours before the assignment is due

- There are many very good reasons for extensions: illness, illness in the family, unexpected child care responsibilities, *etc.*
- Having too much work for other courses is *not* a good reason to request an extension
- Extension requests citing this reason will not be granted

ANONYMOUS GRADING

- The papers for this course will be graded anonymously
- Papers 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 the grade for the paper

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.

GRADE SCALE

- Letter grades will be awarded based on percentage credit earned, according to the following scale:

F	D	C	C+	B	B+	A
<60%	60 - 69.49%	69.5 - 74.49%	74.5 - 79.49%	79.5 - 84.49%	84.5 - 89.49%	>89.5%

CHANGES

- I may need to change any part of this syllabus at any time
- A new, numbered version of the syllabus will be posted to Canvas
- Changes will be announced and explained in course correspondence

Weekly Structure

- This course is *asynchronous*
 - This means that there are no required meetings or fixed meeting times

- Nonetheless, we are involved in this course as a community
 - We are investigating these topics *together*
 - Having recourse to the intuitions, brainpower and hard work of your classmates will improve your learning (and *vice versa*)
- This course is divided into weeklong segments to help coordinate us
 - This makes it easier to focus on particular issues and ideas and how they fit together, and with the course overall
 - Within a given week, you'll still have substantial flexibility about when you do the activities required
- Each week will have a worksheet you'll be expected to complete
 - It will serve as the basis for your weekly participation grade
 - It will tell you what order to reading and watch the materials for the week
 - It will link them together and help explain how they fit into the course
- Each week will have other activities you must complete along the way
 - These will include submitting questions, posting answers, and responding to others on the fora, (ungraded) quizzes, *etc.*
 - I've separated these activities into two sorts, "1st" and "2nd" activities
 - **1st activities** are **due Thursday** before 11:59 P.M.
 - These primarily get you started talking with others or test your understanding of the basics
 - **2nd activities** are **due Saturday** before 11:59 P.M.
 - These activities primarily involve responding to other students or synthesizing what you looked at over the course of the whole week
 - Not every week will have both sorts, but most weeks will
- The four **major papers** for the course are each **due on Sunday** night by 11:59 P.M.
- Overall, this is what a typical week will look like:
 - **Monday:** Read introductory announcement and download the week's worksheet. Start reading/watching/working as instructed by it.
 - **Tuesday-Wednesday:** Keep reading and working!
 - **Thursday:** 1st activities due
 - **Friday:** Keep reading and working!
 - **Saturday:** 2nd activities due
 - **Sunday:** Papers (if any) due

Assignments and Assessment

SHORT PAPERS - 4X @ 18% EACH - 72% TOTAL

- Short break-downs considering reasons for particular views we've looked at in class
- You'll relate the facts of the matter and consider what conclusion those ultimately count in favor of
- These papers will be due on Sept. 20th, Oct. 11th, Nov. 8th, and the time scheduled by the registrar for the final exam, Sunday, Dec. 20th
- More details about how to do this will be given for each individual paper

WEEKLY PARTICIPATION - 14X @ 2% PER WEEK - 28% TOTAL

- Each week you will have several activities that will call on you to engage with authors, your classmates, and me.
- These activities will be assessed primarily—*but not solely*—for completion
- Each week will contribute 2% to your final grade

CLARIFICATION FORA - EXTRA CREDIT - UP TO +5%

- Each week's readings and videos will have separate forums for you to ask and answer clarification questions about the content of those materials
 - Questions like:
 - "I don't understand the claim on page 2. Why does the author say..."
 - "I thought the author was arguing for X, but then they seem to offer reasons against X. What's going on here?"
- You can get extra credit for participating on these fora by asking *and* answering questions.
- Consistent participation over the course of the semester can earn you up to +5% extra credit on your final grade

Course Calendar

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION TO INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

Week 1: What is philosophy? What good is it? How do you 'do' it?

Grob, "Want a Good Job? Major in Philosophy."

Fry, "Fact vs. Opinion"

Uribe, "Believing without Evidence is Always Morally Wrong"

Concepción, "Reading as a Philosopher"

Straub, "Candle Cove"
Smith, "A Theory of Creepiness"

Week 2: A case study in philosophical methods: The Meaning of 'Life'

BBC Bitesize, "Cells to Systems"
Wikipedia, "Life"
Khan Academy, "What is Life?"
Koshland, "Seven Pillars of Life"
Chamary, "A Biologist Explains: What is Life?"
Van Inwagen, *Material Beings*, sec.9 (excerpt)

SECTION 2: THINKING, FEELING, AND MINDS

Week 3: How do we know what thinks?

Brown, "Clever Hans"
Montaigne, "Apology for Raymond Sebond" (excerpts)
Descartes, *Discourse on the Method V* (excerpt)
Fitzpatrick, "Doing Away with Morgan's Canon" (excerpt)

Paper #1 Due

Week 4: Animals that think?

Balcombe, "Fishes Have Feelings, Too"
Woodruff, "The Face of the Fish"
Clayton & Emery, "Corvid Cognition"
De Rohan, "Why Dolphins are Deep Thinkers"
(Watch) CNN, "A Speech Pathologist Taught her Dog, Stella, to Speak"

Week 5: Limits of thinking: biological

Chittka and Wilson, "Bee-Brained"
Borrell, "Are Octopuses Smart?"
Livini, "A Debate over Plant Consciousness is Forcing us to Confront the Limitations of the Human Mind"
Thompson, "Can Plants Think?"
Bender, "A Brainless Blob that 'Learns' and 'Sleeps' is on Display at the Paris Zoo"

Week 6: Limits of thinking: mechanical

Bisson, "They're Made out of Meat"
Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" (excerpt)
Dneprov, "The Game"
Dennett, "Intentional Systems" (excerpt)

Heaven, "A.I. Poker Bot is First to Beat Professionals at Multiplayer Game"

(Watch) Two Minute Papers, "OpenAI Plays Hide and Seek...and Breaks The Game!"

Paper #2 due

Week 7: Vitalism and Consciousness

Pugliucci, "Consciousness is Real"

Véliz, "The Challenge of Determining Whether an A.I. is Sentient"

(Watch) *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, "Measure of a Man" (s02e09)

Dennett, "Vim: Or, How Much is That in Real Money?" (*Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Thinking*, ch.57)

SECTION 3: IDENTITY, DEATH, AND LIFE

Week 8: Personal Identity

Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*, "Night 1"

Vance, "Personal Identity"

Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, "Of Personal Identity" (excerpt)

Melchert and Morrow, "Non-Self and Nāgasena"

Week 9: Personal Identity (pt.2)

(Watch) Grey, "The Trouble with Transporters"

(Watch) *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, "Second Chances" (s06e24)

Parfit, "Personal Identity"

Week 10: Death...

Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus" (excerpt)

Luper, "Annihilation" (excerpt)

Zhuangzi, "Zhuangzi on Death"

(Watch) Grey, "Why Die?"

Paper #3 due

Week 11: ...and Immortality

Pereira and Timmerman, "The (Un)Desirability of Immortality"

Smuts, "Immortality and Significance" (excerpt)

Week 12: A Worthwhile Life: Meaning and Happiness

Wilson, "How to be an Epicurean"

Bernecker and Becker, "Hedonism Leads to Happiness"

Bradford, "Achievement, Wellbeing, and Value"

Schopenhauer, "On the Suffering of the World"

Baudelaire, "Be Drunk"
Cleary, "Being and Drunkenness"

Week 13: Meaning, Philosophy, and Seneca's Prescription

Seneca, "On the Shortness of Life" (excerpts)
(Watch) *Black Mirror*, "San Junipero" (s03e04)

Week 14: Simulations and Digital Life Extension

(Watch) Kurtzgesagt, "Is Reality Real? The Simulation Argument"
Banks, *Surface Detail*, Ch.8
Nozick, "The Experience Machine"
(Watch) Tom Scott, "Welcome to Life"
(Watch) Clark, "Virtual Immortality"

Paper #4 due Sunday, December 20th

Resources

ACADEMIC RESOURCES

DISABILITY SERVICES (ODS)

<https://ods.rutgers.edu>
(848) 445-6800

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

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

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.