

PHI 2010: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY
AMBER ROSS
FALL 2020 SYLLABUS

Over the past few months, we have all become intensely aware of the ways in which our lives- and our world- are out of our control. Many of us have been deeply shaken by this feeling of loss and uncertainty. But is this *loss of control* really as new as it feels? Is it a genuine change from our pre-Covid world? Or is our current situation merely illuminating the uncertainty that has always been there, lying under the surface of the habits and rituals that make up our normal lives?

In this class we will explore several fundamental philosophical questions that are at the core of our lived experience, especially those that have been put center-stage by our current situation:

How can life be meaningful when there seems to be no progress and no purpose? Is free will real, or only an illusion? Moral responsibility? Merit? In a world full of filter bubbles, "fake news", and echo chambers, how can we genuinely *know* that what we see- or read- is true? To what extent is our perception of the social world an illusion, and can acknowledging this change how we see the world?

A philosophy course cannot *give* you the answers to these challenging questions, but studying philosophy helps us understand why we shouldn't expect quick and easy answers here. Studying philosophy helps us understand why and in what ways our world is more complex, nuanced, and uncertain than we may have thought. It allows us to live authentically- an "examined life". When we know what we value, when we see ourselves and our world more clearly, we give ourselves a method for making the best decisions we can in a world with no absolute guarantees.

Learning how to approach problems with a philosophical mindset will help you find and ask better questions, ones that can move a conversation- and a society- forward.

Professor

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(via Zoom)

Graduate Student Teaching Assistants

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Office Hours

Your TAs are graduate student in philosophy. They will lead your Friday classes, grade your papers, and do many other things besides. Your TA is your email contact for questions about administrative matters in the course.

Class Meeting Times

Lecture- Tuesday & Thursday, Period 7 (1:55 PM - 2:45 PM)

Lectures are Full Class Synchronous Meetings, Live via Zoom (all students attend)

To best facilitate our online format, during lectures please mute your microphone and leave your camera turned off. If you have a question during the full class meeting, type it in the Chat and I will check the Chat log periodically throughout the hour.

Discussion Sections- Friday (each student will have one of the Section meeting times below)

Discussion Sections are Small Group Synchronous Meetings, Live via Zoom

- **Period 4 (10:40 - 11:30 AM)**
- **Period 6 (12:50 - 1:40 PM)**
- **Period 7 (1:55- 2:45 PM)**

Discussion Sections- How to make the most of them

Your discussion sections are where you get a chance to go over some of the main points of the course in more detail. They are also the place where you get a chance to talk philosophy, to develop arguments of your own. Finally, they are the place where you will receive instruction about how to write philosophy, including specific training to do your written assignments. Discussion sections are entirely for your benefit, and engaging in these discussions will improve your performance on your written work as well as your understanding of the material. In grading your work, we will hold you to a standard that assumes your attendance in (lecture and) discussion.

Quality participation in discussion depends upon being prepared and making a substantial effort to engage with the material in class. Students who attend discussion section and make useful contributions to the class discussion will see a bump in their Discussion Contribution grade at the end of the term. Those who attend but are not prepared and participating will still improve their performance on their coursework by attending discussions, but merely being present in section will not *boost* your Discussion Contribution grade.

Course Readings

All required readings will be available online via Canvas. You will find links to the assigned readings in the weekly modules and stored in the “Files” folder on our Canvas website: <https://elearning.ufl.edu> (Links to an external site.)

A very useful online **guide for writing philosophy papers** is available here: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html> (Links to an external site.)

There is a collection of **fantastic Intro to Philosophy videos** created by Wireless Philosophy- some of these will be assigned viewing, but you may want to see more. You can find them here: <https://www.youtube.com/user/WirelessPhilosophy/search?query=critical+reasoning> (Links to an external site.)

General Education Objectives and Learning Outcomes

Student Learning Objectives (SLOs):

Students will gain a basic understanding of philosophy and learn how to utilize this knowledge to evaluate and develop their own ideas. Students will pursue these goals across these three categories, all of which will be assessed via written assignments and participation in discussion:

- *Content:* Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, methodologies and theories used within the discipline.
- *Communication:* Students communicate knowledge, ideas, and reasoning clearly and effectively in written or oral forms appropriate to the discipline.
- *Critical Thinking:* Students analyze information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives, using discipline specific methods, and develop reasoned solutions to problems.

Excelling in the Course

- To do well in this course you must be in class prepared to engage the assigned material. This includes: keeping current on the reading assignments, having the current reading accessible during class, and being aware of the course schedule and activities as discussed in class and posted on the course web page.
- You are responsible for regularly checking your UF email.
- Important announcements and explanations of assignments are often made at the beginning of lecture. Please do your best to **sign in to our class meeting before the start time**.
- Attendance in lectures is strongly encouraged. I will not keep records of your presence or absence, but among the material I expect you to engage in your written work is the material I offer in lecture.
- Most people who do well in this course begin writing assignments well in advance of deadlines. You should meet with one of your instructors to discuss your plans for your papers, and you should expect to write and revise drafts of your essays.

Graded Requirements

5 Writing Assignments (together worth 50% of final grade)

- 2 Short Writing Assignments (200-400 wds, 5% each)
- 1 Argument Critique (500-700 wds, 10% of final grade)
- 2 Full-Length Essays (1400-1500 wds, each worth 15% of final grade)

I will provide you with topics and detailed instructions for your writing assignments. All papers must be double-spaced in 12 point Times New Roman font (or something similarly sized and readable). You must include a word-count at the top of your first page. Also, **please be sure to title your full-length essays!**

In this course you will be assigned philosophical readings from popular sources, including online sources, as well as professional articles written especially for philosophers. Your written work for this course should utilize only the texts for the course, the conversations we have in lecture and discussion, and your own some careful thinking, writing, and revising.

Quizzes (together worth 20% of final grade)

There will be several short quizzes throughout the term. These quizzes will all be "open book", or open video for video quizzes. There will be a time limit for the quizzes (5-10 min), but you have unlimited attempts to pass each quiz!

Discussion Board Contributions (together worth 30% of final grade)

Please Read Carefully

Each student will post to the Discussion Board for Week 1 (completion grade only).

You will also **contribute to 4 Discussion Boards** between W2 and W14 (there are 9 graded Discussion Boards available). On a week when you are contributing to a Discussion Board:

- **Original discussion board posts are due at 11:59 pm on Tuesday** each week.
- **Comments on 2 classmates' posts are due by 11:59pm on the Thursday** of that week.

There is a strict **150 word limit on Original discussion board posts. Comments on posts are limited to 100 words each.** Being able to express yourself concisely and still show that you're seriously engaging with the material is an important skill to develop.

Graded Discussion Boards will be capped at 10 participants per section (approx. half of the students enrolled in each section). Look ahead at the upcoming topics, and your work schedule, and plan accordingly! (Hint: If you're having trouble getting on the boards you want, you are free to read ahead and have a post ready to submit before the discussion board opens.)

Discussion Boards for each week will open at 5pm on Fridays.

You should view these posts as a chance to engage with the material and show that you are putting effort into understanding and grappling with the course content- this may involve asking a question(s) or raising idea(s) concerning your assigned reading. Some weeks, you will be given a specific prompt to reply to on the discussion board. Other weeks, the posts may be more self-directed.

Though your Section Leaders will be reading through your discussion posts and assign points appropriately, Section Leaders will not be able to give individual comments on each graded discussion post. They may, however, add their own replies to the discussion board in certain contexts, at their discretion.

Late written work:

The penalty for late work is 1/3 of a letter grade deducted immediately at the deadline, and again at each 24-hour mark beyond the deadline until the work is submitted (including weekend days).

No assignments will be accepted which are more than one week late. Exceptions to this require instructor approval.

Late discussion board contributions will not be accepted.

Grading Scale:

| grades | % of points | |
|--------|-------------|--------|
| A | 4.0 | 94-100 |
| A- | 3.67 | 90-93 |
| B+ | 3.33 | 87-89 |
| B | 3.0 | 84-86 |
| B- | 2.67 | 80-83 |
| C+ | 2.33 | 77-79 |
| C | 2.0 | 74-76 |

| | | |
|----|------|-------|
| C- | 1.67 | 70-73 |
| D | 1.33 | 67-69 |
| + | | |
| D | 1.0 | 64-66 |
| D- | 0.67 | 60-63 |
| E | 0.0 | 0-59 |

Final Grades and Writing Credit

In order to earn the writing credit in this class, you must earn a grade of C+ or higher on at least three of our five assignments. In addition, you must also earn an overall course grade of C or higher.

If your total number of points for the course falls between two grades in the end, we will round to the nearest mark. X.5 rounds up; for example, 93.5 percent of all points will earn you an A. Any 93 below 93.5 is an A-.

UF policy on assigning grade points:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Humanities Credit:

This course provides Humanities credit (H) for the purpose of general education requirements.

All such courses include the following objective:

Humanities courses provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and theory or methodologies used within a humanities discipline or the humanities in general. Students will learn to identify and to analyze the key elements, biases and influences that shape thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives. A minimum grade of C is required for general education credit.

From: <http://gened.aa.ufl.edu/program-area-objectives.aspx>

Writing Requirement (WR):

Students who successfully complete the major writing assignments in this course will earn 4000 words toward the UF Writing Requirement. The Writing Requirement (WR) ensures student both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. Course grades have two components. To receive writing requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course.

In order to earn the WR credit in this class, you must earn a grade of C+ or higher on **at least three of our four graded assignments**. In addition, you must **also earn an overall course grade of C or higher**.

Students will find a number of resources for improving their writing at the university's Writing Studio page <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> including a link to an electronic version of Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* <http://www.bartleby.com/141/> the recommended style manual for this course.

[Campus Resources for UF Students](#)

An extensive list of campus resources- technical, academic, medical, and mental- can be found [here](#) and on the "Campus Resources" page

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

Most instances of academic dishonesty can be avoided by thoroughly citing the resources you have used to help you understand the topic on which you're writing. **If you have read something that helped you understand the material, cite it!** Failure to cite sources is the most common (and easily avoidable) academic offense.

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states:

“We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.”

The Honor Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>) ([Links to an external site.](#)) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

Plagiarism on any assignment will automatically result in a grade of “E” for the course. Plagiarism is defined in the University of Florida's Student Honor Code as follows:

“A student shall not represent as the student’s own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to): a. Quoting oral or written materials, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution. b. Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.”

Students found guilty of academic misconduct will be prosecuted in accordance with the procedures specified in the UF honesty policy.

Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/> ([Links to an external site.](#)). Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/> ([Links to an external site.](#)). Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/> ([Links to an external site.](#)).

Attendance, Illness, Religious Holidays, and Twelve Day Rule

In order to have the fullest understanding of the material you will need to be present for each class meeting and take notes on the class discussion. Given that we are all subject to the whims of our internet connection, there will be no penalty for missing a class, but to get the most out of this course you will want to be part of each of our class meetings.

Official requirements for class attendance, religious holidays, and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx> (Links to an external site.).

Other Course Policies

Working with classmates:

You are encouraged to talk to one another outside of class about philosophy and about this course as much as possible. This includes discussion of paper topics, and it includes reading drafts of one another's work. If you do work together, please be mindful of the following:

1. Your final product must be your own original work, and not a repetition of someone else's ideas or essay.
2. Each essay must be a piece of written thinking in itself. Sometimes conversation in advance of writing can make you feel like the conclusions of that conversation are now established, such that you can now talk about them by stating them (or assuming, or implying). But your essays need to "show your work"—if the argument is not explicitly on the page, you haven't made the argument. We need to see the important pieces of reasoning.
3. You must be willing to endorse what ends up in your paper. Beware of letting others persuade you to go in the wrong direction. You are ultimately responsible for both the understandings and misunderstandings in the papers you turn in.

Classroom conduct:

Philosophy is sometimes mistakenly understood to be a combative exercise. That style does not impress me at all. I encourage you to direct your first effort toward trying to understand and develop both the contributions of the authors we read and the contributions of others in the class. Where those are limited, of course, good philosophy also happens when you (respectfully) disagree, note tensions, make distinctions, reshape the question, and so on. Students who repeatedly act aggressively, in ways which attempt to incite unnecessary conflict or to dominate the discussion and/or other people, will receive a reduction in their Discussion grade.

Regarding lecture recordings:

In case student are unable to attend lectures online for Covid-related reasons, I will be recording our online lecture sessions. These will not be posted but will be made available to particular students as needed. Due to the size of our class, I ask that your camera and microphone be turned off during lecture. Students who participate with their camera engaged or utilize a profile image are agreeing to have their video or image recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who un-mute during class and participate orally are agreeing to have their voices recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the "chat" feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live. The chat will not be recorded or shared. As in all courses, unauthorized recording and unauthorized sharing of recorded materials is prohibited.

Other Requirements

Regular Attendance, Reading, and Note-Taking

In order to have the fullest understanding of the material you will need to be present for each class meeting and take notes on the class discussion.

Given that we are all subject to the whims of our internet connection, there will be no penalty for missing a class, but to get the most out of this course you will want to be part of each of our class meetings.

Regular Attendance and Participation in Discussion Sections

Given that we are all subject to the whims of our internet connection, there will be no penalty for missing a class, but to get the most out of this course you will want to be part of each of our class meetings. (Repeated for emphasis!)

E-mail guidelines:

- (1) If you need some practical information about the course you should **look at most recently updated syllabus or on the website**. E-mails requesting information which is available on the most recently updated syllabus or on the website will not be answered.

- (2) If you want to discuss a substantive philosophical question you should bring it up in your discussion section or visit your Discussion Leader's office hours. E-mails asking substantive philosophical questions will cannot be answered in full- philosophy just doesn't work that way! (You will likely receive a note suggesting that you visit one of our office hours or arrange an appointment to chat.)

If, after reading (1) & (2) you still think you should e-mail me, you are welcome to do so at amber.ross@ufl.edu. I will try to answer e-mail within a week. You must use your 'ufl' address.

Please note: I may not read email between 5pm and 9am.

How to do well in this course:

1. **Be sure to read the assigned material before our class meeting.** This will help to ensure that our class time is quality time.
2. **After class, re-read the material for the session**, paying special attention to the questions that you had before. Hopefully the material will make much more sense to you now.
3. **Bring specific questions with you to class and discussion sections.** Even if there are aspects of the readings or study questions you didn't fully grasp, the fact that you tried should help you to narrow down what it is that you don't get.
4. **See us in office hours**, if there are still questions you are unclear about. That's what office hours are for. Don't be shy.
5. **Manage your time well.** Many students make the mistake of waiting until a few days before papers are due to start writing. That is *bad* time management. The **same number of hours** devoted to the material BEFORE class can lead to a much more efficient use of your time, better understanding, and higher grades.

On Reading Philosophy Texts:

You will be expected to have done the assigned reading **before** you come to class to be able to follow the lecture and participate in tutorial discussion. Learning philosophy is as much learning a style of thinking and reasoning as it is learning certain contents. Therefore it is important that you try to participate actively and learn to engage with the readings critically.

You should budget enough time for the reading to be able to read each piece **at least three times**. Don't expect to be able to 'breeze through' the texts and you can avoid a lot of frustration. For all the readings you should have a pen and paper ready to take notes as you read. Philosophical writing is concerned with advancing and defending arguments. Your task will be to try to reconstruct the arguments and to critically evaluate them.

The first reading of the text should be fairly quick. Your goal here should be to get a first, rough sense of the general argument the author is advancing and the rough structure of the text. What is his or her main thesis? (write this down!) Where in the text is s/he arguing for it? Where does s/he address objections? Where does he discuss qualifications? Where does s/he motivate the argument? Don't worry, if during the first reading you don't yet understand how precisely the author is arguing for a thesis.

The second reading should be devoted to giving a reconstruction of the argument that is as sympathetic as possible. Now you should spend a lot of time on trying to understand how the author supports the main thesis, and how s/he might address potential objections. Here it is usually useful to try to jot down the following: What are the premises of the argument? How are the premises themselves supported? For example the author might appeal to shared intuitions or might claim that the premises are self-evident. What are the steps which are meant to get the author from the premises to the conclusion? (Here words like 'because' and 'therefore' can provide a clue.) You might think of yourself as engaging in a dialogue with the text here. Ask critical questions of the text, such as "You say that all simple ideas are copies of impressions. Why should I be compelled to accept this?" Then search the text for answers. At this stage your aim should not yet be to try to discover flaws or problems in the argument. Aim to make the argument as strong as possible.

Finally it is time to be critical. During a third reading you ought to try to see if you can uncover weaknesses in the arguments. If someone would want to disagree with a conclusion, there are two general ways in which one might attack the author's arguments. One, you can disagree with one or more of the premises. That is you might accept that *if* we grant the premises, *then* the conclusion follows, but you might disagree with one or more of the premises. (But then you should ask yourself how you would respond to the attempt to motivate the premises.) Or, two, you might disagree with one or more of the steps in the argument. That is, you might be willing to accept the premises, but you might deny that this commits you to the conclusion as well. If you have an objection of the latter kind you should try to explain why it is possible to accept the author's premises and yet deny his or her conclusions. (Of course you also might have objections of both kinds.)

A careful reading of a difficult text takes time. Learn to read patiently and slowly, and before you get frustrated, remember that even professional philosophers struggle with some of the texts you are reading. One of the most wonderful aspects of reading philosophy is that it allows you to engage in conversations with some of the deepest and most original thinkers. Enjoy the challenge!