

PHILO 101 | SECTIONS 02+06 | SPRING 2014

# INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

Instructor: Daniel Harris (danielwharris@gmail.com)

Office Hours: Mondays, 11:15-12:30      Office: 1447W

## ABOUT THE COURSE

Philosophy deals with questions of fundamental importance about the world and our place in it that the empirical sciences seem ill-equipped to handle. This course is designed to introduce students to philosophy by investigating some longstanding and persistent philosophical questions, including these:

- Can we have genuine knowledge of anything? If so, what?
- What are minds, and what do they have to do with bodies?
- Do we have free will, or are our actions predetermined?
- What are the differences between persons and non-persons?
- Do we have moral responsibilities toward animals? If so, why?
- What makes an action right or wrong, and what makes a person good or bad?
- What makes a society just?

We'll consider how some influential philosophers have attempted to answer these questions, and we'll also look at what some contemporary authors have to say about them. Along the way, we'll learn some methods for asking and answering tough questions that should also prove useful outside the philosophy classroom.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Daily Five Minute Quizzes — 20%  
First Writing Assignment — 20%  
Midterm Exam — 15%  
Second Writing Assignment — 30%  
Final Exam — 15%

## EXAMS

The midterm and final exams will take the form of short essay questions. They will cover material from the readings, but also some material talked about in class which may not have been in the readings. The final exam will cover material from the entire semester.

## ESSAYS

You'll write two essays for the class. In each, you'll defend a philosophical thesis by giving arguments and responding to objections. You'll have a choice of topics, which I'll circulate about two weeks before the essays are due.

## DAILY FIVE MINUTE QUIZZES

We'll begin every class with a five minute quiz consisting of two or three short questions about that day's reading and/or the previous day's discussion. You should be able to answer the questions in a sentence or two.

Quizzes will be graded on a pass/fail basis. The quizzes are worth 20% of your total grade, and we'll have something like 25-28 quizzes in total. Here is how I will calculate your final quiz grade out of 20:

$$\text{quiz grade} = 20 \times \frac{\text{number of quizzes you passed}}{\text{total number of quizzes} - 3}$$

This means that you can miss or fail up to three quizzes before it will begin to have a negative impact on your grade; after that, each quiz that you miss or fail will lower your final grade by a bit less than one percentage point.

## READINGS AND WEBSITE

All of the required readings (and podcasts, etc.) will be available on the course website:

<http://bit.ly/philo101>

No need to buy a book.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

If all goes well, here's what will happen this semester:

- You'll learn about some central philosophical questions and the ways that some influential philosophers have tried to answer them.
- You'll get better at thinking like a philosopher. This means thinking clearly about hard questions, taking a rationally critical attitude toward your own and others' answers to those questions, and being willing to go where the best reasons and arguments lead.
- You'll get better at reading like a philosopher. This means identifying what's important and controversial in an author's claims, distinguishing between rational and irrational support for those claims, and noticing the weak spots in their arguments.
- You'll get better at writing like a philosopher. This means being clear about what you're trying to say, giving the best possible rational support for your claims, and anticipating the objections of those who disagree.
- Since these ways of thinking, reading, and writing are useful for dealing with issues outside philosophy, you'll gain some skills that you can use in other courses, and in your everyday life.

## HOW TO GET A GOOD GRADE

Getting an A in this course will require you to do all of the following:

- Do all of the readings before we discuss them in class, and in most cases again afterward.
- Attend class and display your knowledge of the readings on the quizzes and in class discussion.
- Regularly ask questions, preferably during class, but alternatively during office hours or by email.
- Work hard at understanding the theories we discuss and practice applying them to new cases.
- Learn to write in the clear, concise, and convincingly argumentative style that philosophers like. (We'll spend a day discussing how to write philosophy before the first essay is due, and two readings on this topic will be assigned.)
- Ruthlessly revise and proofread your essays until they are written in clear and grammatical English.

## ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

	MONDAYS	THURSDAYS
1	January 27 Dennett: <i>Darwin's Dangerous Idea</i> (excerpt)	January 30 David Foster Wallace: <i>Consider the Lobster</i>
2	February 3 Descartes: <i>Meditations</i> (excerpt 1) Pryor: <i>Guidelines on Reading Philosophy</i>	February 6 Pryor: <i>What's So Bad about Living in the Matrix?</i>
3	February 10 Hume: <i>Enquiry into Human Understanding</i> (excerpt) Philosophy Bites Podcast: <i>Peter Millican on Hume's Significance</i>	February 13 Descartes: <i>Meditations</i> (excerpt 2)
4	February 17 NO CLASS (Presidents' Day)	February 20 Louis Menand: <i>Head Case</i>
5	February 24 Gilbert Ryle: <i>The Concept of Mind</i> (excerpt) Philosophy Bites Podcast: <i>David Papineau on Physicalism</i>	February 27 Frank Jackson: <i>What Mary Didn't Know</i>
6	March 3 <b>Mid-Term Exam</b>	March 6 Horban: <i>How to Write a Philosophy Essay</i> Pryor: <i>Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper</i>
7	March 10 Singer: <i>What Ethics is Not</i>	March 13 Mill: <i>What Utilitarianism Is</i> Singer: <i>Famine, Affluence, and Morality</i>
8	March 17 Kant: <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> Sandel: <i>Justice, Lecture 6</i> (video)	March 20 John T. Noonan, Jr.: <i>An Absolute Value in History</i>
9	March 24 Judith Jarvis Thomson: <i>A Defense of Abortion</i> <b>First Essay Due</b>	March 27 Mary Anne Warren: <i>On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion</i>
10	March 31 John Locke: <i>Identity and Diversity</i>	April 3 Bernard Williams: <i>The Self and the Future</i>
11	April 7 Daniel Dennett: <i>The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity</i>	April 10 Lehrer: <i>How We Decide</i> (excerpt) Dawkins: <i>The Selfish Gene</i> (excerpt)
	April 14 NO CLASS (Spring Recess)	April 17 NO CLASS (Spring Recess)
12	April 21 NO CLASS (Spring Recess)	April 24 Strawson: <i>Your Move: The Maze of Free Will</i>
13	April 28 Michael Levin: <i>A Compatibilist Defense of Moral Responsibility</i> Philosophy Bites Podcast: <i>Daniel Dennett on Free Will</i>	May 1 Plato: <i>Republic</i> (excerpt)
14	May 5 Nozick: <i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i> (excerpt) Sandel: <i>Justice, Episode 3</i> (video)	May 8 Rawls: <i>A Theory of Justice</i> (excerpt) Sandel: <i>Justice, Episodes 7 and 8</i> (video)
15	May 12 Iris Marion Young: <i>Five Faces of Oppression</i>	May 15 Frye: <i>Sexism</i>