

Phil 100 - Introduction to Philosophy (3 credits)

Tue/Thu 11:25 - 12:15

Location TBD

Instructor: Thomas Morrison

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Office: South College E314

Course Overview

Course Description: This course introduces students to some of the most puzzling questions in philosophy. Our main focus will be on two things: (i) getting a basic familiarity with some questions and unique solutions in four subfields of philosophy (Epistemology, Metaphysics, Ethics, and Political Philosophy); and (ii) developing students' basic philosophical thinking and writing skills. In this class we will try to get a basic grip on what philosophy and philosophical thinking are by exploring questions like:

- What is the relation between appearances and reality?
- Do we have knowledge?
- What should we do in cases of reasonable disagreement?
- Do we have free will?
- What is the human mind and what is it to be myself?
- What makes our actions right/wrong or good/bad?
- What is the meaning of life?
- What is justice?

Course Objectives: The student learning objectives of this course are the following. The first is to introduce students to core topics of the discipline. The second is to develop the philosophical skills and the intellectual and interpersonal tools necessary in approaching philosophical debates. We will particularly focus on developing students' abilities to identify, reconstruct, and evaluate philosophical views and arguments, and to write philosophical papers.

Assignments/Grades

Socratic Notes	15%
Weekly Quizzes	15%
Paper 1 (2-3 pgs, double-spaced)	10%
Paper 2 (4-6 pgs, double-spaced)	20%
Final Paper (8-10 pgs, double-spaced)	30%
Attendance and Participation	10%

Grading Scale	
A	92.6+ %
A-	90-92.5%

B+	87.6-89.9%
B	82.6-87.5%
B-	80-82.5%
C+	77.6-79.9%
C	72.6-77.5%
C-	70-72.5%
D+	67.6-69.9%
D	62.6-67.5%
D-	60-62.5%
F	<59.9%

Socratic Notes: For **each week on which a paper is not due**, you will write “Socratic Notes”. Socrates famously taught by asking questions. For each week, you **must write down three (3) questions for the reading(s) due that week**. The questions need to show genuine engagement with the text. **Submit your Socratic Notes on Canvas. Socratic Notes are due at the end of the week by Sunday at 11:59 pm.** The weekly Socratic Notes will be graded Pass/Fail.

Reading Quizzes: Every week, there will be a **short (in class) reading quiz covering some of the basic ideas in the readings**. These reading quizzes are designed to keep you on track and to make sure that you have a sufficient grasp of all of the major topics in the course.

Papers: You will **write three papers** during the course of the semester. The **lengths and requirements of the papers will increase over the course of the semester** (see overview above). I will post instructions for each paper one week prior to their due date. The point of the staggered-approach to the papers is to gradually develop your skills at writing longer, more complicated philosophical papers. I will give detailed comments on papers.

Attendance and Participation: Your participation grade is based on the extent to which you complete in-class activities, attend class, and participate in discussion. Late attendance gets half-credit unless otherwise excused. You can miss up to three (3) classes without it affecting your attendance grade, after that you will lose 5% of your attendance grade for every **unexcused** absence. You must email me with a legitimate reason to have your absence excused.

Additional Information

Course Materials: *All readings are available on Canvas*. If you get alternative copies, make sure they are the **same editions** as those available on Canvas.

Office Hours: I have office hours Wednesdays from 2:30 - 3:30 or *by appointment* (also meeting on Zoom is fine).

Communication: If you need to contact me outside of office hours, you can reach me by email. You must use your UMass email when emailing me. During the week, I will respond to emails within 24 hours and try to reply to emails sent during business hours the same day. If you send me an email outside of business hours, do not expect a same-day response.

Accommodation: If you find the course in any way inaccessible, please let me know. If you need academic accommodation, please contact [Disability Services](#). The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements.

Academic Honesty: Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism (including the use of AI). UMass has a zero tolerance policy for academic dishonesty. If you have any questions, look [here](#) or ask me. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent

Title IX Policy: In accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 that prohibits gender-based discrimination in educational settings that receive federal funds, the University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students, free from all forms of discrimination, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and retaliation. This includes interactions in person or online through digital platforms and social media. Title IX also protects against discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, miscarriage, abortion, or related conditions, including recovery. There are resources here on campus to support you. A summary of the available Title IX resources (confidential and non-confidential) can be found at the following link: <https://www.umass.edu/titleix/resources>. You do not need to make a formal report to access them. If you need immediate support, you are not alone. Free and confidential support is available 24 hours a day / 7 days a week / 365 days a year at the SASA Hotline 413-545-0800.

***Note: The syllabus/schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.**

Readings and Assignments Schedule

***Note:** if there are no sections/pages listed, the entire article/chapter is assigned.

Week	Date	Topic	Assigned Reading	Pages / Sections	Notes
1	Tue, Sep 2	Course Intro	Syllabus Day		
	Thu, Sep 4	Knowledge & Reality	<i>Russell (1912), Problems of Philosophy</i>	Ch. 1	
			<i>Plato (c. 380 BCE), Republic VII (Allegory of the Cave)</i>	selections	

2	Tue, Sep 9	Skepticism	<i>Descartes (1641), Meditations</i>	Mediation I & II	
	Thu, Sep 11				
3	Tue, Sep 16	Reasonable Disagreement	<i>Feldman (2006), "Epistemological puzzles about disagreement"</i>		
	Thu, Sep 18				
4	Tue, Sep 23	Epistemic Injustice	<i>Fricker (2007), Epistemic Injustice</i>	Ch. 1	
	Thu, Sep 25				Paper #1, due Sep 28 (by midnight)
5	Tue, Sep 30	Substance	<i>Lowe (2002), "Substance" (in A Survey of Metaphysics)</i>		
	Thu, Oct 2				
6	Tue, Oct 7	Mind and Body	<i>Antony (2009), "The Mental and the Physical"</i>		
	Thu, Oct 9				
7	Tue, Oct 14	Personal Identity	<i>Parfit (1984), "Personal Identity" (in Reasons and Persons)</i>		
	Thu, Oct 16				
8	Tue, Oct 21	Free Will and Determinism	<i>Sider (2001), "Free Will and Determinism" (in Riddles of Existence)</i>		
	Thu, Oct 23				
9	Tue, Oct 28	Kantian Ethics	<i>Kant (1785), Groundwork</i>	selections	
	Thu, Oct 30				Paper #2, due Nov 2 (by midnight)
10	Tue, Nov 4	Utilitarianism	<i>Mill (1853), Utilitarianism</i>	Ch. 2	
	Thu, Nov 6				
11	Tue, Nov 11	Moral Relativism	<i>Midgley (1981), "Trying Out One's New Sword"</i>		
	Thu, Nov 13	Meaning of Life	<i>Wolf (1989), "The Meanings of Lives"</i>		
12	Tue, Nov 18	Political Liberalism	<i>Rawls (1971), A Theory of Justice</i>	selections	
	Thu, Nov 20				
13	Nov 24 - 30	✗ No Class (Thanksgiving Break)			

14	Tue, Dec 2	Structural Oppression	Young (1990), "Five Faces of Oppression"		
	Thu, Dec 4				
15	Tue, Dec 9	Civil Disobedience	King Jr. (1963), "Letter from Birmingham Jail"		Last Class
					Paper #3, due Dec 14 (by midnight)