

Phil 101.001: Introduction to Philosophy: Central Problems, Great Minds, Big Ideas (online)

Fall 2021, UNC Chapel Hill
MW 3.35pm — 4.50pm

Instructor: Dominik Berger
Email: dominik@live.unc.edu
Office Hours: Mondays 4.50pm — 5.50pm
 Thursdays 3.00pm — 4.00pm

Course Description

Everyone engages with philosophical questions at one point or another. Do we have free will? Is there a God? What can we know about the world? Is it wrong to eat meat? This course will give you the tools to engage with these and similar questions in a more systematic way. It will introduce you to different philosophical concepts and ideas, and you will learn to think critically about different answers to such important questions. As a result you will be better able to articulate your own point of view with respect to such questions and you'll have the resources to explain why you think that a particular answer might be right or wrong. You might also learn interesting perspectives on these questions that you had not considered before.

Readings

All readings will be made available on Sakai.

Course Requirements and Grading Policy

Two Short Papers: 35%
Final Paper: 25%
Special Participation: 20%
Quizzes: 15%
Attendance: 5%

A-Range: 90-93 = A-, 94-100 = A
B-Range: 80-83 = B-, 84-86 = B, 87-89 = B+
C-Range: 70-73 = C-, 74-76 = C, 77-79 = C+
D-Range: 60-66 = D, 67-69 = D+
F-Range: 0-59 = F

Assignments

Short Papers

Twice during the semester you will be required to write a short paper on one of the readings that we have done up until now. In these papers you will explain an important idea from the readings that you disagree with, explain the author's reasons for adopting the idea and critically engage with it by coming up with objections. This will force you to think more deeply about why the author's view on a particular topic is wrong and yours might be right. The short papers will typically be around 3 pages long and should be submitted on the days indicated on the syllabus. I will distribute prompts for them one week in advance. The first paper will be worth 15% of your overall grade and the second paper will be worth 20% of your overall grade.

Final Paper

Instead of a final exam you will be required to write a final paper. In your final paper you will be asked to explain a philosophical position that you hold and consider an important problem with it. You should then explain how your view can avoid that problem. That paper should be around 5 pages in length and should be submitted on the day that the final exam would be due. The final paper will be worth 25% of your overall grade.

Study Groups and Special Participation

Since it is difficult to get to know 39 students well over zoom, I will divide the class into 8 small study groups at the beginning of the semester. You will continue to meet with your group for the small group discussions that we will have in breakout rooms during the semester. Hopefully you can get to know the other students in your group well and you can reach out to them for support if you need to.

Four times throughout the semester you will be required to take on a leading role in the group discussions of your group. This means that you should (i) think of questions to discuss about a particular paper beforehand and send them to me before the day that the reading is due, (ii) manage the discussion of your group during that day, and (iii) write a short report summarizing the results of the group discussion you had that day. Each instance of your special participation assignment will be worth 5% of your overall grade. I will distribute more information about this assignment and who is in your group at the beginning of the semester.

Note: The short papers, final paper and group discussion reports will exceed 10 pages of writing.

Quizzes:

I want to make sure that everyone is following along with the material we're discussing in class. So in order to make sure that everyone is on the same page, I will ask you to complete 11 quizzes on Sakai at the end of (almost) every week. These quizzes will usually be short and aim to test your understanding of the material of that week. The quizzes will make up 15% of your overall grade — but I will drop the lowest score. The quizzes will be due on Sundays at 11.59pm.

Attendance:

Attendance at lectures is required as part of UNC's policy (see also the appendix at the end of the syllabus). But it is especially important during this course for two reasons: (1) The ideas we are discussing are often fairly difficult and so it's important that you come to lecture to make sure that you are understanding the readings accurately. (2) A large component of this course is for you to share your ideas and perspective with others — but if you don't come to class or don't participate, others will miss out on hearing your thoughts! To make sure that your incentives align with UNC's attendance policy, attendance will contribute 5% to your overall grade.

Zoom etiquette

It is more difficult to have an open and constructive discussion on zoom than it would be in person. But it is even more difficult if everyone turns off their cameras — this way other students (and the instructor!) will feel less like they're discussing ideas with others and more like they are speaking to a vast and unsympathetic void. This is why you should try to keep your cameras turned on during our class. If there is a reason why you would prefer to keep your camera turned off during class, please reach out to me in an email.

Late Policy

I am usually happy to grant **short** extensions for the two short papers, the special participation group discussion report or the quizzes as long as you send me an email beforehand. If you should suffer a serious and genuinely unforeseen medical or personal emergency and need a longer extension, that emergency has to be verified with the Dean of Students Office (<https://deanofstudents.unc.edu/>) first. If an assignment is more than three days late it will be docked 1/3 of a letter grade for each day that it is 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.

Note: The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

Course Schedule

Week 0 - Introduction

Wednesday, August 18th - Introduction
No reading.

Quiz 1 due on Sunday, August 22nd at 11.59pm.

Week 1 - Knowledge

Monday, August 23rd - What is knowledge?
Watch Jennifer Nagel's "Epistemology: Introduction to the theory of knowledge"

Wednesday, August 25th — What can we know about the external world
Read René Descartes's *Meditations* (Read Meditations 1 and 2)
Watch Jennifer Nagel's "Epistemology: The Problem of Skepticism"

Quiz 2 due on Sunday, August 29th at 11.59pm.

Week 2 — Belief

Monday, August 30th - Is it wrong to believe something?
Read William Clifford's "The ethics of belief"

Wednesday, September 1st — Practical Reasons for belief
Read Blaise Pascal's "The Wager"

Quiz 3 due on Sunday, September 5th at 11.59pm.

Week 3 – How to read a Philosophy paper

Monday, September 6th – No class (labour day)

Wednesday, September 8th – How to read a Philosophy paper

Read Jim Pryor's "Guidelines on Reading a Philosophy Paper"

Watch Pynn's "Critical Thinking - Fundamentals: Introduction to Critical Thinking" and "Critical Thinking - Fundamentals: Deductive Arguments"

No quiz due this week.

Week 4 – Disagreement and Echo Chambers

Monday, September 13th – Disagreement

Read Richard Feldman's "Religious Disagreement"

Wednesday, September 15th – Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles

Read C. Thi Nguyen's "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles"

Quiz 4 due on Sunday, September 19th at 11.59pm.

Week 5 – The Problem of Evil

Monday, September 20th – The problem of evil

Read Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* (Read the chapter "Rebellion")

Wednesday, September 22nd - The problem of evil: an answer

Read Marilyn Adams's "The problem of evil"

Short Paper 1 due on Sunday, September 26th at 11.59pm.

Week 6 – Meaning of Life

Monday, September 27th – Is human existence absurd?

Read Thomas Nagel's "The absurd"

Wednesday, September 29th – How could our lives have meaning?

Read Susan Wolf's "The meanings of lives"

Quiz 5 due on Sunday, October 3rd at 11.59pm.

Week 7 – Personal Identity

Monday, October 4th - Am I my body or my memories?
Read John Locke's "The Prince and the Cobbler"
Watch "To be - Philosophical Cartoon Exploring the Self"

Wednesday, October 6th - Psychological Continuity and Bodily Continuity
Read Ted Sider's "Personal Identity"

Quiz 6 due on Sunday, October 10th at 11.59pm.

Week 8 - Personal Identity

Monday, October 11th - Personal Identity is not what matters
Read Derek Parfit's "Personal Identity"

Wednesday, October 13th - The Narrative View
Read Marya Schechtman's "The Narrative Self-Constitution View"

Quiz 7 due on Sunday, October 17th at 11.59pm.

Week 9 - Ethics

Monday, October 18th — Are we morally required to donate money?
Read Peter Singer's "Famine, Affluence and Morality"

Wednesday, October 20th - Utilitarianism
Watch Julia Markovits's "Utilitarianism, Part 1 and 2"
Read John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism* (Chapter 2) (optional)

Short Paper 2 due on Sunday, October 24th at 11.59pm.

Week 10 - Ethics

Monday, October 25th - Should we try to be as moral as we can be?
Read Susan Wolf's "Moral Saints"

Wednesday, October 27th - Is morality objective or culturally relative?
Read James Rachels's "The challenge of cultural relativism"

Quiz 8 due on Sunday, October 31st at 11.59pm.

Week 11 - Eating meat

Monday, November 1st - Is eating meat wrong?
Read Peter Singer's "All animals are equal"

Wednesday, November 3rd - Is eating meat wrong?
Read Cora Diamond's "Eating Meat and Eating People"

Quiz 9 due on Sunday, November 7th at 11.59pm.

Week 12 - Friendship

Monday, November 8th - What if the demands of friendship and morality conflict?
Read Dean Cocking's and Jeanette Kennett's "Friendship and Moral Danger"

Wednesday, November 10th - Do we have a special obligation to believe our friends?
Read Sarah Stroud's "Epistemic Partiality in Friendship"

Quiz 10 due on Sunday, November 14th at 11.59pm.

Week 13 - Free Will

Monday, November 15th - What would be required for us to have free will?
Read Roderick Chisholm's "Human freedom and the self"

Wednesday, November 17th - Could free will be compatible with determinism?
Read Harry Frankfurt's "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"

Quiz 11 due on Sunday, November 21st at 11.59pm.

Week 14 - Moral Responsibility

Monday, November 22nd - Can we be morally responsible for what we do?
Read Galen Strawson's "The impossibility of ultimate moral responsibility"

Wednesday, November 24th — No class. (Thanksgiving)

No quiz due.

Week 15 - Conclusion

Monday, November 29th - Catch up
No reading.

Wednesday, December 1st — Review
No reading.

No quiz due.

Week 16 - Final Exam

Thursday, December 9th - Final class meeting at 4pm; course wrap up
No reading.

Final papers due at 7.00pm.

Official Course Description from the Course Catalogue

PHIL 101. Introduction to Philosophy: Central Problems, Great Minds, Big Ideas. 3 Credits

An introduction to philosophy focusing on a few central problems, for example: free will, the basis of morality, the nature and limits of knowledge, and the existence of God. Honors version available.

Gen Ed: PH.

Grading status: Letter grade.

University Policies and Support Services

Attendance Policy

No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

1. Authorized University activities
2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by [Accessibility Resources and Service](#) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC)
3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators](#), and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC).

Instructors may work with students to meet attendance needs that do not fall within University approved absences. For situations when an absence is not University approved (e.g., a job interview or club activity), instructors determine their own approach to missed classes and make-up assessment and assignments.

Honor Code

All students are expected to follow the guidelines of the UNC honor code. In particular, students are expected to refrain from “lying, cheating, or stealing” in the academic context. If you are unsure about which actions violate the honor code, please see me or consult honor.unc.edu.

Acceptable Use Policy

By enrolling as a student in this course, you agree to abide by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill policies related to the acceptable use of IT systems and services. You may be asked to participate in online discussions or other online activities that may include personal information about you or other students in the

course. The rights and protection of other participants are protected under the UNC-Chapel Hill [Information Technology Acceptable Use Policy](#), which covers topics related to using digital resources, such as privacy, confidentiality, and intellectual property. Consult the University website “[Safe Computing at UNC](#)” for information about the data security policies, updates, and tips on keeping your identity, information, and devices safe.

Accessibility Resources and Services

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities.

Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu> or email ars@unc.edu.

Counseling and Psychological Services

CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

Title IX Resources

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Please contact the University’s Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, interim–titleixcoordinator@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

Policy on Non-Discrimination

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals’ abilities and qualifications. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University’s [Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination](#) offers access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms

and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, creed, genetic information, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such a policy ensures that only relevant factors are considered and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied. If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (see contact info at safe.unc.edu) or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#), or online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

Diversity Statement

I value the perspectives of individuals from all backgrounds reflecting the diversity of our students. I broadly define diversity to include race, gender identity, national origin, ethnicity, religion, social class, age, sexual orientation, political background, and physical and learning ability. I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all students. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to improve. I appreciate suggestions.

Undergraduate Testing Center

The College of Arts and Sciences provides a secure, proctored environment in which exams can be taken. The center works with instructors to proctor exams for their undergraduate students who are not registered with ARS and who do not need testing accommodations as provided by ARS. In other words, the Center provides a proctored testing environment for students who are unable to take an exam at the normally scheduled time (with pre-arrangement by your instructor). For more information, visit <http://testingcenter.web.unc.edu/>.

Learning Center

The UNC Learning Center is a great resource both for students who are struggling in their courses and for those who want to be proactive and develop sound study practices to prevent falling behind. They offer individual consultations, peer tutoring, academic coaching, test prep programming, study skills workshops, and peer study groups. If you think you might benefit from their services, please visit them in SASB North or visit their website to set up an appointment: <http://learningcenter.unc.edu>.

Writing Center

The Writing Center is located in the Student and Academic Services Building and offers personalized writing consultations as well as a variety of other resources. This could be a wonderful resource to help with your writing assignments in this course (and any assignments in your other courses). You do not need a complete draft of your assignment to visit; they can help you at any stage! You can chat with someone in the writing center or set up an appointment on their website: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu>.

Grade Appeal Process

If you feel you have been awarded an incorrect grade, please discuss with me. If we cannot resolve the issue, you may talk to our departmental director of undergraduate studies or appeal the grade through a formal university process based on arithmetic/ clerical error, arbitrariness, discrimination, harassment, or personal malice. To learn more, go to the [Academic Advising Program](#) website.