

# INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

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COURSE WEBSITE: [danielwharris.com/teaching/101online](http://danielwharris.com/teaching/101online)

## ABOUT PHILOSOPHY

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.

## THIS IS A FULLY ON-LINE COURSE

The course content will be delivered to you via the course website, via email, and, occasionally, the course's blackboard site, and you will submit assignments by blackboard or email. You absolutely need continual access to both the website and blackboard in order to pass the course.

## EMAIL COMMUNICATION

I will normally contact you by email, and I will use whichever email address is listed for you in the CUNYfirst system. It is *essential* that you regularly check this email address. If CUNYfirst has an email address for you that you prefer not to use, you can easily change it. Instructions for doing so are available here:

[https://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/registrar/upload/How - To\\_Change\\_Address\\_Phone\\_Email\\_Contact.pdf](https://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/registrar/upload/How_To_Change_Address_Phone_Email_Contact.pdf)

This is your responsibility. If you are late with an assignment because an email from me went to the wrong address, you will not receive credit for the assignment.

If you would like to contact me, you can do so by

## COURSE WEBSITE

All of the readings, assignments, and other materials for the semester will be made available in electronic form on the course website:

[danielwharris.com/teaching/101online](http://danielwharris.com/teaching/101online)

To download some of the readings, you'll need to login with the username and password.

There is a tentative schedule of topics and required readings on the last page of this syllabus. However, the schedule is incomplete and may change, and the definitive schedule will always be what is listed on the website. Always use the website as your definitive guide to the schedule.

## WEEKLY UNITS

The course will be organized into fifteen weekly units. Each of these weeks will include some required reading, listening, and/or viewing materials, and at least one writing assignment in which you will . Each week's tasks will be posted on the course website no later than the Friday of the prior week. Each week's materials will include a point-by-point list of the tasks you should accomplish that week.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Weekly Writing Assignments — 80%

Write-at-home Final Exam — 20%

### WEEKLY WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

There will be a writing assignment each week that will be designed to help you to engage with the readings. The assignments will take various forms. Each week's assignment will be made available no later than the Friday of the previous week.

For the most part, you will have a good deal of flexibility in when you do this work. (You needn't work on any particular day of the week, for example.) However, some writing assignments may require you to comment on other students' work, and this may involve two due dates—one in the middle of the week and one toward the end of the week.

There will be strict due dates for all of these writing assignments, and each one counts for a significant part of your grade. It is important that you keep up with the coursework each week.

It is also important that you do your own work. If two assignments resemble one another very closely, I will consider both to have been plagiarized. Although it's okay for you to discuss assignments with other class members, and to offer them help, you should keep your written assignments private until they're submitted to me.

### FINAL EXAM

The final will consist of short essay questions about the readings. It will cover the whole semester. It will be made available at least a week before the due date, which is 22 December. You will submit the final exam to me by email. Again: I will be very strict about plagiarism.

## 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.
- 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 writing assignments 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.

	DATES AND TOPIC	READINGS
1	<b>First Things</b> 28 August – 1 September	David Foster Wallace: Consider the Lobster
2	<b>Consequentialist Ethics</b> 4–8 September	Peter Singer: About Ethics John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism
3	<b>Kantian Ethics</b> 11–15 September	Immanuel Kant: Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals Onora O’Neill: Kantian Approaches to some Famine Problems
4	<b>Distributive Justice</b> 18–22 September	John Rawls: A Theory of Justice (excerpt) Robert Nozick: Justice and Entitlement Joseph H. Carens: Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders
5	<b>Gender and Feminism</b> 25–29 September	Marilynn Frye: Sexism Hi-Phi Nation, Episode 8: Be A Man
6	<b>Perspectives on Abortion</b> 2–6 October	John T. Noonan: An Almost Absolute Value in History Mary Anne Warren: On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion Judith Jarvis Thomson: A Defense of Abortion
7	<b>Metaethics</b> 9–13 October	J. L. Mackie: The Subjectivity of Values
8	<b>Skepticism</b> 16–20 October	Descartes: Meditation 1 The Matrix (film) Jim Pryor: What’s So Bad About Living in the Matrix?
9	<b>Rationalism</b> 23–27 October	Descartes: Meditations 2–4 Plato: Meno (excerpt)
10	<b>God</b> 30 October – 3 November	Roger White: The Argument from Cosmological Fine-Tuning David Lewis: Divine Evil
11	<b>Empiricism</b> 6–10 November	Hume: An Enquiry into Human Understanding (excerpt)
12	<b>Dualism and Materialism</b> 13–17 November	André Kukla and Joel Walmsley: Dualism and Materialism Frank Jackson: What Mary Didn’t Know Thomas Nagel: What is it Like to Be a Bat?
13	<b>Artificial Intelligence</b> 27 November – 1 December	Alan Turing: Computing Machinery and Intelligence André Kukla and Joel Walmsley: Artificial Intelligence John Searle: Minds, Brains, and Programs
14	<b>The Mind and the Self</b> 4–8 December	Andy Clark and David Chalmers: The Extended Mind Paul Churchland: Eliminative Materialism Daniel Dennett: Where Am I?
15	<b>Personal Identity</b> 11–15 December	John Locke: Of Identity and Diversity Bernard Williams: The Self and the Future Derek Parfit: Personal Identity

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