

PHI 101: Introduction to Philosophy

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Course Description. This course will introduce you to some basic philosophical questions about knowledge, mind, persons and freedom. These include:

- What is knowledge? How can I know about the world?
- What is it to be conscious? Is my mind just my brain?
- What sort of thing is a person? Can I survive the death of my body?
- What is it to act freely? Am I responsible for what I do?

The aim of the course is to give you practice in the sort of analysis and argumentation that philosophers engage in when they address these and other questions. The emphasis will be on analyzing problems, constructing and evaluating arguments, developing and defending theses.

Requirements and Grading. You will be graded on the basis of two things:

1. Essays. There will be 2 papers. These should be around 1500 words. Assignment/Due dates are below. Essays should be submitted electronically as a pdf file with your name in the file name.
2. Quizzes. There will be frequent short quizzes. These will consist of 2 – 3 straightforward questions drawn from class discussion.

Your grade will be calculated as a weighted average of your essays and quizzes as follows: each paper will count for 30% of your grade; the average of your quiz grades will count for the other 40% of your grade; I will drop your two lowest quiz grades with the exception of those quizzes you miss due to an unexcused absence.

Grading scale: 0-59% F, 60-62% D-, 63-66% D, 67-69% D+, 70-72% C-, 73-76% C, 77-79% C+, 80-82% B-, 83-86% B, 87-89% B+, 90-92% A-, 93-96% A, 97-100% A+.

Late Policy. Late essays will be penalized by half a letter grade per day late.

Attendance Policy. I will not take attendance, but attendance is strongly encouraged. The quizzes provide an incentive: their content will be drawn from class discussion, and they will occur unannounced. If you miss a quiz for a good, documented reason, then I will allow a makeup.

Texts. The following texts are required:

René Descartes – Meditations on First Philosophy
Bertrand Russell – Problems of Philosophy
Alter and Howell – A Dialogue on Consciousness
John Perry – A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality

I've ordered all the books through the university bookstore. The Descartes and Russell books, however, are now public domain.

Additional readings will be made available on the course website.

Schedule.

August 24: First Day of Class

Descartes and the Beginning of Modern Philosophy (August 26 – September 12)

Descartes – Meditations on first Philosophy

September 5: No Class

Personal Identity and Immortality (September 14 – September 23)

Perry – Dialogues on Personal Identity and Immortality

Parfit – Personal Identity

Lewis – Survival and Identity

Perception (September 26 – October 5)

Russell – Problems of Philosophy chapters 1 - 4

Austin – Sense and Sensibilia (selections)

October 5: First Essay Assignment

Induction (October 7 – October 17)

Russell – Problems of Philosophy chapters 5 and 6

Salmon – The Problem of Induction (selections)

October 14: No Class

October 17: First Essay Due

The Intellect (October 19 – October 26)

Plato – Meno

Russell – Problems of Philosophy chapters 7 – 11

Ayer – Language, Truth, and Logic (selections)

Fate, Freedom, and Luck (October 28 – November 7)

Conee – Fatalism

Sider – Free Will and Determinism

Nagel – Moral Luck

Minds and Computers (November 9 – November 14)

Block – The Mind as Software of the Brain

Consciousness and the Physical World (November 16 – November 30)

Alter and Howell – A Dialogue on Consciousness

November 25: No Class

December 2: Last Day of Class, Second Essay Assignment

December 14: Last Day of Semester, Second Essay Due