

PHIL103S: Introduction to Philosophy

Time: WF

Instructor: Aaron Ancell

Office: West Duke 201A

Place:

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Office Hours:

How much do affluent citizens owe to those living in poverty? Is morality entirely relative, or are there moral truths that apply to everyone? Does science undermine our conception of ourselves as agents who make free choices? What makes you the person you are as opposed to somebody else? Can science explain consciousness? These are difficult questions and there are no easy answers. In this course we will examine arguments by philosophers who have tried to answer such questions. You will learn how to think clearly and rigorously about such arguments, and how to construct your own arguments. You will learn skills that will make you a better reasoner and a better writer—skills that will serve you well in your time at Duke and in your personal, professional, and civic life beyond the academy.

Required Texts

- Vaughn, Lewis (2005) *Writing Philosophy: A Student's Guide to Writing Philosophy Essays*. Oxford University Press.
- Nagel, Thomas (1987) *What does it all mean?: A very short introduction to Philosophy*. Oxford University Press.

Assignments and Grading

Short Assignments and Quizzes: 25%

First Paper: 20%

Second Paper: 25%

Final Exam: 25%

Attendance and Participation: 5%

Percentage grades will be converted to final letter grades using the following scale:

97-100 = A+

77-79 = C+

93-96 = A

73-76 = C

90-92 = A-

70-71 = C-

87-89 = B+

67-69 = D+

83-86 = B

65-66 = D

80-82 = B-

0-65 = F

Attendance

Attendance and class participation are 5% of your final grade. It may not seem like much, but 5% is enough to make the difference between an A and a B+ at the end of semester. This is a small, discussion driven, seminar. I expect you to attend every class unless you have a documented excuse. That does not mean you have to STINF every time you miss a class. If you must miss a class, for any reason, please email me at least 24 hours in advance. Obviously this is not always possible, such as if you wake up in the morning feeling very ill or if there is a zombie apocalypse. In such cases, please email me as soon as possible to explain your absence. Failure to provide an adequate reason for a missed class will result in the loss of 0.5 points from the total of a possible 5 for attendance and participation. If you are unable to complete an assignment due to illness, please use the STINF system.

Class Participation

Showing up to every class is not enough to get 5 out of 5 for attendance and class participation. To get those 5 points you have to actually participate. A seminar like this one only works if people contribute class discussions. You do not have to say something every class, and certainly you should not try to talk as much as possible. There comes a time when contributing to a discussion means keeping quiet and letting others have a chance to talk. Talking in class is also not the only way to participate in the class. You can, for example, visit me during office hours to discuss an assignment you're working on or even just to talk about a particular topic you found interesting. Ultimately, I am looking for evidence that you are engaged in the class and thinking critically about the course material.

Accommodations and Extensions

Please see me or email me as soon as possible if you require special accommodations due to religious practice, disability, medical needs, family emergency, personal crisis, or for any other reason.

Except under extenuating circumstances, extensions on assignments must be requested at least 3 days before the assignment is due. Do not email me requesting an extension at the last minute unless you have a very good reason for suddenly being unable to complete your assignment on time. The farther in advance of the deadline you request an extension, the more likely I am to grant your request.

Late Assignments

Assignments submitted after the deadline without a documented excuse will be subject to a penalty of 5% per day. For example, if an assignment is graded out of 10 points, you will lose 0.5 per day that the assignment is late. An assignment that is more than 20 days late will receive a 0.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

I will report any cases of suspected plagiarism or academic dishonesty to the Office of Student Conduct. In addition to any sanctions imposed by the Office of Student of Student Conduct, you will also receive a grade of 0 on the plagiarized assignment. A second offence will result in a failing grade for the course. The Duke Community Standard defines plagiarism as follows:

Plagiarism occurs when a student, with intent to deceive or with reckless disregard for proper scholarly procedures, presents any information, ideas or phrasing of another as if they were his/her own and/or does not give appropriate credit to the original source. Proper scholarly procedures require that all quoted material be identified by quotation marks or indentation on the page, and the source of information and ideas, if from another, must be identified and be attributed to that source. Students are responsible for learning proper scholarly procedures.

For more information about what constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty, see:

<https://studentaffairs.duke.edu/conduct/z-policies/academic-dishonesty>

A note on Course Content

In this course you are likely to encounter ideas, values, and viewpoints that are very different from your own. Some of the material we read and discuss may challenge your deeply held beliefs and values. Some of it might even disturb you. If you're feeling unsettled, you are welcome and encouraged to talk to me about it.

It is also important to remember that you are not expected to agree with everything we read nor are you expected to agree with my views on the issues we discuss. There are no easy answers to many of the questions we'll tackle and reasonable people can and do disagree about how to answer them.

Tentative Schedule of Topics and Readings			
Week	Day	Topic	Reading
1	Wednesday	Welcome to Phil103S	
	Friday	How to Read Philosophy and Understand Arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vaughn Ch. 1 & 2 • Nagel Ch. 1
2	Wednesday	Bad Arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vaughn Ch. 5 • Stan Baronett, Excerpt on Informal Fallacies from <i>Logic</i> (on Sakai)
	Friday	Arguments and Rhetoric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scott Aiken and Robert Talisse, Excerpts from <i>Why We Argue and How We Should: A Guide to Political Disagreement</i> (on Sakai)
3	Wednesday	Belief, Knowledge, and Justification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robert Audi, Excerpt from <i>Epistemology</i> (on Sakai) • Video: Jennifer Nagel, "Epistemology: Introduction to Theory of Knowledge" (link on Sakai)
	Friday	What's so great about knowledge?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linda Zagzebski, Excerpt from <i>On Epistemology</i> (on Sakai) • Video: Jeremy Fantl, "The Value of Knowledge" (link on Sakai)
4	Wednesday	What can be known with certainty?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descartes, Meditation 1 (on Sakai) • Nagel Ch. 2 • Video: Jennifer Nagel, "The Problem of Skepticism" (link on Sakai)
	Friday	Responses to Skepticism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descartes, Meditation 2 (on Sakai) • Video: Jennifer Nagel, "Three Responses to Skepticism" (link on Sakai)
5	Wednesday	How to Write Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vaughn Ch. 4 & 6-8
	Friday	Is the mind distinct from the body?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nagel Ch. 4 • Jaegwon Kim, Excerpts from <i>Philosophy of Mind</i> (on Sakai) • Alex Byrne "Mind-Body Dualism" (link on Sakai)
6	Wednesday	How do we know who, or what, has a mind?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nagel Ch. 3 • Alan Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" (on Sakai)
	Friday	Can computers have minds? Case Study: Computer Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Searle, Excerpt from <i>Minds, Brains and Science</i> (on Sakai) • Video: "The Chinese Room" from BBC's <i>The Hunt for AI</i> (link on Sakai) • Video: Fei-Fei Li's TED Talk "How We're Teaching Computers to Understand Pictures" (link on Sakai)

7	Wednesday	The Hard Problem of Consciousness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas Nagel, "What is it like to be a bat?" (on Sakai) • David Chalmers, "The Hard Problem of Consciousness" (on Sakai) • Video: Caspar Hare, "Can Science Teach us Everything?"
	Friday	Is the Hard Problem really THAT hard?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patricia Churchland, "The Hornswoggle Problem" (on Sakai)
8	Wednesday	What makes me <i>me</i> , and what happens to me when I die?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nagel Ch. 9 • John Perry, "A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality" (on Sakai)
	Friday	Case Study: What happens when you cut someone's brain in half?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video: "Severed Corpus Callosum" from PBS's <i>Scientific American Frontiers</i> (link on Sakai) • Derek Parfit, "Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons" (on Sakai)
9	Wednesday	Is morality relative?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism" (on Sakai) • Philippa Foot, "Moral Relativism" (on Sakai)
	Friday	Is morality objective?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nagel Ch. 7 • R. Jay Wallace, "Moral Subjectivism" (on Sakai)
10	Wednesday	What do we owe to those living in poverty?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (on Sakai)
	Friday	Treating People as Ends in Themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onora O'Neill, "Kantian Approaches to Some Famine Problems" (on Sakai)
11	Wednesday	Which inequalities are unjust?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nagel Ch. 8 • Video: Luvell Anderson, "The Original Position" (link on Sakai)
	Friday	Justice and Entitlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robert Nozick, Excerpt from <i>Anarchy State and Utopia</i>
12	Wednesday	Trolley Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judith Thomson, "Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem" (on Sakai)
	Friday	Case Study: The Ethics of Autonomous Cars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patrick Lin, "The Robot Car of Tomorrow May Just be Programmed to Hit You" (on Sakai)
13	Wednesday	The Classic Problem of Free Will and Moral Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nagel Ch. 6 • Peter van Inwagen, "The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism" (on Sakai)
	Friday	Compatibilism and Libertarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" (on Sakai) • Robert Kane, Excerpts from "A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will" (on Sakai)
14	Wednesday	The "New" Problem of Free Will and Moral Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adina Roskies, "Neuroscientific Challenges to Free Will and Moral Responsibility" (on Sakai) • Eddy Namihas, "Why We Have Free Will" (on Sakai)
	Friday	Review for Final Exam	