

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

PROFESSOR: Daniel W. Harris (danielwharris@gmail.com)

OFFICE HOURS: after class or by appointment (HW1446)

COURSE WEBSITE: danielwharris.com/teaching/101

ABOUT THE COURSE

Philosophy deals with questions 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 is it to have a mind, and what does this have to do with having a body?
- 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 would a just society be like?

We'll consider how some influential philosophers of the past and present have attempted to answer these questions. 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 In-Class Quizzes — 20%

Three Writing Assignments — 60%

Final Exam — 20%

Writing Assignments

A writing assignment may consist of a short essay assignment or a take-home exam. You will be given at least two weeks notice for each one.

Final Exam

The final exam will consist of essay questions that I will give out in advance. They will cover material from the readings, but also some material talked about in class which may not have been in the readings. Each of the second and third exams will focus on material covered since the previous exam, but may also cover issues from earlier in the semester as they relate to more recent material.

DAILY 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 there will be about 30 quizzes in total. Here is how I will calculate your final quiz grade out of 10:

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

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.

The purpose of these quizzes is to create an incentive for you to do the things you should be doing anyway in order to get the most out of the course: show up to class (on time), do the readings, and begin each day with the relevant ideas in your mind.

WEBSITE AND READINGS

All of the readings for the semester are available in electronic form on the course website:

danielwharris.com/teaching/101

To download most of the readings, you'll need to use the username and password.

There is a tentative schedule of readings on the next page of this syllabus. However, the schedule may change, and the definitive schedule will always be what is listed on the website. Always check there before you begin to prepare for class.

EMAIL COMMUNICATION

I will email you at whatever address is listed for you in CUNYfirst. It is important that you check this email address regularly. You can find instructions for how to change your email address in CUNYfirst here:

https://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/registrar/upload/How_To_Change_Address_Phone_Email_Contact.pdf

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 open-minded enough 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 each reading at least once, and preferably more than once.
- Demonstrate your understanding of each day's reading on a quiz.
- Participate in class discussion. Use this space as an opportunity to understand the material better, and to help classmates do the same.
- 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.
- 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	August 28 (Introduction)	August 31 David Foster Wallace: Consider the Lobster
2	September 4 Labor Day — No Class	September 7 Peter Singer: About Ethics John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism
3	September 11 Immanuel Kant: Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals Onora O'Neill: Kantian Approaches to some Famine Problems	September 14 John Rawls: A Theory of Justice (excerpt)
4	September 18 Robert Nozick: Justice and Entitlement	September 21 Hunter College Closed — No Class
5	September 25 Joseph H. Carens: Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders	September 28 Marilynn Frye: Sexism Hi-Phi Nation, Episode 8: Be A Man
6	October 2 John T. Noonan: An Almost Absolute Value in History Mary Anne Warren: On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion	October 5 Judith Jarvis Thomson: A Defense of Abortion
7	October 9 Hunter College Closed — No Class	October 12 J. L. Mackie: The Subjectivity of Values
8	October 16 Descartes: Meditation 1	October 19 Jim Pryor: What's So Bad About Living in the Matrix?
9	October 23 Descartes: Meditations 2-4	October 26 Aquinas: The Five Ways Roger White: The Argument from Cosmological Fine-Tuning
10	October 30 David Lewis: Divine Evil	November 2 Eric Schwitzgebel: 1% Skepticism
11	November 6 Hume: An Enquiry into Human Understanding (excerpt 1)	November 9 Hume: An Enquiry into Human Understanding (excerpt 2)
12	November 13 André Kukla and Joel Walmsley: Dualism and Materialism	November 16 Alan Turing: Computing Machinery and Intelligence
13	November 20 Hilary Putnam: The Nature of Mental States	November 23 Thanksgiving — No Class
14	November 27 Andy Clark and David Chalmers: The Extended Mind	November 30 Paul Churchland: Eliminative Materialism
15	December 4 Frank Jackson: What Mary Didn't Know	December 7 Thomas Nagel: What is it Like to Be a Bat?
	December 11 TBD	

Please note: The above schedule is tentative! The readings may change. the definitive schedule will appear on the website.