

Philosophy 103: Introduction to Philosophy Syllabus (Updated 12/22/19)

Winter 2020, Section 90 (Online)

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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? 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 week but no more than that.*
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

Each week in the course will center around 2 or 3 Modules and will involve the following activities:

1. 2 or 3 First-Take Discussion Forum Posts
2. 2 or 3 Reading Assignments
3. 2 or 3 Second-Take Discussion Forum Posts
4. 2 or 3 Quizzes

In addition to these weekly activities, the course will involve three other kinds of less frequent assignments, namely, (a) Three Exercises, (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 optional Video 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. Ten Modules (including 10 Quizzes, 9 First-Take Discussion Forum Posts, and 9 Second-Take Discussion Forum Posts)
2. Three Exercises
3. Two Essays
4. One Final Exam
5. Optional Video Conferences

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

§5.2 Ten Modules

The course includes 10 modules. Each module covers a distinct piece of the course's content. Except for Module 1, 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. You should complete your first-take discussion forum post before completing the readings for the module.
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.
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. You should complete your second-take discussion forum post after completing the readings for the module.
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.
6. **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 10 possible questions, all of which are given to you in advance. Except for Module 1, 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 Three Exercises

The course also includes three Exercise assignments. The 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. These 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. More detailed instructions about the essays can be found on the Essay 1 and Essay 2 assignment pages on the Canvas website.

§5.5 One Final Exam

The final exam will be an **online exam**. **It is scheduled for Friday, January 17th. You may complete the exam anytime on January 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 January 17th (e.g., you will be traveling on an airplane that day), I expect that you contact me about this no later than December 30th (one week 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 Optional Video Conferences

Before every major assignment (the 3 Exercises, 2 Essays, and 1 Final Exam), I will host an optional video Conference. At each Conference, I will answer any questions you have about the associated major assignment and help you work on that assignment. **You are strongly encouraged to attend as many Conferences as you can.**

Here is a tentative schedule for the Conferences in the course (once you complete the Required Student Survey, I will confirm this schedule):

1. Mon 12/23 9-10pm EST (Introductory Conference; Ask Questions about the Course)
2. Sat 12/28 10am-12pm EST (Exercise 1 Conference)
3. Su 12/29 9-10:30pm EST (Exercise 2 Conference)

4. Mon 12/30 9-10:30pm EST (Exercises 3 Conference)
5. Th 1/2 9-10:30pm EST (Essay 1 Conference)
6. Su 1/12 9-10:30pm EST (Essay 2 Conference)
7. Th 1/15 TBD (Final Exam Review Session(s))

I will host these Conferences through the course's Canvas webpage, using a platform known as "BigBlueButton." You do not need to use your mic or camera to participate; I use a mic and camera, but students are not required to do so.

I want to remind you here that I am also available to talk one-on-one via an online video chat. (Again, you don't need to use your camera; we can just talk over the mic if you'd prefer not to do video). If at any point in the course you would like to schedule a chat with me, just email me and let me know 3 times when you are available in the next day or two, and I will do what I can to make time to talk with you. *Note: don't wait until the last day if you want to schedule a time to talk to me about an upcoming assignment (e.g., your first essay or second essay).*

§6. Grades and Grading Policies

§6.1 Grade Breakdown:

- 10% Quizzes (total of 10 quizzes)
- 10% Discussion Forum Posts (total of 18 posts: one First-Take Post and one Second-Take Post for each Module 2-10)
- 10% Three 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 3 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		

Please note that because I use this 40pt scale, the summary of your overall grade displayed on Canvas will NOT BE ACCURATE. If you want to know your overall grade at any point in the class, just email me.

§6.3 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. I will not accept a late Final Exam. Again, if for any reason you will not be able to take the Final Exam on the scheduled date (Friday January 17th) (e.g., you will be traveling on an airplane that day), I expect that you contact me about this no later than December 30th (one week 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 3pts (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 32/40 (B). If it were two days late, you would instead receive a 29/40 (C+). In other words, each day an Essay is late, you lose a full letter grade off your final score on the essay. **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 Discussion Forum Grading Policy

I note that Discussion Forums Posts will be graded primarily based on completion. As long as you complete the Discussion Forum Post on time, you will receive full credit (40/40). If I judge your post to be below satisfactory, you will instead receive a C+ (30/40). Again, I emphasize that late Discussion Forum Posts will not be accepted for credit.

§6.5 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.

§6.6 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 January 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.

§6.7 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 me immediately.

§7 Course Summary

Week	Modules	Assignments Due
Week 1	Module 1: What is Philosophy?	Module 0 Required Student Survey (due Sat 12/28) Quiz 1 (due Sat 12/28)
	Module 2: Some Classic Arguments for the Existence of God	Quiz 2 (due Sat 12/28) Module 2 First-Take Discussion Forum Post(due Sat 12/28) Module 2 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post (due Sat 12/28)
	Module 3: The Problem of Evil	Quiz 3(due Sat 12/28) Module 3 First-Take Discussion Forum Post (due Sat 12/28) Module 3 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post (due Sat 12/28)
	Exercises 1	Exercises 1 (Due Sat 12/28)
Week 2	Exercises 2 and 3	Exercises 2 and 3 (Due Tues 12/31)
	Essay 1	Essay 1 (Due Sat 1/4)

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	Module 4: Philosophy of Perception (or Can We Trust Our Senses?)	Quiz 4 (due Sat 1/4) Module 4 First-Take Discussion Forum Post (due Sat 1/4) Module 4 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post (due Sat 1/4)
	Module 5: Will the Sun Rise Tomorrow? The Problem of Induction	Quiz 5 (due Sat 1/4) Module 5 First-Take Discussion Forum Post (due Sat 1/4) Module 5 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post (due Sat 1/4)
Week 3	Module 6: What is Knowledge?	Quiz 6 (Due Sat 1/11) Module 6 First-Take Discussion Forum Post (Due Sat 1/11) Module 6 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post (Due Sat 1/11)
	Module 7: Applied Ethics – Charity and Vegetarianism	Quiz 7 (Due Sat 1/11) Module 7 First-Take Discussion Forum Post (Due Sat 1/11) Module 7 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post (Due Sat 1/11)
	Module 8: Applied Ethics – Is Abortion Immoral?	Quiz 8 (Due Sat 1/11) Module 8 First-Take Discussion Forum Post (Due Sat 1/11) Module 8 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post (Due Sat 1/11)
Week 4	Essay 2	Essay 2 (Due Tues 1/14)
	Module 9: Do We Have Free Will?	Quiz 9 (Due Weds 1/15) Module 9 First-Take Discussion Forum Post (Due Weds 1/15) Module 9 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post (Due Weds 1/15)
	Module 10: How are our Minds Related to Our Bodies?	Quiz 10 (Due Weds 1/15) Module 10 First-Take Discussion Forum Post (Due Weds 1/15) Module 10 Second-Take Discussion Forum Post (Due Weds 1/15)
	Final Exam Review Session	Thurs 1/16
	Final Exam	Final Exam (Take on Fri 1/17)