

## **PHIL 101 - Introduction to Philosophy**

Fall 2020

Tuesday/Thursday 1:15-2:40

### **Professor Lisa Tessman**

Pronouns: she/her or they/them.

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Office hours on Zoom: Tues/Thur 2:45-3:45 or by appointment.

Zoom link for office hours: <https://binghamton.zoom.us/j/97417174593>

Zoom link for lectures: <https://binghamton.zoom.us/j/91529470522>

### **Texts:**

No texts need to be purchased; all are available electronically as PDF files on MyCourses.

### **Course Description:**

In this course students will both study historical and contemporary philosophical texts and will learn to do philosophy themselves. The texts focus on philosophical problems such as: “What is reality?” “Does God exist?” “Are social categories such as race and gender real?” “What can we know?” “Whose knowledge counts?” “Is there a human nature?” “Why be good?” “Are values relative?” “What is the relationship between society and an individual?” “Is government justified?” “What should be done about injustices?” We will read traditional philosophical work as well as challenges to the tradition by those who take different approaches to doing philosophy. Students will learn to formulate philosophical questions, understand and critique difficult philosophical texts, and develop arguments to support their own philosophical positions. All texts are available electronically, free of charge.

### **Course Objectives:**

- To familiarize students with some historical and contemporary philosophical texts, and with the major subfields of Philosophy.
- To have students learn and practice philosophical skills.
- Learning Outcome: This course satisfies the Humanities General Education Requirement; thus, in this course, students “will demonstrate an understanding of human experience through the study of literature or philosophy.” The course also satisfies the Harpur College Writing Requirement, so students will “obtain considerable experience and receive significant guidance or instruction in writing.”

### **Course Format:**

**Lectures** will take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:15-2:40 via Zoom. The lecture itself will be one hour or shorter, followed by a Q & A that will end by 2:40. I will also ask for responses from students and make time for students to ask questions during the lecture.

All lectures will be recorded and the recordings will be available from as soon as possible after the lecture ends until 8:30 AM on Friday. Thus, students must either attend on Zoom synchronously or watch the week’s lectures asynchronously before the beginning of discussion sections. Students may choose between these options, though I

encourage students to attend synchronously whenever possible, as I believe that there are learning (and other) benefits to live interaction.

**Discussion sections** meet at various times on Fridays. Sections 1, 2, 4, and 5 meet synchronously via Zoom. Sections 3 and 6 alternate weekly between meeting synchronously face-to-face and synchronously via Zoom. Students who are taking all of their courses remotely and who are registered for sections 3 or 6 will participate synchronously via Zoom every week; students in these sections who are taking courses face-to-face may also participate synchronously via Zoom on any given week if they are ill, quarantined, etc. Because participation is a crucial aspect of discussion sections, students are expected to attend synchronously (whether face-to-face or via Zoom) unless they have a good reason not to (see “participation” below).

**Office hours** offer an opportunity for students to meet individually with me or with the Teaching Assistants via Zoom. Please make use of this time to ask questions or engage in further discussion of the course material.

This course is a 4-credit course, which means that in addition to time spent in lectures and discussion section meetings, students are expected to do at least 9 ½ hours of course-related work *outside of class* each week during the semester. This includes time spent completing assigned readings, taking notes on the readings, preparing questions and comments on the readings to bring to lectures and/or discussion section meetings, completing reading responses, reviewing material before writing essays, and writing/rewriting essays.

If I and/or the TAs are pronouncing your name wrong, using the wrong pronouns for you, etc., please correct us! Please let us know if there is anything we can do to facilitate your participation or accommodate your particular learning style.

### **Course Requirements:**

#### **1) Participation, worth 20% of the final grade.**

Participation will not be graded for the first two discussion section meetings. Beginning with the third discussion section meeting (Sept 11), students may earn 0, 5, or 10 points for participation (face-to-face or via Zoom) in any discussion section meeting. Every student is expected to regularly contribute ideas to discussions; to facilitate this for each other, please make the classroom a place for disagreement, but not for disrespect. The Teaching Assistants will explain for their own sections how to participate over Zoom (i.e. whether to use “chat,” or to use the “raise hand” icon and unmute yourself, etc).

If you are unable to participate in a discussion section synchronously (either face-to-face or via Zoom) due to temporary illness, emergency, or an unexpected wifi problem (etc.), you may watch a recording of the discussion section and, by midnight on the day of the discussion section, submit either a 200-250 word written response or a 3-5 minute video response. Your response should replicate what you would have said during the discussion section were you to have been able to participate synchronously; be sure to respond to the specific questions that the TA asks or the discussion prompts that the TA offers during the discussion section meeting. Recordings of discussion sections will be posted on the MyCourses page for your discussion section, not on the MyCourses page for the lecture,

and your written or video responses should also be submitted through the MyCourses page for your discussion section.

- To submit a written response, click on “discussions” in the MyCourses page for your discussion section, then click “create thread” and write or paste your response; it will be visible to everyone in your discussion section.
- To record or upload a video response, click on Panopto video in the MyCourses page for your discussion section, then click on the “Student videos” folder, then click on “create” and either record or upload your video; it will be visible to everyone in your discussion section.

Asynchronous participation in discussion sections is intended primarily as an option for students with occasional, unanticipated reasons for missing class; if you anticipate being unable to participate synchronously on a *regular* basis (for instance, if the discussion section meets at 3:00 AM in your time zone, or if you are responsible for child care during the time that your discussion section meets, etc.) please discuss this with your TA in advance.

Points for participation:

0 = absent, disrespectful, or silent; AND did not submit a written or video response by midnight.

5 = contributed to the class by asking questions or by responding to questions with brief, not fully developed, or not well thought out responses.

10 = contributed to the class in a substantial way by demonstrating a good understanding of the week’s readings and lectures and by offering well thought out original ideas in response.

Participation during lectures is encouraged but not required. If you would like to ask a question, respond to a question, or make a comment during lecture, either use the “raise hand” icon to be called on, then unmute yourself to speak, or send your question/comment through “chat”; the TA(s) will be monitoring the chat and will either answer questions themselves or will pass questions/comments on to me (you may also indicate through chat that you would like to be called on to speak).

**2) Ten 150-200 word reading responses, worth a total of 20% of the final grade.**

Reading responses are due before the lectures on the same material. To receive credit, they must be submitted on MyCourses (the MyCourses page for the lecture, not for your discussion section) before the lecture begins at 1:15.

All responses will be graded anonymously—the TAs and I will see your names only after grades for all responses have been submitted. The TAs and I may share selected responses in class, anonymously. You may write “please don’t share this response” (or something similar) on your response if you do not want it to be shared.

Points for each response:

0 = did not complete the assignment (on time), or outside of word limits, or showed little or no understanding of the material, or very poorly written, etc.

5 = showed at least some understanding of the material and at least some development of and argument in support of the response.  
10 = showed excellent understanding of the material and developed and supported the response well.

**3) Two essays and one essay rewrite, each 1,000-1,250 words; worth a total of 60% of the final grade.** The grade on a late essay (or rewrite) will be reduced by one full letter grade if it is submitted within 24 hours of the deadline and will be reduced by two full letter grades if it is submitted between 24 and 48 hours late. Essays submitted more than 48 hours late will receive no credit.

- a) **Essay #1: worth 20% of the final grade.**
- b) **Essay #2: worth 20% of the final grade.**
- c) **Rewrite of essay #2: worth 20% of the final grade.**

For the essays, you may make use of all lecture notes that you have taken yourself, and you may refer to all assigned readings. However, you may not make use of any sources that were not assigned (including Wikipedia, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, etc.). Any student who violates these rules will receive a zero on the essay (and rewrite). The essay questions are difficult; you will not just be asked to repeat what has been said in lecture or discussion section. Essays must present original, carefully thought out, and well supported ideas that engage with the readings; the essays should demonstrate both that you have understood the material and that you have something of your own to contribute in response. Essay topics will be made available, and will be explained in lecture, five days before the essay is due. Essays will be graded anonymously.

All students must rewrite essay #2, no matter what grade you received on it, because *everyone's* writing can improve. The rewrite must take into consideration the feedback that you have received. Each student will receive written comments from a TA and will have an appointment to consult with me or with a TA to get further guidance in rewriting. It may also be helpful to visit the [Critical Thinking Lab](#) for help with rewriting. We cannot grade the rewrites anonymously, because each rewrite must be compared with the earlier essay.

### **Grading of essays:**

**A+ (97 or above)**

**A (94-96):** understands the material very well; engages with the material by clearly stating and persuasively arguing for a thoughtful response.

**A- (90-93)**

**B+ (87-89)**

**B (84-86):** mostly understands the material, though there may be some misunderstandings or lack of clarity; engages with the material by stating a response sufficiently clearly, and offering an argument for it, though the argument may be weak or somewhat disorganized.

**B- (80-83)**

**C+ (77-79)**

**C (74-76):** understands some of the material, but also has some major misunderstandings or is too vague; offers a position that lacks clarity or is supported by an argument that is very weak, disorganized, or impossible to follow.

**C- (70-73)**

**D+ (67-69)**

**D (64-66):** misunderstands the material; makes assertions without offering any supporting reasons or argumentation.

**D- (60-63)**

**F (59 or below):** fundamentally misunderstands the material; does not offer any original engagement with the material.

Even if you earn an A+ on essay #2, if your rewrite further improves the essay in a significant way, you will receive an additional 5 points (up to 105) for the improvement. Thus, while the highest grade possible for essay #1 and essay #2 is 100, the highest grade possible for the essay rewrite is 105.

**Disability-related equal access accommodations:** I am happy to make accommodations for any student with a need for it. Please communicate with me about accommodations as soon as you know that you need them. If you are unsure about what kind of accommodations may facilitate your learning, I encourage you to visit [Services for Students with Disabilities](#).

**Academic Honesty:** I follow the Philosophy Department policy on academic honesty (below). Students are responsible for being familiar with, and abiding by, the [Student Academic Honesty Code](#).

#### **Philosophy Department Guidelines on Academic Honesty**

The Philosophy Department considers plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty to be serious breaches of the code of ethics governing academic life. They are also violations of Harpur College and Binghamton University policies.

In order to contribute to a culture of Academic Honesty within both the Department and the University, the Philosophy Department has agreed on the following guidelines:

- 1) Instructors will include a statement describing their policy regarding Academic Honesty on all course syllabi.
- 2) When a student commits an act of academic dishonesty, the instructor will formally bring the violation to the attention of the Harpur College Academic Honesty Committee by either:
  - a. submitting an Admission of Dishonesty Form that has been signed by the student,
  - or*
  - b. initiating a hearing before the Harpur College Academic Honesty Committee.
- 3) When a student commits an act of academic dishonesty, the instructor for the course will not give the student credit for the assignment, whether or not the student re-submits honest work.
- 4) Instructors will decide what further grade consequences are appropriate in response to the dishonesty at their own discretion; the typical consequence is a grade of 'F' for the course.

### **Schedule**

#### **Week 1:**

Thursday Aug 27: lecture 1.

Friday Aug 28: discussion sections.

### **Part I: Metaphysics and Epistemology**

#### **Week 2:**

Read before lecture 2:

Plato, *Meno*. (PDF #1)

Tuesday Sept 1: lecture 2.

Read before lecture 3:

Plato, *Republic* (page numbers refer to those found in the three provided PDFs)

Book V, read only from p 377-400; (PDF #2)

Book VI, read only from p 450-468; (PDF #3)

Book VII, read only from p 469-493. (PDF #4)

(If you are reading in a different version of the *Republic*, look for the numberings in the margins of each page – these refer to the numberings in the original Greek, and will be the same in any translation. Using the marginal pagination, read Book V from 472a to end; Book VI from 504d to end; Book VII through 524d.)

Thursday Sept 3: lecture 3.

Friday Sept 4: discussion sections.

### **Week 3:**

Read before lecture 4:

René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, First & Second Meditation. (PDF #5).

Submit before lecture 4:

Reading response #1: According to Descartes, we have reason to doubt those of our beliefs that are based on sense experiences. Explain the reasons that Descartes gives in support of this claim. Then evaluate his arguments—are you persuaded by them?

Be sure to stay within the word limits (150-200 words) for all written responses.

Tuesday Sept 8: lecture 4.

Read before lecture 5:

René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Third, Fourth, Fifth, & Sixth Meditation. (PDF #5)

Thursday Sept 10: lecture 5.

Friday Sept 11: discussion sections.

### **Week 4:**

Read before lecture 6:

John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

Book One, Chapter I, read only sections 1-5 (PDF #6)

Book Two, Chapter I, read only sections 1-8 (PDF #7)

Book Two, Chapter II, read only sections 1-2 (PDF #8)

Book Two, Chapter VIII, read only sections 7-17 (PDF #9)

Tuesday Sept 15: lecture 6.

Read before lecture 7:

David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (PDF #10)

Section II “Of the Origin of Ideas”

Section III “Of the Association of Ideas”

Section IV “Sceptical Doubts Concerning the Operations of the Understanding”

Part I of Section V “Sceptical Solution of these Doubts”

Submit before lecture 7:

Reading response #2: According to Hume, why can't *experience* be what tells us what will happen when one billiard ball hits another? (Hint: Hume also answers the question, 'why can't we know *a priori* what will happen when one billiard ball hits another' but I am not asking for Hume's answer to that question). (The question I am asking is so difficult that you will get full credit for a serious attempt to interpret the text, even if your answer is not quite correct).

Thursday Sept 17: lecture 7.

Friday Sept 18: discussion sections.

### **Week 5:**

Read before lecture 8:

Charles Mills, “‘But What Are You *Really*?’ The Metaphysics of Race.” (PDF #11)

Submit before lecture 8:

Reading response #3: On p. 59, Mills considers a possible objection to his claim that his constructivist position is a “variety of objectivism.” Explain how Mills then defends his claim that constructivism is a variety of objectivism rather than a variety of subjectivism.

Tuesday Sept 22: lecture 8.

Read before lecture 9:

Sally Haslanger, “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?” (PDF #12)

Thursday Sept 24: lecture 9.

Friday Sept 25: discussion sections.

### **Week 6:**

Read before lecture 10:

Tamar Gendler, “Alief in Action (and Reaction).” (PDF #13)

Submit before lecture 10:

Reading response #4: Give an original example of some behavior that is driven by a norm-discordant alief (don't re-use one of Gendler's examples). What *belief* is this alief discordant with? If possible, choose an example that you have actually experienced, and describe it with some detail.

Tuesday Sept 29: lecture 10.

Read before lecture 11:

Tamar Gendler, “On the Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias.” (PDF #14)

After doing this reading, go to [Project Implicit](#), register, and then [take at least two different tests](#).

Thursday Oct 1: lecture 11.

Friday Oct 2: discussion sections.

**Week 7:**

Read before lecture 12:

Linda Martín Alcoff, “On Judging Epistemic Credibility: Is Social Identity Relevant?” (PDF #15)

Submit before lecture 12:

Reading response #5: Alcoff asks: “In assessing a claim or judgment, is it relevant to take into account the social identity, (e.g., race or gender), of the person making the claim?” Very briefly state Alcoff’s own answer to this question, including the reasons she gives in support of her answer. Then give one original example (don’t re-use one of Alcoff’s examples) that illustrates Alcoff’s point.

Tuesday Oct 6: lecture 12.

Thursday Oct 8: Q & A on all material from Part I, and explanation of Essay #1 topics.

Friday Oct 9: discussion sections.

**Part II: Ethics and Social and Political Philosophy**

**Week 8:**

Submit before lecture 13:

**Essay #1.**

Tuesday Oct 13: lecture 13 (no prior reading).

Read before lecture 14:

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. (PDF #16)

“First Section: Transition from common rational moral cognition to philosophical moral cognition.”

Thursday Oct 15: lecture 14.

Friday Oct 16: discussion sections.

**Week 9:**



Read before lecture 15:

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*

Chapter II, "What Utilitarianism Is." (PDF #17)

Chapter IV, "Of What Sort of Proof the Principle of Utility Is Susceptible." (PDF #18)

Submit before lecture 15:

Reading response #6: How does Mill know that intellectual pleasures are of a higher quality than physical pleasures? After explaining Mill's argument, give a critical response to it (i.e. a counterargument).

Tuesday Oct 20: Essay #1 grades and comments available.

Tuesday Oct 20: lecture 15.

Read before lecture 16:

Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality." (PDF #19)

Thursday Oct 22: lecture 16.

Friday Oct 23: discussion sections.

### **Week 10:**

Read before lecture 17:

Jonathan Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment." (PDF #20)

Submit before lecture 17:

Reading response #7: Suppose that Haidt is right that most of our moral judgments are produced by our intuitive system rather than our reasoning system. Would this empirical fact change what you think of Kant's moral theory? Why or why not?

Tuesday Oct 27: lecture 17.

Read before lecture 18:

Myisha Cherry, "The Errors and Limitations of Our 'Anger-Evaluating' Ways." (PDF #21)

Thursday Oct 29: lecture 18.

Friday Oct 30: discussion sections.

### **Week 11:**

Read before lecture 19:

David Wong, "Pluralism and Ambivalence." (PDF #22)

Tuesday Nov 3: lecture 19. (Also: **VOTE** if you are eligible)

Read before lecture 20:

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*:

Chapter XIII (PDF #23)

Chapter XIV (PDF #24)

John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*:

Chapters I (PDF #25)

Chapter II (PDF #26)

Chapter III (PDF #27)

Submit before lecture 20:

Reading response #8: What is it like in the state of nature? Hobbes and Locke give different answers to this question. Write an imaginary conversation between Hobbes and Locke (without directly quoting either of them) in which Locke explains to Hobbes why things wouldn't be as bad as Hobbes thinks they would.

Thursday Nov 5: lecture 20.

Friday Nov 6: discussion sections.

### **Week 12:**

Read before lecture 21:

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*:

Section 3 "The Main Idea of the Theory of Justice" (PDF #28)

Section 11 "Two Principles of Justice" (PDF #29)

Section 22 "The Circumstances of Justice" (PDF #30)

Section 24 "The Veil of Ignorance" (PDF #31)

Tuesday Nov 10: lecture 21.

Read before lecture 22:

Eva Feder Kittay, "Taking Dependency Seriously." (PDF #32)

Submit before lecture 22:

Reading response #9: What is the "dependency critique"? Do you agree with it? Why or why not?

Thursday Nov 12: lecture 22.

Friday Nov 13: discussion sections.

### **Week 13:**

Read before lecture 23:

Charles Mills, "Contract of Breach: Repairing the Racial Contract." (PDF #33)

Submit before lecture 23:

Reading response #10: Mills describes his own theory as "non-ideal theory" and Rawls' theory as "ideal theory." What does he mean by the terms "non-ideal theory" and "ideal theory"?

Tuesday Nov 17: lecture 23.

Thursday Nov 19: Q & A on all material from Part II, and explanation of Essay #2 topics.

Friday Nov 20: discussion sections.

**Week 14:**

Submit before 1:15 on Tuesday Nov 24:

**Essay #2.**

**Week 15:**

Tuesday Dec 1: Essay #2 grades and comments available.

Tuesday Dec 1, Thursday Dec 3, & Friday Dec 4: Individual consultations, by appointment, about rewriting essays.

**Week 16:**

Submit before 1:15 on Tuesday Dec 8:

**Essay #2 rewrite.**