

Introduction to Philosophy

Louise Williams Lwilli16@nd.edu

Textbook

There is no required textbook for this course. Readings will be available on the course website.

Course Description

In this course, students have the opportunity to explore, discuss, and debate questions at the core of human experience. Together we will investigate what is most fundamental in our reality, how do we justify our beliefs, and how do we spend our time on earth wisely? No longer limited by geographic constraints, our course will pull on a variety of philosophical texts from around the world. Throughout the course, students will participate in a total of three in-class debates where everyone will get some hands-on experience applying these philosophical concepts to problems in our everyday world.

Course Goals

- (1) Describe three major philosophical problems and a potential solution to each problem.
- (2) Identify the major issues at stake for each philosophical problem and how those apply to contemporary issues.
- (3) Defend and critique your favored solution to at least one of the major philosophical problems in a variety of contexts including both formal and informal writing, as well as conversational performances.

Unit Goals

<p>What are we even talking about?</p>	<p>What are philosophers up to when they <i>do</i> philosophy? What tools do they use?</p> <p>Why should we learn to think philosophically?</p>
<p>What is Real? Metaphysics</p>	<p>Describe and evaluate Dualism, Materialism, and Idealism.</p> <p>Identify what issues are at stake in determining what is most real.</p> <p>Defend and critique an assigned stance on a related contemporary issue.</p>

<p>How do we know? Epistemology</p>	<p>Describe and evaluate at least two theories of knowledge and the role of testimony and disagreement.</p> <p>Identify what issues are at stake in exploring epistemology.</p> <p>Defend and critique an assigned stance on a related contemporary issue.</p>
<p>How should we live? Ethics</p>	<p>Describe and evaluate Utilitarianism, Deontology, and Virtue Ethics.</p> <p>Identify what issues are at stake in evaluating how we ought to live.</p> <p>Defend and critique an assigned stance on a related contemporary issue.</p>

READING SCHEDULE

Unit 1 What Are we Even Talking About?

Week 1 Philosopher's Toolkit

“What is Philosophy?: Crash Course Philosophy #1” from CrashCourse
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1A_CAKYt3GY

Baggini and Fosl, “Basic Tools for Argument” (selection)

“How to Argue – Philosophical Reasoning: Crash Course Philosophy #2” from CrashCourse
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKEhdsnKKHs>

Week 2 The Payoff of Philosophy

“What Happens in a Philosopher's Brain?” from Philosophy Tube
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZ50yy65e3U>

“What is Philosophy for?” from The School of Life
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIYdx6IDDhg>

Unit 2 Metaphysics

Week 3 Dualism

2pg essay on Unit 1 DUE by the first class meeting of this week.

Descartes *Mediation VI*

“Samkya” from the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy
<https://www.iep.utm.edu/sankhya/>

Week 4 Materialism

Stoljar Ch 1 of *Physicalism (New Problems of Philosophy)*

Wernicki, “Lokayata/Carvaka—Indian Materialism” from the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy <https://www.iep.utm.edu/indmat/>

Week 5 Idealism

Visual Aid due at the start of the first class meeting of this week

Adams, “Idealism Vindicated”

Siderits *Ch 8. Yogacara: Impressions-Only*

Week 6

DEBATE: “Should abortion be permissible?”

The debate will take place in class. There are no additional readings for this week

Unit 3 Epistemology

Week 7 Evidentialism & Reliabilism

10 Minute Podcast DUE at the start of the first class meeting of this week.

Mittag, “Evidentialism” in the *Routledge Companion to Epistemology*.

Comesana, “Reliabilism” in the *Routledge Companion to Epistemology*.

Week 8 Skepticism

Mills, “Skeptical Roots in Early Indian Philosophy” from *Three Pillars of Skepticism in Classical India: Nagarjuna, Jayarasi, and Sri Hasa*

Huemer, “The Lure of Radical Skepticism,” *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*.

Week 9 Testimony & Disagreement

Visual Aid Due at the Start of the first class meeting of this week.

Lackey, “Testimonial Knowledge” in the *Routledge Companion to Epistemology*.

Kelly, “The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement” in *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*

Week 10

DEBATE: “Can you rationally maintain your belief in light of an epistemic peer disagreeing with you?”

The debate will take place in class. There are no additional readings for this week

Unit 4 EthicsWeek 11 Utilitarianism

3pg essay on Unit 2 DUE by the first class meeting of this week

“Utilitarianism: Crash Course Philosophy #36” from CrashCourse
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-a739VjqdSI>

Rawls, “Classical Utilitarianism”

Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”

Week 12 Deontology

Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, selections

“Kant & Categorical Imperatives: Crash Course Philosophy #35” from
 CrashCourse <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8blys6JoEDw>

Nagel, “War and Massacre”

Week 13 Virtue Ethics

Visual Aid Due at the start of the first class meeting of this week.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, selections

“Aristotle & Virtue Theory: Crash Course Philosophy #38” from CrashCourse
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrvtOWEXDIQ>

Wong, "Chinese Ethics" Section 2 "Confucian Ethics" from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=ethics-chinese>

Week 14

DEBATE: "Should the death penalty be allowed?"

The debate will take place in class. There are no additional readings for this week

Week 15

Review Material – no additional reading

Students submit a full draft of their final paper by 9:00am Monday Morning. Each student is assigned a peer paper to read as homework. The peer pairs meet during the next class session after following precise marking guidelines. Then the class engages in speed peer-review where students rotate to get perspective on sections of their paper from a number of their peers.

FINAL ESSAY DUE – at our assigned finals time.

For specific dates, see the document entitled "Calendar Overview." This document provides a calendar view of the entire course including assignment and essay due dates.

Assignments

Your grade in this course is based on 1) your understanding of the potential solutions to the nature of the self and 2) your philosophical skill. You will be awarded credit for demonstrating these different skills. Here is the breakdown of the different assignments you can use to demonstrate these two features. You have complete control over your grade in this class—the more assignments you work through and the more class activities you participate in, the more likely you are to earn a high grade. Conversely, if you miss class, do not complete the written assignments, or fail to be an active participant, then you are not likely to succeed.

- 1. ESSAYS [4,000]:** These essays are an opportunity for you to demonstrate your mastery of the potential solutions to the nature of the self. You will only need to draw on the homework assignments and class materials to complete these assignments. Late essays will be deducted 10% of the total points possible for each 24 hour period which passes from the deadline. Essays should be uploaded to **The Course Website**. In total, essays are worth 4,000 points:

- ESSAY 1 – 500 points
 - Length = 2 pages double spaced
 - **DUE: Middle of First Full Month of Course**
- PODCAST – 500 points
 - Length = 10 minutes
 - **DUE: Middle of Third Full Month of Course**
- ESSAY 2 – TOTAL 3,000 points
 - Length = 4 pages double spaced
 - Three distinct Components:
 - Full Draft 1,000 points – **Due two weeks prior to the final draft due date**
 - Peer Feedback Report 500 points – **Due one class period prior to our feedback event**
 - Final Draft 1,500 points – **Due whenever the Final happens for the course.**

NOTE: You are welcome to send drafts to me up to one week prior to the essay due date. This will give me sufficient time to generate comments, and you sufficient time to modify your work accordingly.

2. HOMEWORK [2,500 points]: For each day of class, you will have a reading assignment. You are to complete that assignment by the time class meets on the day it is assigned.

In addition, 3 days of the week (**SPECIFIC DAYS DEPEND ON WHEN CLASS MEETS**), you are required to upload a handwritten¹ 3 paragraph philosophical reflection. Each day's assignment must be submitted to the class **google folder by 11:59pm on the day it is due**. For example, the Aug 27th 3 Paragraphs must be uploaded by 11:59pm on Aug 27th.

On the days that the class meets, your reflection will be guided by specific prompts released at the end of that day's lecture. For the days that class does not meet, you are to write 3 paragraphs that engage in philosophy in some way. These are called free form 3 paragraphs. It is the student's responsibility to write such that the work can be read.

- Prompt Guided 3 paragraphs are worth **70** points each
- Free Form 3 paragraphs are worth **53** points each

¹ If you have a learning difference or need an accommodation regarding hand writing 3 paragraphs, please come see me immediately.

All 3 paragraph assignments are graded as either no credit or full credit. Feedback on 3 paragraph assignments will be given to the class as a whole. No written feedback will be given for 3 paragraph assignments. The student's **two lowest scores on the 3 paragraph assignment will be dropped** from the final grade calculation.

Students are not expected to write 3 paragraph assignments during school holidays and the last week of classes. [13 weeks of 3 paragraph assignments are calculated for above]

3. **VISUAL AIDS [2,500 points]:** Throughout the semester you are required to develop 3 visual aids². The goals of these is to somehow illustrate at least one of the concepts that we have studied up to that point in the course. Within the visual aid, words should be kept to a minimum. Students must, in addition to submitting the visual aid itself, include a single paragraph explaining the visual aid. Examples of visual aids include but are not limited to: a single powerpoint slide, a hand drawn image, a piece of digital art, or a diagram.
 - The first visual aid is worth **500** points
 - Visual aids two and three are each worth **1000** points

4. **PARTICIPATION [1,000 points]:** Students are expected to attend class, and actively engage. This course is largely activity based, so it is critical that all class members work together to master the material. In total, participation is worth 1,000 points. The student's **two lowest participation scores will be dropped** from the final grade calculation.
 - Each day of class is worth **36** points for participation [This will vary depending on the number of class sessions]

Grades and Grading Policies

Your grade will be determined by total points earned out of a potential 10,000 points. There are no comparative assessments in this class; it is entirely up to you how well you perform. As you'll see, strong participation and regular writing can make up for your less-than-stellar performance on the essays. There are many routes to a good grade.

A (9,500+): This student has demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the various potential solutions to major philosophical questions and their philosophical skill. The student is able to both discuss and write about these topics in a sophisticated and persuasive way by exercising their philosophical abilities, apply elements of them in novel ways, and is an active and supportive citizen of the class.

² If you have a learning difference or need an accommodation regarding the development of a visual aid, please come see me immediately.

A- (9,000-9,499)**B+ (8,500-8,999)**

B (8,300 – 8,499): This student has demonstrated competent knowledge of the material covered in both the lectures and readings, is able to analyze arguments and present objections and replies, writes clearly, and actively participates in class activities. The student may show some difficulty in applying philosophical thinking in new contexts, chose not to pursue some opportunities to develop writing and critical thinking skills, or struggled with one or two particular units in the course.

B- (8,000 - 8,299)**C+ (7,500 -7,999)**

C (7,300-7,499): This student shows understanding of most of the material covered in the lectures and readings, demonstrates an ability to analyze philosophical arguments as well as consider objections, and participates in class activities from time-to-time. However, the student does not demonstrate competency in some topics of the course, has missed or poorly composed assignments, or is unable to apply the material in new contexts.

C- (7,000-7,299)

D (6,000-6,999): This student shows understanding of some but not all of the material; serious deficiencies in writing, and may have missing or incomplete work.

F (5,999 or fewer): This student failed to show understanding of basic concepts in the course material and may have substantial missing or incomplete work.

Academic Integrity [Modify by institution]

All students must abide by the Notre Dame Honor Code: “As a member of the Notre Dame community, I will not participate in or tolerate academic dishonesty.” Details are available can be found [here](#). Please note that academic dishonesty (including plagiarism and unauthorized multiple submissions of work for assignments) will not be tolerated and will be punished severely.

Students with Disabilities [Modify by institution]

I am strongly committed to working with students who have any disability recognized under the Americans with Disabilities Act to ensure that they are able to fully participate

in class activities. If you feel you require a reasonable accommodation, please follow the process described [here](#).

Email Policy

I check my email once every weekday. That means I may not respond to your inquiry for up to 24 hours during the week. Please plan accordingly.