

**Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy**  
Summer II 2019, UNC Chapel Hill

MTWRF 1:15pm–2:45pm  
Caldwell 103

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Fridays 2.45-3.45pm, or by appointment

**Course Description**

This course is an introduction to some of the main problems in Philosophy. We will study (among other things) such questions as: Can we know that there is an external world? Why does the universe exist? Can human life be meaningful? What is the relationship between the mind and the body? What makes a certain action good? Besides introducing you to some of the main topics of contemporary (and historical) philosophy, this course also aims to teach you to read, write, and think philosophically.

**Readings**

All readings will be made available on Sakai.

**Course Requirements**

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

Short Papers: 45% (each paper is worth 15%)  
Reading Responses: 5%  
Midterm Exam: 25%  
Final Exam: 25%

**Short Papers:**

Every week you will be required to write a short paper on one of the readings of that week. The papers are supposed to be 2-3 pages long and they are always due on Monday of the following week. I will try to distribute the paper prompts at the beginning of each week. You are required to write 4 short papers (due on the dates specified below), but only your three highest scores will count towards your final grade.

### **Reading Responses:**

Twice during the semester (in Week 2 and Week 4) you will be required to write a short one-page long summary of the argument the author gives in a particular part of this week's reading. At the beginning of Week 2 and Week 4 I will give you a list, indicating the particular sections of this week's readings about which you can write your reading response. You may then write your reading response about any of the sections of the reading that I indicated. The purpose of this exercise is for you to engage with an unfamiliar philosophical text and figure out the author's argument on your own. This is why you *must* submit your reading response before the beginning of class on the day where we discuss the reading that you'll be writing about. You have to write two such reading responses, but only your highest score will count towards your final grade.

**Note: The required writing for this class will be at minimum 10 pages.**

### **Midterm**

On July 12th, we'll have an in-class mid-term exam that consists of several short answer questions that are designed to test your understanding of the main points discussed in the course so far.

### **Final Exam**

On July 30th we'll have our final exam. The final exam will (like the midterm) consist of short answer questions that are designed to test your understanding of the main points discussed in the course.

### **Choose your own adventure!**

Since this course is an introduction to Philosophy, I want to make sure that we cover at least some of the things you want to learn about Philosophy. This is why I haven't yet assigned any reading for the last week of class. Instead, I want to hear your opinion about what you want to do, and then I will try to incorporate that into the syllabus. Possible topics for the last three days may (but need not) include: Fake news and Philosophy, Topics in Existential Philosophy, Topics in Asian Philosophy, The problem of evil, Vegetarianism, Free will, Can beliefs wrong, Time travel, Personal identity, etc.

### **Due Dates and Late Policy**

**Short papers** are due in class on the day assigned on the syllabus (please email me a copy of your paper or bring a printed copy to class). I'm happy to give anyone who needs it a short extension for the short papers until the end of the day on which the papers are assigned. If you would like to have a short extension, please send me an email and ask. After that period, short papers will be docked 1/2 a letter grade for each day that they are late, unless you were experiencing a serious and genuinely

unforeseen medical or personal emergency, and only when the emergency can be verified with the Dean of Students Office (<https://deanofstudents.unc.edu/>).

**Reading Responses** are due *before class* on the day for which the readings are assigned. Since the purpose of the reading responses is for you to engage with a philosophical text before we've covered that text in class, I cannot accept requests for extensions for the reading responses. If, however, you should suffer a serious and genuinely unforeseen medical or personal emergency that can be verified with the Dean of Students Office, please let me know. I'll then give you a different reading response assignment for a future reading that we haven't discussed yet.

Both the **midterm exam** and the **final exam** have to be taken on the day indicated on the syllabus. Any request to take the Midterm or the Final Exam at a time other than the scheduled time must likewise go through the Office of the Dean of Students.

**Note: Please write your PID instead of your names on your papers and exams to allow for blind grading.**

### **Accommodations**

If you require reasonable accommodations for a documented disability, you must register with ARS (<https://accessibility.unc.edu/>). Once I receive ARS's recommendations, I will be happy to work with you to implement them as appropriate.

### **Laptops**

Since this is a very small class and in my experience laptops are distracting both to you and the people around you, laptops, phones, and other electronics are not permitted for use in the classroom. (Though if you have a valid reason for which you need to use a laptop come and talk to me and we'll find a way to accommodate you.)

Since I know that many people like taking notes with their laptop, I have decided that in exchange for requiring you not to bring laptops, I will pass out short handouts summarizing the main points of the day's reading at the beginning of each class.

### **Outside Sources**

Please do not refer to any academic sources other than the assigned readings in your papers. The one exception is the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/>), which is very useful for general background reading on philosophical terms and topics.

## Plagiarism

The UNC Instrument of Student Governance defines plagiarism as “deliberate or reckless representation of another’s words, thoughts, or ideas as one’s own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise.” You are expected to abide by UNC’s Honor Code, and refrain from any kind of academic dishonesty, including cheating and plagiarism. Just as you are bound by the Honor Code not to plagiarize, I am bound by it to report suspected cases of academic dishonesty of any kind to the Honor Court.

In your papers, you may use whichever standard citation convention that you’d like. But any words that you borrow from any external source must appear in quotation marks, and you must provide some sort of internal citation indicating where those words came from. It is also a form of plagiarism to closely paraphrase text from an external source without proper citation, changing a few of the words but imitating the structure of the external source.

In addition, please bear in mind that plagiarism can be committed non-deliberately; if you are reckless in your use of other people’s words or ideas, then you have committed plagiarism even if you didn’t mean to do so. If you have any questions at all about proper citation of other people’s words or ideas in the course, please don’t hesitate to come talk to me about them. You are responsible for knowing what exactly counts as plagiarism and to not commit it in your papers.

(Note: This Syllabus is still provisional and some parts of it might change over the course of this semester.)

## Course Schedule

### Week 1 - Skepticism about the external world

#### Monday, June 24th - Introduction

No reading

#### Tuesday, June 25th - What can we know about the external world?

Read Descartes’ *Meditations* (Read only Meditation 1)

Read Bostrom’s “The Simulation Argument: Why the Probability That You Are Living in a Matrix is Quite High”

#### Wednesday, June 26th - Would it be bad if there was no external world?

Read Grau’s “Bad Dreams, Evil Demons, and the Experience Machine: Philosophy and The Matrix”

#### Thursday, June 27th - Possible answers to skepticism

Read Moore’s “Proof of an external world” (Read only pp. 165-170)

Optional: Read Moore’s “Certainty”

**Friday, June 28th** - Possible answers to skepticism, continued  
Read Rinard's "Reasoning one's way out of skepticism" (Read only sections 1-4)

## **Week 2 - Fine-tuning**

**Monday, July 1st** - How to respond to arguments  
No reading

**Tuesday, July 2nd** - Fine-tuning and the existence of God  
Read Collins' "God, Design and Fine-Tuning"  
**Paper 1 due in class**

**Wednesday, July 3rd** - Why does the universe exist?  
Read Parfit's "Why anything, why this?"

**Thursday, July 4th** — **No Class** (Independence Day)

**Friday, July 5th** - Is human existence absurd?  
Read Camus's "The myth of Sisyphus"

## **Week 3 - The meaning of life**

**Monday, July 8th** - Is human existence absurd?  
Read Nagel's "The absurd"  
**Paper 2 due in class**

**Tuesday, July 9th** - How could our lives have meaning?  
Read Wolf's "The meanings of lives"

**Wednesday, July 10th** - The problem of evil  
Read Adams - "The problem of evil"

**Thursday, July 11th** - Review for the midterm/catch up  
No new reading

**Friday, July 12th - Midterm**  
No new reading; Midterm

## **Week 4 - Ethics**

**Monday, July 15th** - Introduction

Read Singer "Famine, Affluence and Morality"

**Paper 3 due in class**

**Tuesday, July 16th** - Utilitarianism

Read Mill's *Utilitarianism* (selections)

**Wednesday, July 17th** - Kantianism

Read O'Neill's "A simplified account of Kantian ethics"

**Thursday, July 18th** - Should we try to be as moral as we can be?

Read Wolf's "Moral Saints"

**Friday, July 19th** - Is there objective morality?

Read Street's "Does anything matter or did we just evolve to think so?"

## **Week 5 - Various topics**

**Monday, July 22nd** - Choose your own adventure - Existentialism

Reading TBD

**Paper 4 due in class**

**Tuesday, July 23rd** - Choose your own adventure! - Free Will

Reading TBD

**Wednesday, July 24th** - Choose your own adventure! - Life after Death

Reading TBD

**Thursday, July 25th** - Review day for the final exam

No new reading

**Friday, July 26th** - No Class (Reading Day)

## **Week 6 - Final Exam Period**

**Monday, July 29th** - No Class (Exam Period)

**Tuesday, July 30th** - **Final Exam at 11.30am**