

Introduction to Philosophy (PH 101)

Fairfield University

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Office: Donnarumma Hall 311
Office Hours: M and W, 3:45pm-4:45pm
(and by appointment)

Course Description

Two giants of philosophy, Aristotle and Plato, claimed that philosophy begins in wonder. But it certainly doesn't end there. Using philosophy's signature tool—rational argument—philosophers seek to critically assess our fundamental assumptions about the world and our place in it. In this course, we'll explore some of the major questions of philosophy: Does God exist? Who are we? And what do we owe to each other? We will also consider what should be done when equally smart people disagree and whether we can ever acquire knowledge through testimony. These are weighty issues, and it is unlikely that we will arrive at settled answers to these questions in a single semester. Instead, our central goal will be to arrive at a better understanding of the target questions by examining some famous responses to them and by attempting to develop our own answers to the questions. We will also work on becoming more critical and careful thinkers by engaging in thoughtful dialogue with each other and with the assigned texts.

Required Texts

- The readings for each class meeting will be made available as PDF or Word documents under Course Documents on Blackboard.
- You are expected to print out the readings in advance of the sessions for which they are assigned and bring them to class.

Course Goals and Objectives

By the end of the semester, you will

- be able to state some of the central questions of philosophy;
- be able to explain some of the prominent strategies for responding to those questions;
- be able to ask questions that draw out the implications of a position, reveal its underlying assumptions, and expose ambiguities;
- be able to offer your own, critical assessment of candidate answers to the target questions, both in class conversations and in written pieces of work.

Course Requirements and Grading

Doing philosophy is hard work! But, as with any skill, you will get better with practice. The course assignments and class discussions are all designed to help you develop a better understanding of the target questions and to give you hands-on experience evaluating philosophical views and developing your own arguments.

Assignment	% of Final Grade
Attendance and participation	15%
4 critical question assignments	4 x 5% = 20%
Final paper + thesis statement + peer reviews	20% + 5% + 5% = 30%
2 in-class quizzes	2 x 7.5% = 15%
Final exam	20%

See pp. 6-8 for more detailed discussion of these assignments.

Course Policies

Attendance

Consistent attendance and active participation are crucial to your learning experience in this class (and to the learning experience of class as a whole). Regular attendance and participation will improve your grade in the course; missing classes will negatively affect your grade. Page 7 provides a break-down of how your attendance and participation grade will be calculated.

Technology Policy

Our main goal in this class is to explore ideas in conversation with each other. To do this, you won't need a cellphone, laptop, tablet or other electronic device. You just need to show up with a hardcopy of the assigned paper, a notebook and pen/pencil (for taking or referring back to notes), and your own thoughts about the material! In order to facilitate thoughtful conversations, I will be requiring you to **leave gadgets at home or in your bag (this includes cellphones, laptops, and tablets)**. I reserve the right to modify or suspend this policy if I determine that use of gadgets will contribute to our learning experience.

Snow Days

In the event that the university is closed due to bad weather, class will meet virtually via Blackboard. I will provide a video lecture and participation will be graded via a discussion board.

Accommodation

Fairfield University is committed to providing qualified students with disabilities an equal opportunity to access the benefits, rights, and privileges of its services, programs and activities in an accessible setting. If you require accommodations for this course, please contact the Academic and Career Development Center as early as possible in the semester to complete the registration process for accommodations. Center staff will work with us to create a plan for your success in this course.

Sexual Misconduct and Harassment

Fairfield University seeks to provide an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have been the victim of sexual harassment, misconduct or assault, we encourage you to report it, knowing that if you report this to a faculty member, she or he must notify Fairfield University's Title IX coordinator about the basic facts of the incident (you may choose whether you or anyone involved is identified by name). For more information about your options at Fairfield please see the Student Handbook.

Academic Integrity

I expect you to follow Fairfield University's academic honesty policy (see the Academic Honesty section of the current catalog: catalog.fairfield.edu/undergraduate/overview/academic-policies-general-regulations). Academic dishonesty includes (but is not limited to) copying examination answers from crib notes or another student, submitting your own work from other courses for credit in this course (without prior permission of both instructors), and submitting the information, ideas, or language of others as your own work in fulfillment of course assignments. If you are uncertain about whether your use of material constitutes plagiarism or another form of academic dishonesty, please consult me. Instances of academic dishonesty will result in a grade of zero for the paper or examination, and I will send an official letter to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences detailing the academic misconduct. The letter will remain on file in the Dean's office and will be a permanent part of your academic record.

Tentative Schedule of Topics and Readings

Introduction and the Problem of Evil

1.1 Jan 23	The problem of evil <i>Skill Workshop (SW): what an argument is and how to win one</i>	<i>Read the syllabus!</i>
2.1 Jan 28	A solution to the problem of evil? <i>SW: reading philosophy</i>	Plantinga, “The Free Will Defense” (I) Handout: “How to Read Philosophy” (Concepción)
2.2 Jan 30	A solution to the problem of evil? <i>SW: thesis statements and critical questions</i>	Plantinga, “The Free Will Defense” (II)
3.1 Feb 4	The evidential argument from evil	Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism”
3.2 Feb 6	A new aspect of the problem of evil	Stump, “The Problem of Evil and the Desires of the Heart”

Disagreement

4.1 Feb 11	What should you do if your epistemic peer disagrees with you? (I)	Feldman, “Reasonable Religious Disagreements”
4.2 Feb 13	What should you do if your epistemic peer disagrees with you? (II)	Holley, “Religious Disagreements and Epistemic Rationality”
5.1 Feb 19 Note Tuesday meeting! *Quiz 1	Debriefing: Politics and Disagreement	Gutting, “On Political Disagreement” (Op-Ed) Gutting, “Political Disagreement Revisited” (Op-Ed)

Testimony and Trust

5.2 Feb 20	Should I believe you if you tell me you witnessed a miracle? <i>SW: identifying supporting claims</i>	Hume on miracles
6.1 Feb 25	Can knowledge be acquired through testimony?	Coady, “Testimony and Observations”
6.2 Feb 27	Epistemic injustice	Fricker, “Rational Authority and Social Power”

Personal Identity

7.1 Mar 4	A psychological account of personal identity	Locke on personal identity
7.2 Mar 6	A physiological account of personal identity <i>SW: objections</i>	Williams, “The Self and the Future”
8.1 Mar 11	Does personal identity even matter?	Parfit, “The Unimportance of Identity”
8.2 Mar 13	A feminist account of personal identity	Brison, “Outliving Oneself”

Mar 18 and 20 SPRING BREAK

Ethics and Its Scope

9.1 Mar 25	Psychological egoism, ethical egoism	Selection from Plato’s <i>Republic</i> Rachels, “Ethical Egoism”
9.2 Mar 27	Consequentialism and Utilitarianism <i>SW: responses to objections</i>	Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”
10.1 Apr 1	Does consequentialism demand too much?	Arthur, “Equality, Entitlements, and the Distribution of Income”
10.2 Apr 3 *Quiz 2	Deontology	O’Niell, “Introduction to Kantian Ethics”
11.1 Apr 8	Associative duties (I)	Scheffler, “Relationships and Responsibilities”
11.2 Apr 10	Associative duties (II)	Keller, “Four Theories of Filial Duty”
12.1 Apr 15	Morality and other values	Wolf, “Moral Saints”

Course Conclusion

12.2 Apr 17 Class meets virtually	Debrief on ethics unit <i>SW: writing a philosophy paper</i>	“How to Write a Philosophy Paper”
13.1 Apr 22 Class will meet!	Final Paper Workshops (I)	Note: In order to receive a passing grade on the Peer Review exercise, you must attend class on Apr 22 and 24
13.2 Apr 24	Final Paper Workshops (II)	
14.1 Apr 29	Review Session	Russell, “The Value of Philosophy”
Apr 30 *Final Paper Due		

May 9, 3pm *Final exam, 5pm section*

May 6, 6:30pm *Final exam, 6:30pm section*

Assignment Details

Participation (15%)

The success of our class—and what you take from it—depends on your presence and participation. Your attendance and participation grade will be based on points. Everyone in the course will start with 100 points; the minimum number of points required for an ‘A’ in attendance and participation is 93. Beginning in session 3 and continuing through session 26 (our final class), I will start collecting attendance and participation data. If you show up to class and contribute at least once to the day’s discussion, you will maintain your current running score.

Non-participation and absences:

- If you are present for a class meeting but do not participate, you will lose 2 points. (See below for participation options!)
- If you are absent for a class meeting, you will lose 3 points (1 point for the absence, 2 points for non-participation).
- 4+ absences: you will lose 3 points for each session missed **and** you will lose 7 points from your running score for each additional absence above 3. (E.g. If you missed 5 classes but received full points for other class meetings, you would receive a ‘C-’ for participation and attendance: $100 - (5 \times 3) - (2 \times 7) = 71$ pts = C-)

What if I get sick/have a meeting/have an interview/need a personal day?

- As a general rule, you cannot make up absences. However, since the minimum number of points required for an ‘A’ is 93, you could miss a class or two due to illness or other obligations and still receive an ‘A’, as long as you fully participate in the other classes.
- If you have an emergency or a chronic illness, or participate in a university-sponsored activity that you think might result in your missing class, please contact me as soon as the issue arises. We will arrange a plan for you to make up these absences. Make-ups will likely be in the form of brief in-class presentations. Please note that I will **only** offer make-ups in the case of emergencies, serious on-going illness, and *documented* participation in university-sponsored extracurriculars.

What if I have trouble participating in group discussions?

- There are two ways to contribute to class discussion. (1) Raise a question for discussion or respond to someone else’s question or comment in class. (2) **Email me a short question for class discussion by 2pm on the day our class meets.** Questions received by 2pm will count for your participation points for that day **as long as you also attend the class.** (If you send me a question but don’t show up for class, the absence policy outlined above will apply. If you send me a question after 2pm and show up for class, you won’t lose attendance points but you will lose participation points.)

Critical Question Assignments (4 x 5 = 20%)

You will be required to complete 4 short critical question assignments over the course of the semester. Each assignment will ask you to complete a task related to one of the readings and it will ask you to formulate a question related to that reading; completed assignments will be graded using a rubric. Instructions and rubrics for each assignment will be posted on Blackboard. The assignments must be done in order, and a sign-up sheet for these assignments will be made available through Blackboard.

The purpose of these assignments is to familiarize you with the components of the essay that you will write at the end of the semester and to give you practice formulating concise questions that deepen your understanding of a topic. The questions you submit will also form the basis of class discussions and thus will provide you with an extra opportunity to get participation points (e.g. by expanding on your question in class). **In order to receive credit for your CQA, you must attend class on any days that you sign up to submit a CQA.**

Final Paper (20% + 5% for thesis statement + 5% for peer reviews = 30%)

The final paper assignment provides you with the opportunity to delve deeper into one of the philosophical views covered in the course. You will be expected to **demonstrate an understanding** of your chosen topic through a concise presentation of the central view and arguments for it, and you will be expected to **provide your own critical assessment** of that view. You will have the option of writing on an assigned prompt or developing one of your question assignments.

- If you decide to develop one of your question assignments into a paper, you must clear this with me **by April 15**.
- Everyone will be required to submit the thesis statement for their paper via Blackboard on **April 18**. This counts for 5% of your final paper grade and will be graded using a rubric.
- Peer reviews will be held on **April 24 and 29**. During the reviews, each student will present their thesis statement and a sketch of their argument to a group of 5-6 peers. Peers are responsible for providing feedback to their group members. They will create a document that contains, among other things, what the peer reviewers take to be the strongest objection to each of the six theses that they are reviewing. The document will be graded using a rubric and this grade will be worth 5% of each participant's final grade.
- The final paper will be due through Blackboard on **April 30**. It should be 4-6 pages long and should contain, among other things, a response to the major objection raised by the peer reviewers. This assignment will be worth 20% of the final grade.

Quizzes (2 x 7.5% = 15%)

There will be two short (20-30 minute) in-class quizzes consisting of short-answer questions. The questions will be designed to help you review key concepts and arguments and to prepare you for the final exam. Quiz 1 will be on **February 19**; Quiz 2 will be on **April 3**.

Final Exam (20%)

The final exam will be a two-hour cumulative exam, and it will be a combination of short answer and essay questions. The exam provides you with the opportunity to systematically review the material from the whole course and to consolidate your understanding of the arguments and ideas that we have discussed. The exam will be closed book and will be held during the final exam period.

- Exam date for 5pm section: **May 9, 3pm.**
- Exam date for 6:30pm section: **May 6, 6:30pm.**