

PHI 2010 Introduction to Philosophy , Fall 2020

MWF 3-3:50 via Zoom (taught synchronously)

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Office Hours: via virtual appointment, office at 330 Griffin-Floyd Hall will not be in use

Quick Response Hours via email : 10 AM – 4PM Weekdays

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Course Description

Perhaps you decided to enroll in college to increase your knowledge about a particular subject. Maybe, after a few courses, you would say that you know a thing or two about, for example, calculus or business administration or art history. But how can you really be sure?

Ask yourself: how do you know that you aren't dreaming right now? Or that you aren't in an elaborate virtual reality simulation? Could it be that all of the experts you rely on for "knowledge" are really just trying to cheat you out of money? Once you begin to doubt these things, how can you be sure that you really "know" anything?

In Introduction to Philosophy, you will learn how to tackle skeptical questions like these. In our first unit of the class, we will ask about the foundations of knowledge. What does it mean to **know** something, as opposed to merely believing it?

We will also consider questions in a variety of different areas of philosophy. For example, we will wonder about the relationship of your mind to your brain. Are they the same thing? Could your mind exist apart from your brain? Could there be zombies with no mind at all?

In addition to questions about knowledge and the mind-body relationship, we will ask other philosophical questions: Can we prove that God exists, or can we only have faith that God exists? To what extent does the morality of our actions depend on forces beyond our control? Why be moral in the first place?

Our primary goal will be to construct and evaluate *arguments* based on good evidence in favor of different answers to these questions. The answers we will consider come from both classical readings in Philosophy (like Descartes' *Meditations*) as well as from contemporary sources.

This course aims to develop students' skills in critical thinking, reading, and writing. Class time will largely be discussion-based, though I will lecture on some key concepts from the reading.

Students will be asked to write three papers. They will also be asked to participate in a peer review process of two of these papers to help them challenge their ideas and strengthen their arguments. The rest of the course grade will be based on students participating in guided discussion, taking weekly reading quizzes, and their performance on a final exam.

Textbook

All of the course material will be accessible online. We will read nearly all of Descartes' *Meditations*, so you might want to buy the physical copy sold by the bookstore.

Course Goals

The goals of this course are:

- To introduce you to philosophy, both as a historical body of knowledge and as a practice that you can engage in.
- To encourage you to see the intrinsic value of learning about and doing philosophy, regardless of its benefits to your critical thinking, reading, and writing skills.
- To introduce you to the methods and goals of interpreting primary texts from the history of philosophy, with the aim of developing your ability to charitably interpret unfamiliar texts and to assess the merits of the ideas therein.
- To help you develop the skill of engaging with complex, abstract and unfamiliar ideas with clarity and rigor.
- To encourage you to reflect carefully on the foundations of your own knowledge by reflecting on its humble origins and on impressive arguments for beliefs you may not hold.

Achieving these Goals

We will achieve these goals with the following methods:

- Students are expected to read assigned texts carefully before class and take notes of questions and comments you have about the text.
- I will give brief lectures to help explain the more complex material. However, most of class time will consist in my asking pointed questions about the text to help you guide your own thoughts.
- Sometimes I will ask small groups to work together to discuss an unfamiliar text to help develop the skills of constructing one's own interpretation of a text and of critically engaging with that text.
- When an objection to a philosopher's views is raised, I will do my best to respond "as" that philosopher. I will illustrate that though we may reject certain beliefs, they often have more merit than we might expect.
- When we find points of disagreement with a philosopher I will ask you to reflect on *why* your views are more plausible.
- Exam questions will test not only your comprehension of the material discussed in class but also your ability to grasp the systematic points of view of many of these philosophers.

Assignments and Grading

Guided Discussions (10 pts.)

About once a week, students will enter break-out rooms with four or fewer of their peers to engage in philosophical discussion. These discussions will be guided by reflection on a short piece of writing, a short video, etc. and will involve completing a digital handout to be turned in at the end of the session. I will visit each room to check in with the groups. Credit will be awarded based on consistent, effortful participation. Missing more than 3 guided discussions will result in a 0 for this part of the grade.

Weekly Reading Responses (20 pts.) (300 words each x at least 10)

Each week, I will post a question about the readings and class material. You will write a short response (<300 words) due before the next class period, typically a Monday. Each response will be given a grade out of 10 depending on how well it matches or exceeds a model answer that I will post shortly thereafter. Your final grade will be double your average grade of all responses. Your lowest score (including 0's for missing one of the responses) will be dropped. In effect, this means that your responses will be at minimum 3000 words total.

Longer Writing Assignments (60 pts.)

Paper 1 – Philosophical Dialogue (1500+ words) (20 pts.)

Your second “paper” will be a dialogue between two philosophers we’ve read in class or between two fictional characters. The idea is to have the two philosophers engage in a direct discussion about a philosophical topic. The task is to show that you understand how the two philosophers might argue about a topic that we have not directly discussed in class. Before submitting your final dialogue (15 pts), you will be asked to submit a draft to be peer reviewed. You will be asked to review two papers and then to show how you incorporated that feedback into your final draft. The remaining 5 points will be assigned based on your participation in the peer review process.

Paper 2 – Defense Paper (1500+ words) (30 pts.)

Finally, you will be asked to write a paper defending your position on a philosophical topic discussed in class. Before submitting your final paper (25 pts), you will be asked to submit a draft to be peer reviewed. You will be asked to review two papers and then to show how you incorporated that feedback into your final draft. The remaining 5 points will be assigned based on your participation in the peer review process.

Final Exam (10 pts.)

The final exam will be a long multiple-choice quiz covering all of the material discussed over the course of the semester. You may use any notes taken over the course of the class as well as the course texts.

Grading Scheme

Grade:	Range:
A	100 % to 94.0%
A-	< 94.0 % to 90.0%
B+	< 90.0 % to 87.0%
B	< 87.0 % to 84.0%
B-	< 84.0 % to 80.0%
C+	< 80.0 % to 77.0%
C	< 77.0 % to 74.0%
C-	< 74.0 % to 70.0%
D+	< 70.0 % to 67.0%
D	< 67.0 % to 64.0%
D-	< 64.0 % to 61.0%
F	< 61.0 % to 0.0%

Grading Policies

- All scores are rounded to the nearest half point.
- No extra credit will be assigned.
- I am happy to give extra feedback on work, but under no circumstances will I discuss grades after they have been assigned.
 - The one exception to this policy is cases of clerical error (bad math, wrongly recorded grades, etc.)

You may see how to convert your grade in this course to GPA points by seeing this site:
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/#gradestext-otp1>

Course Policies

- During our Zoom sessions, you must have your video on unless you have pre-approval from me to leave it off. Cell phone use or use of the computer for anything other than participating in class is not permitted. Please make an effort to hold your meeting in a private area, free from distractions.
- Please note that my lectures will contain visual elements, as will the guided discussions. This means that calling in instead of using the Zoom software is not advised. All visual elements will be saved and uploaded to Canvas
- Because I cannot feasibly read drafts of papers for everyone, I will not read drafts of papers for anyone.
- Class attendance is expected. Though there will be no grade penalty for missed classes, I will not go over the material twice for students with an unexcused absence. Class will be recorded, but I will only share the recordings with those who have excused absences. Excused absences are consistent with university policies in the undergraduate catalog (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>) and

require appropriate documentation. Students who can demonstrate that they were unable to submit an assignment by the deadline due to an excused absence and who can provide appropriate documentation for the absence will be given a reasonable period of time to make up the late work.

- Discussions must be respectful. No one wants to feel uncomfortable or unsafe in a classroom. Any comment or action that discriminates or harasses on the grounds of sex, gender, race, sexual identity, nationality, ability, or any physical characteristics will not be tolerated. If you feel disrespected in any way during the class, please contact me immediately.
- Plagiarism and collaboration of any kind on papers or responses is strictly prohibited. You may not collaborate on any written assignment except as part of the peer review process. If your papers refer to or include work that is not your own, whether directly quoted, paraphrased, or even described in general terms, it must be clearly cited. I do not care which citation style you use, as long as I can check the source. If I discover any instance of plagiarism, you will receive a zero for that assignment.
- 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://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) 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.
- Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.
- Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/> ([Links to an external site.](#))
- Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.
- The writing studio is committed to helping University of Florida students meet their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. Visit the writing studio online at <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> or in 302 Tigert Hall for one-on-one consultations and workshops.
- Our class sessions will be audio-visually recorded. 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 unmute 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.

- Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. [Click here for guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner.](#) 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 ufl.bluer.com/ufl/. [Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students here.](#)
- If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms ([Click here for guidance from the CDC on symptoms of coronavirus](#)), please use the UF Health screening system and follow the instructions on whether you are able to attend class. [Click here for UF Health guidance on what to do if you have been exposed to or are experiencing Covid-19 symptoms.](#)
- Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work. [Find more information in the university attendance policies.](#)
- For technical issues, please contact the helpdesk at 352-392-4357 or visit their website.

Writing Requirement

This course confers 6000 words towards the Writing Requirement (WR), which ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. While helping students meet the broad learning outcomes of content, communication, and critical thinking, the instructor will evaluate and provide feedback on students' written assignments with respect to clarity, coherence, and organization. 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 (the weekly responses and papers).

Course Schedule and Readings – Subject to updates on a weekly basis

Please note: Reading for this course will often be demanding, even when the assignment is short. As well, some of the topics we will discuss are highly abstract. For that reason, I recommend reading each assignment before and after each class meeting.

All readings can be found in "Files." No materials, supplies, or books are required for this course.

8/31 – Introduction to the Class and Philosophy

The Foundations of Knowledge

9/2 – Descartes' *Meditations* - 1

9/4 – Descartes' *Meditations* -2

9/7 – Labor Day, No Class

9/9 – Descartes' *Meditations* - 4 (selections)

9/11 – Guided Discussion, Descartes

9/14 – Hume's *Enquiry* – 4 (selections)

9/16 – Hume's *Enquiry* – 5 (selections)

9/18 – Guided Discussion, Carroll's "The Tortoise and Achilles"

The Reach of Human Thought

9/21 - Berkeley – *Principles* – Sections 1 – 33 [not the Introductory sections]

9/23 - Berkeley – *Principles* – Sections 1 – 33 [not the Introductory sections]

9/25 - Nagel – selection from "Thought and Reality" from *The View from Nowhere*

9/28 – Guided Discussion, "What can we say about the colors that we can't see?"

Mind-Body Problem

9/30 – Descartes' *Meditations* 6 (selections)

10/2 – Descartes's Correspondence with Elizabeth (Read p.1-8 ending at "The letters of xi.1643")

10/5 – Guided Discussion, "Zombies Seeing Red"

10/7 - Wittgenstein – selections from *Philosophical Investigations*

10/9 – Searle – Minds, Brains, and Programs

10/12 – Guided Discussion, "What does it mean to 'think?'"

Philosophy of Religion

10/14 - selections from Descartes – *Meditations* 3,5

10/16 - Hume – *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Parts 2-5) (selections)

10/19 - Rowe – Problem of Evil

10/21 – Guided Discussion, "Spinoza on Final Causes"

10/23 - Murray – Coercion and the Hiddenness of God

10/26 – James – The Will to Believe

10/28 – Guided Discussion on Papers, Paper 1 and 2 Discussed

Time and Fate

10/30 – Aristotle – On Interpretation IX -

11/2 – Lewis – The Paradoxes of Time Travel

11/4 – Continue Lewis, Guided Discussion, "Time-traveling through parallel universes?" - Paper 1 Draft Due

Memory, Identity, Personal Responsibility

11/6 - Locke – Identity and Diversity from the *Essay*

11/9 – Nietzsche – selections from *On the Genealogy of Morality* - **Paper 1 Peer Review Due**

11/11 - Veteran's Day, No Class

11/13 – Guided Discussion, “Splitting Brains” - **Paper 1 Final Due**

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Foundations of Morality and Meaning

11/16 - Benedict – The Case for Moral Relativism - **Paper 2 Thesis Due**

11/18 - Kierkegaard – selections from *Fear and Trembling*

11/20- Nagel – Moral Luck

11/23 – Guided Discussion, “Freedom and Foreknowledge” - **Paper 2 Draft Due**

11/25 - Thanksgiving, No Class

11/27 - Thanksgiving, No Class

11/30 - Wolf - Moral Saints – **Paper 2 Peer Review Due**

12/2 - Foot – Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives

12/4 - Nagel – The Absurd

12/7 – Guided Discussion, from Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus* - **Paper 2 Final Due**

12/9 - Last Day of Class, Final Exam Review