

**PHIL 1101:
INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY**

COURSE INFORMATION

Class Meetings: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday (4:35-5:40); 237 Forsyth Building

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Office Hours: TBA

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course we will take a hero's journey through a number of central philosophical topics, including

- Personal Identity – “Am I the same person over the course of my life?”
- Self-Knowledge – Is it easier to know myself than to know other people?”
- Ontology – “What is it to be a certain “kind” of person?”
- Practical Reason – “How can I make good decisions in conditions of uncertainty?”
- Happiness – “How can I be happy, given that I can't control everything that happens to me?”

The structure of the course will mirror that of a *conversation*. Each subsequent topic will build on the last, allowing us to see both a) how previously gained insights bear on new questions and b) how later discussions cast light on what was said before. The result of this conversation will be a deepened appreciation of the beauty and complexity of the world and the power of our own curiosity.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of the course are to

- Give you familiarity with one of the most important periods in philosophical history.
- Refine your ability to carefully read and analyze texts.
- Develop your skills as a writer – learning to produce clear, coherent prose and craft well-structured arguments.
- Develop your skills as a communicator – learning to receive feedback on your ideas and writing from your peers and to give helpful feedback to others.
- Spark your natural curiosity for philosophical ideas and questions.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- **All readings** are available through our **course website**.
- If you click on the “readings” folder in the “content” folder, you will notice 14 folders, each one of which corresponds to a week that our class is in session. Any other information pertaining to the readings or assignments for that week will also be posted there. You will be updated to about any changes to the content or schedule by me via email.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. 3 essays (see schedule below for due dates). – **60% of your final grade**.
 - Each of these essays will cover a particular sub-unit in the class. The first essay will concern **personal identity & self-knowledge**; the second, **decision-making & authenticity**; the third, **attachment & happiness**.
 - These essays will be **argumentative**: you will receive a question related to the particular subtopic. Using what you’ve learned from the readings on this topic, our discussions, and your reflection assignments, you will develop and defend an argument.
 - For example, if we are discussing personal identity & self-knowledge you might argue that because there is no such thing as a “self” (i.e., that we have no “personal identity” over time), there is no way that we can “know ourselves” in any meaningful sense.
 - An example of how such an essay may be structured is as follows: introduction – where you make clear the topic of the essay, **your position, the reasons that you think justify your position, an objection that someone might make to your position, how you plan to respond, and the significance of your argument** (i.e., what follows if you’re right). The following paragraphs of the essay would then spell out each of these five elements of the essay – from your position to its significance).
 - We will discuss essay writing in more detail when the time comes to do so.
 - Each of these essays will be **1200 words**.
2. 6 reflections see schedule below for due dates). – **30% of your final grade**.
 - Like the essays, each reflection will cover a particular sub-unit of the class.
 - These reflections will be **interpretive**: you will receive a question related to a certain part of one reading (e.g. what does Callard see as the central problem of “self-creation”? Why, for her can we not “create ourselves” in the manner we typically think we can). Your aim here is to get the reader to understand **why** Callard holds the position she does in this instance. The question of whether Callard is justified holding this position is a different question altogether and belongs in your essays.
 - The aim of these reflections is to serve as **scaffolding** for your essays. Before we can construct well-informed arguments, it’s important to be acquainted with what others have said about the topic. By writing these reflections, you will develop the necessary skills to write essays that represent your considered thoughts on a topic.

- The structure of your reflections will differ based on the question that you receive. Due to the length of these reflections, most will have a 2-3 paragraph structure, though we will discuss the writing of reflections in more detail when the time comes to do so.
- Each of these reflections will be **500 words**.

3. Participation & Attendance – **10% of your final grade**

- **5%** of your grade will be based purely on attendance.
- You are free to miss one week of class without harm to your grade. If you miss a fourth time, you will lose 1% of your final grade; if you miss a fifth time, you will lose 2% of your grade; if you miss a sixth time, you will lose 3% of your grade, etc. The maximum you can lose on the basis of your attendance is 5%. That said, if you were to miss 8 days of class it would also have an impact on your participation grade.
- **5%** of your grade will be based purely on participation.
- How does one participate? There's the normal way of course – asking questions in class, engage with others productively when in groups, bring to class any requested materials (e.g. if we have a workshop day, you will be expected to bring a complete rough draft of your essay or reflection to class). Philosophy, unlike other disciplines like chemistry or biology, flourish with your participation. The aim is not for me to deliver content to you (though I will certainly assist you in helping to understand the readings) but to engage with you in conversation about the topics of the readings.
- Many of you may not feel comfortable participating. There will be other options for people to gain their participation grade. The chief one of which is sending me questions about the reading. If you feel like were unable to participate well a particular week, you can send me **2 questions & 2 comments** about the reading for that week. I will respond to every question, so you may also wish to use this medium to seek clarification on an issue or delve further into issues that we didn't get to cover in class.

4. **Grade Scale**

- A 93-100
- A- 90-92
- B+ 88-89
- B 83-87
- B- 80-82
- C+ 78-79
- C 73-77
- C- 70-72
- D+ 68-69
- D 63-67
- D- 60-62
- F 0-59

EXPECTATIONS

What you can expect from me:

- I will upload any course readings **at least a week** prior to when they will be covered in class – you can expect the same when it comes to the reflection and essay topics.
- I will grade any and all assignments **within 7 days** of them being turned in.
- I will respond to any and all emails **within 24 hours**.
- I will hold office hours **as scheduled**. If you are unable to attend office hours, you are more than welcome (even encouraged) to set up another time for us to meet.
- I will shift the class schedule as deemed necessary for *your learning*. If we need extra time on a topic or you're collectively interested in pursuing a topic further, I will make any necessary changes to the schedule. **These changes will be communicated via email.**
- I will begin each class by writing down 2-3 questions on the board to help frame our discussions. **These questions will be circulated in advance** (at the end of the prior class) so that you can keep them in mind when you're completing the reading.
- I will engage with you – in writing and in person – in a **thoughtful manner**. As I see it, this thoughtfulness has two components. I will be **respectful** of your ideas, and also dedicated to **your improvement** as a thinker and writer. At times, this dedication will require me to be critical in my feedback, which is I sign that I take you seriously.
- I will be **understanding and empathetic** regarding any challenges that you face, either in this class or in your personal lives (to the extent that they bear on your ability to turn work in on time, keep focus, maintain motivation, etc.).

What I can expect from you:

- You will **attend** each class, or notify me of your absence prior to class
- You will attend class having **read** and being prepared to **discuss** the material for that day. My advice is that you a) complete the reading twice and b) make a note of 2-3 questions and 2-3 comments you have. This exercise will cement your understanding of the material and give you a sense of which points you found interesting and/or confusing. Points of interest and/or confusion are the perfect material for discussion.
- You will **complete your work** on time or notify me of your inability to do so.
- You will engage with me and your classmates in a **thoughtful** manner. Show the same dedication to others (and to yourself) that I do to you. For this semester, for three hours a week, you and your classmates are on a bit of a journey. The journey will not always be easy, and we will all meet obstacles along the way. Lift each other up.
- You will **not give up on yourself**. At times, the readings and the assignments will be difficult. If you feel like you are slipping or things have stopped making sense, *reach out*.

There is nothing honorable about suffering in silence. I am here to help with anything you may require along your journey, but you must always keep pushing.

- You will **stay curious** and **work to improve**. We have a lot to learn from each other and from the material that we will be discussing throughout the class. If you work to maintain your sense of curiosity and desire to improve throughout the course, you will come out of this experience as a better writer and a clearer thinker.

CLASS SCHEDULE (this schedule is subject to change as deemed necessary)

Week 1: What is Philosophy? – *What is philosophy, after all? Sure, the word “philosophy” comes from the Greek, “philosophia,” which means love (phileo) of wisdom (sophia) but to what does this amount? What do you study when you study philosophy? A body of content? A method? A way of thinking? Both?*

9/9 – Introduction

9/10 – Derek Parfit, “Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons” (1974)

Week 2: Personal Identity – *We grow and change over time and yet we feel ourselves to be the same person. Are we the same person over the course of our lives? What makes us the same? Are we mistaken in this belief? Are we actually a number of different people in our lifetime? Are each of us multiple people right now? What could this mean?*

9/14 – Unknown, “Katha Upanishad” (~9th and 6th centuries BCE)

9/16 – Buddha, “Mahili Sutta: About Mahili” (~5th century BCE)

9/17 – Continued discussion of Personal Identity

(Reflection 1 Due: 9/19)

Week 3: Self-Knowledge – *Well that was a trip. Let us stipulate that you are the same person over time. Still, do you ever notice that it is sometimes difficult to really “know yourself?” Are you ever confused about what you think or how you feel? But how is this possible? Shouldn’t it be easy to know ourselves?*

9/21 – Madeline de Scudéry, “Of the Knowledge of Others, And of Our Selves” (1683)

9/23 – Joseph Butler, “Upon Self-Deceit” (1729) & “Upon the Character of Balaam” (1729)

9/24 – Continued discussion of Butler

(Reflection 2 Due: 9/26)

Week 4: Knowledge – *Maybe we don’t know as much about ourselves as we once thought. Still, we can be confident in our ability to know other things, right? After all, we seemed to settle on the idea that knowing ourselves is the hardest thing of all. It must get easier from here on out. But what if we are mistaken about more than just ourselves?*

9/28 – Al-Gazali, *Path of Sufism and Deliverance from Error* (~late 12th century)

9/30 – David Hume, “The Sceptic” (1777)

10/1 – Continued Discussion of Hume; Discussion of Essay
(Essay 1 Due: 10/3)

Week 5: Reality – *We have certainly gone down the rabbit hole. Don't worry, just one more step before we return to the surface. Is it possible that our ability to know things is not limited by our nature but by the world itself? Is the world just so irreducibly complex that we could never hope to get our heads around it?*

10/5 – Parmenides, “On Nature” (~early 5th century BCE)

10/7 – Zhuangzi, “Discussion on Making things Equal” (~4th century BCE)

10/8 – Continued Discussion of Zhuangzi

Week 6: Decision-Making – *Time to emerge from the rabbit hole. Even if we are not the same person over time, and cannot truly know ourselves, or anything else for that matter, we are still forced to make important decisions about our lives. How can we make these decisions responsibly when we can't be certain what we know?*

10/12 – **No Class**

10/14 – L.A. Paul, “Becoming a Vampire” & “Transformative Choice,” *Transformative Experience* (2014)

10/15 – Continued Discussion of Paul

Week 7: Authenticity – *We want to make good decisions for ourselves (when we are thinking clearly). Notably, it is not enough that our decisions be approved of by others; we also need to feel as if we are doing right by ourselves. In other words, we need to feel like we are “being ourselves” in what we do. But what does it take to “be oneself”?*

10/19 – L.A. Paul, “Shock of the New,” *Transformative Experience* (2014); Jean-Paul Sartre, “Existentialism is a Humanism” (1947)

10/21 – Agnes Callard, “Proleptic Reasons,” *Aspiration*

10/22 – Continued Discussion of Paul and Callard
(Reflection 3 Due: 10/24)

Week 8: Self-Determination – *We want to see ourselves as a reflection of our choices and commitments. But is there a limit to how much we can exert control over “who we are”? It surely does not seem as if we determine every aspect of who we are. So, how can we take responsibility for a self that we have not chosen? Can we?*

10/26 – Agnes Callard, “The Problem of Self-Creation,” *Aspiration* (2018)

10/28 – Agnes Callard, “Self-Creation and Responsibility,” *Aspiration* (2018)

10/29 – Continued Discussion of Callard
(Reflection 4 Due: 10/31)

Week 9: Social Identity – *Up to this point we've asked, "What is **my** identity?" "What can I know about **myself**? How can I make decisions to better **myself**? How can I take responsibility for **myself** even if I haven't made myself? But we live in a world alongside others, and our identity is importantly shaped by our interactions with others.*

11/2 – Rebecca Mason, "The Metaphysics of Social Kinds" (2016)

11/4 – Ian Hacking, "Making Up People: Moving Targets" (2006)

11/5 – Continued Discussion of Hacking; Discussion of Essay
(Essay 2 Due: 11/7)

Week 10: Race and Gender – *This discussion of social identity becomes complicated very quickly. If we want to look at concrete cases of social identity, the easiest (well, clearest) places to turn are to "race," "gender," and "disability." In so doing, we also begin to see how different categories of social identity can be problematic for individuals.*

11/9 – Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?" (2000)

11/11 – **No Class**

11/12 – Elizabeth Barnes, "Constructing Disability" (2016)

Week 11: Epistemic Injustice – *So what makes certain social categories pernicious? Well, once we have identified someone as a particular kind of person, we feel as if we have access to their experience of the world. As a result, we tend to ignore the testimony of those individuals who belong to a specific group and favor our own judgments.*

11/16 – Miranda Fricker, "Prejudice in the Credibility Economy" (2006)

11/18 – Talia Bettcher, "Trans Identities and First-Person Authority" (2009)

11/19 – Continued discussion of Fricker and Bettcher

Week 12: Humility – *At this point you may be a little less certain of yourself. This can seem intimidating. Still, it's an important first step to taking ourselves less seriously. Taking ourselves less seriously does not commit us to cynicism. Instead, we learn to be playful with our own identity and more attentive to our surroundings and to the lives of others.*

11/23 – Maria Lugones, "Playfulness, World-Travelling and the Nature of Persons" (1987)

11/25 – **No Class**

11/26 – **No Class**
(Reflection 5 Due: 11/28)

Week 13: The Good Life – *It is time to start bringing the threads of the class together. In order to do so we will look to three great Chinese philosophers – Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Xunzi – who present an image of our proper relation to the world that is not only beautiful but instructive. Be caring, humble, and attentive to others and to the world.*

11/30 – Michael Puett & Christine Gross-Loh, “The *Inward Training* and Being Like a Spirit,” *The Path* (2016) – on Laozi (~5th century BCE)

12/2 – Puett & Gross-Loh, “Zhuangzi and a World of Transformation,” *The Path* (2016) – on Zhuangzi (~4th century BCE)

12/3 – Puett & Gross-Loh, “Xunzi and Putting Pattern on the World,” *The Path* (2016) – on Xunzi (3rd century BCE)

(Reflection 6 Due: 12/5)

Week 14: Closing Thoughts – *All things must end...*

12/7 – Discussion of Essay 3

12/9 – Final Discussion **(Final Essay Due: 12/11)**