

PHILO 101

Introduction to Philosophy

Instructor Ms. M. Whitaker (room 1447, Hunter West)

Lectures Mon, Tues, Wed, Thurs, 12–4:08pm

Venue Room 505, Hunter West

Student consultations by appointment

Please email to arrange a time, or for any questions/problems you may have
after having carefully checked:

- this syllabus
- the course website
- your up-to-date lecture notes (if you've missed any classes,
make sure to get notes from a classmate).

Email

whitaker.monique@gmail.com

Readings

All of your readings will be available electronically, via the course website (see details, below).

Course Description

This course will introduce you to some of the main themes of philosophy, as well as help you to learn how to reason philosophically. We'll look at a number of important problems from different areas of philosophy; first getting a broad idea of what each issue is about, discussing its history and significance, and then working together to understand and critique key philosophical readings that deal with the problem at issue.

An important focus of this course, in addition to the philosophical content we examine, is on how to think carefully and critically about the issues discussed and the arguments that you read. You'll learn how to assess the material, develop your own view on the problems covered, and how to argue for and support the positions you take.

Evaluation and grade breakdown

Course grades will be based on:

- class participation (in class and/or online)
- midterm and final papers
- short response papers
- reading assignments for each class

Weighting of grades:

class participation—10%

midterm paper—25%

final term paper—30%

short response papers—20%

reading assignments 15%

Class participation is very important in this course. If you aren't comfortable asking questions and actively participating in the classroom, you may participate online on the course website instead. Of course, you're welcome to do both.

For some of your assignments, I may give percentage grades. I like to use points and percentages, as these allow for more precise and informative grades—percentages especially are very specific but also easy to interpret—and, should a student fail an assignment, they enable me to give them at least partial credit towards their overall grade (rather than just an F, which effectively counts as 0).

Translation from percentages to letter grades is as follows:

90–100% = A, 80–89% = B, 70–79% = C, 60–69% = D, below 60% = F,

with + or - grades given according to Hunter College guidelines. Point grades can be translated into percentages to obtain the corresponding letter grade.

If you fail to hand in any of the required work on time, you must have a valid excuse with written documentation. If there is no valid excuse, the missed work receives a grade of 0. Late work is penalized at a rate of -5% per day late.

For any excuse to be considered, it must:

- be emailed to me (excuses will be accepted *only* by email; please don't try to hand them to me in class)
- have a *clearly labeled* subject line, including: (1) the course code, and (2) the relevant exam or assignment
- be received *no later than one day* after the work is due.

Extensions will only be granted under exceptional circumstances (in other words, having a lot of other coursework isn't an acceptable basis for an extension), and only by prior arrangement—that is, *before* the work is due in—except in the case of a serious emergency.

Discussions

We will spend a good deal of time discussing the assigned material for this course. This is your opportunity to raise any questions you have about the readings or anything we've covered in class. Please come to class prepared with notes of anything you found difficult or were unsure about.

Course Website on Canvas

Please make sure that you sign up for the course website on Canvas, and that you check it *frequently*. A lot of important material for the course will be posted there, and it is your responsibility to make sure that you read it. You will be sent an invitation to join the course website at the email address listed for you on Blackboard. *Please check that this address is correct*—if it isn't, you won't get the invitation and so won't have access to much of the course material. Alternatively, you can sign up here: <https://canvas.instructure.com/enroll>

Please add a clear photo of yourself to your profile, as well as your full name.

Attendance

All students registered for PHILO 101 are expected to attend *all* class sessions.

- You are allowed only one unexcused absences over the course of winter session, though all absences should be excused, and you should miss class only if it is absolutely unavoidable.
- Remember that missing just a single winter session class is equivalent to missing *more than a week* of classes during the regular semester.
- Please *do not come late to class*, as you will miss material and it's disruptive of my teaching and for the rest of the students.
- Your attendance may influence your final grade, especially in borderline cases.

Safe Space

I'm committed to making this class a safe space in which absolutely no discrimination in any form, explicit or subtle—whether on the basis of race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, income, mental or physical health, ability, personal characteristics, or the like—will be tolerated.

This class should be an inclusive space for all students. So, if you feel uncomfortable in any way during the course please do let me know. Or, if you prefer, you can contact my colleague _____ (_____@gmail.com), who can advocate on your behalf. You're also welcome to email either of us anonymously if you'd like.

Student support

Hunter's Counseling & Wellness Services (CWS, <http://tinyurl.com/cjnb2f>) provide mental health, health and wellness services. Counseling Services provides short-term individual counseling, crisis intervention, psycho-education, outreach, and referrals.

Student Services' Office of AccessABILITY (<http://tinyurl.com/bnwbyvs>): In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (emotional, medical, physical and/or learning) consult the Office of AccessABILITY located in Room E1124 to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance please call (212) 772-4875 / TTY (212) 650-3230.

- I'd like to help accommodate any different abilities or specific needs you may have as far as I can—though, of course, it is entirely up to you whether you would like to let me know about these or not.
- Even if there's something that doesn't officially qualify as a disability, or is relatively minor—if you feel it may affect your work, or if there's anything I can do to better accommodate you and help you succeed in this course, please don't hesitate to let me know.

Academic dishonesty

Hunter College's Statement on Academic Dishonesty: Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

I take a very dim view of plagiarism, and I require you to familiarize yourself with all of the guidelines on avoiding it. *Any evidence of academic dishonesty in my class will earn you a grade of 0 and disciplinary action.*

Guidelines on plagiarism: <http://tiny.cc/1s2fw>

You will need to consult the following resource on how to correctly cite all your sources, in the MLA style—both in the text of your paper and in your references at the end—and complete all the exercises, before beginning any of your writing compositions: <http://tinyurl.com/d75wpym>

The Reading/Writing Center

Please make good use of Hunter's Reading/Writing Center in working on your written composition. Register early for their regular tutoring service. Their services will be of help to all of you, but I'd particularly encourage you to sign up for ongoing tutoring if English is not your first language, or if you have any difficulty with writing generally.

Regardless of your ability, you'll need to put a good deal of work into perfecting your academic writing to do well in this class. This course requires a very high degree of writing proficiency, because it's essential to constructing a good argument to be able to make your points very clearly, precisely, and accurately.

So, do not leave it until shortly before a writing assignment is due, or until near the end of winter session, to work on any writing weaknesses you may have. If in doubt—sign up right away for the Writing Center's tutoring service. Private tutoring sessions would cost you hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars, but the Writing Center's service is completely free.

Reading/Writing Center: <http://tiny.cc/sszev>

PHILO 101

Introduction to Philosophy

Course Topics and Readings

You must make sure to have done the relevant reading for each topic before it is discussed in class. The best way to do this is to read the material in the order given below, and to always read at least one or two articles ahead of the class discussion.

There will be reading assignments on this material for each class, and you'll need to have a good understanding of these articles for the papers and exams.

All the readings are available online through the course site on Canvas. Those readings online that are marked with an asterisk (*) are optional extra material or alternative versions/formats of the required readings.

All material listed below is required reading.

Introduction

- . How to reason well and avoid fallacious arguments
 - **Fallacies:** Online logical fallacies resources
- . What is philosophy, and why do it?
 - These philosophy articles are insanely difficult—how on earth can I understand them? Pryor, 'Guidelines on Reading Philosophy'
 - **What's the point of doing philosophy?**
Russell, 'The Value of Philosophy', *Problems of Philosophy*

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Religion and philosophy

- . Is there a god(s)? Where did the world come from?
 - **The Ontological Argument:** St. Anselm, *Proslogium* (selection)
 - **The Cosmological Argument:**
St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (selection)
 - **The Wager:** Pascal, *Thoughts* (selection)

- . What about all the suffering in the world? If there is a god, why would they allow it?
 - **The Problem of Evil:** Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (selection)
 - **The Argument from Design:** Palley, *Natural Theology* (selection)
 - **Critique of the Design Argument:** Hume, *Natural Religion* (selection)
- . Overview:
 - **The Role of the Brain:** Churchland, 'Religion and the Brain'

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge and certainty

- . What is knowledge? What can we know?
 - **The Nature of Knowledge:** Plato, *Theaetetus*, *Meno* (selections)
 - **The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge:** *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 'Justified True Belief' (selection)
 - **Gettier Problems:** Gettier, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?
- . Can we know anything on the basis of experience?
 - **Radical Skepticism:** Descartes, *Meditations I and II*
- . Can we know anything beyond our experience?
 - **The Problem of Induction:** Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (selection)
- . Why are certain knowers and ways of knowing privileged/ignored in philosophy?
 - **Invisible biases in epistemology:** Code, *What Can She Know?* (selection)

METAPHYSICS

Existence and Reality

- . What things exist? What is reality *really* like?
 - **The nature of objects in the external world:** Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (selection)
 - **What's reality *really* like?** Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (selection)
 - **Idealism:** Berkley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, 'First Dialogue', Part II
 - **Realism about the external world:** Moore, 'Proof of an External World'

EPISTEMOLOGY

Self-knowledge and social knowledge

- . How well do we know ourselves? Can self-perception be distorted or incorrect?
 - **The Unconscious:** Freud, 'The Unconscious'
 - **False Consciousness:** Marx, 'Estranged Labour'
 - **Double Consciousness:** W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (selection)
- . Are we aware of everything that influences and shapes us?
 - **Self-knowledge:** Kahneman, 'Thinking Fast and Slow'
 - **Unconscious influence:** Gendler, 'On the Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias'

METAPHYSICS

Free will

- . Can we really make choices, or does it just seem that way?
 - **Determinism:** Schopenhauer, 'Freedom of the Will'
 - **Compatibilism:** Frankfurt, 'Alternate Possibilities' and Moral Responsibility'
 - **Libertarianism:** Chisholm, 'Human Freedom and the Self'
 - **Science and free will:** Roskies, 'Neuroscientific challenges to free will and responsibility'

PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

Mind and Body

- . What's the relationship between the mind and the body? Is the mind physical? Could a robot or an alien be conscious? What is consciousness?
 - **The problem of consciousness:** Nagel, 'What is it like to be a bat?'
 - **Dualism:** Descartes and Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia, *Correspondence between René Descartes and Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia* (selection)
 - **Functionalism:** Levin, 'Functionalism'
 - **A Causal-Role Theory:** Lewis, 'Mad Pain and Martian Pain'
 - **Eliminative Materialism:** Churchland, 'Eliminative Materialism' (podcast)