

COURSE NUMBER: PHI 111
COURSE TITLE: Introduction to Philosophy
SEMESTER: Fall 2019
CREDITS: 3 Credits
PREREQUISITES: None
FOR WHOM PLANNED: For students with little or no experience with philosophy

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION:

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Office Hours: M 3:15pm-4pm, W 9am-10am, and by appointment

DESCRIPTION:

Philosophical questions are among the most fundamental and important questions there are. Here are some of the questions that we will not only discuss but actually try to answer. What can I (or anyone) know? Does God exist? What is the human mind? What is the relation between the mind and the physical world? Is the mind part of the physical world? Is our mental life just another physical processes like digestion? Or is it, rather, that the mind is non-physical in nature and hence that it cannot be accounted for in physical terms?

Most people consider questions like these at some point in their lives, but they often stop thinking about them before formulating well-supported answers. The philosopher attempts to support answers to these questions based not on dogma, but on careful argument. Because we will be spending our time analyzing these arguments, this course will improve your ability to understand and formulate arguments.

This is an introductory level philosophy course. Students do not need any prior experience with philosophy.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

This course is part of UNCG's General Education Program. More specifically, it falls under the general education category of *Philosophical/Religious/Ethical Perspectives* (abbreviated as "GPR"). Here are the student learning outcomes (abbreviated at "SLOs") for this category:

1. Describe and analyze at least two significant philosophical, religious, and/or ethical theories or traditions.
2. Compare and contrast the assumptions, arguments, beliefs, and/or practices of two or more theories or traditions.
3. Apply the general description of at least two theories and/or traditions to specific instances.

The assignments and methods of evaluation for this course are designed to achieve these GPR student learning outcomes, but the course also includes its own, more specific student learning

outcomes (called “course specific SLOs”). They are the following. Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. characterize and compare the principles at the center of first-order philosophical theories (GPR SLOs 1 & 2),
2. apply those theories to specific cases, and explain how differences in their application bear on the theories themselves (GPR SLOs 2 & 3),
3. analyze a metaphilosophical issue (GPR SLOs 1 & 2),
4. distinguish the argument given for philosophical position from the position itself (GPR SLOs 1 & 2),
5. assess and compare those arguments (GPR SLO 2).

TEACHING METHODS:

The meetings of this class will not consist solely, or even mostly, of the instructor speaking and you quietly listening. Rather, you should come to class having read the material and prepared to participate in a discussion. Typically, I will begin class by recapping the material and explaining things, and we will transition into discussion. I will often call on students to share their thoughts, summarize part of the reading, or read a short passage out loud. Come prepared to participate.

The course readings include 17th century thinkers (Descartes and Elisabeth of Bohemia) as well as more contemporary ones (Ryle, Armstrong, Putnam, Place, Searle, Nida-Rumelin, Nagel, Jackson, and Chalmers). We begin by reading all of René Descartes's famous *Meditations on First Philosophy*. We will discuss the many topics in this foundational work: epistemology (the study of knowledge), philosophy of religion, philosophy of mind, etc. (course specific SLOs 1 & 3; GPR SLOs 1 & 2). After reading it, we pick just one of these topics—the relation between the mind at the body—and explore it further (course specific SLOs 2, 4, & 5; GPR SLOs 1, 2, & 3). There is a lot more to philosophy than what we cover in this course, but we have to start somewhere and this course will give you many of the tools needed to explore other philosophical questions.

EVALUATION AND GRADING:

Beginning-of-Lecture Quizzes (course specific SLOs 1, 2, 3, & 4; GPR SLOs 1, 2, & 3):

There will be an electronic reading quiz for every reading at the beginning of lecture.

Why?

Students can only learn how to have a philosophical discussion if their peers come prepared by having done the reading. These quizzes guarantee that everyone does the reading, so everyone can engage in a productive discussion.

What does “electronic quiz” mean?

The students go to b.socrative.com on any internet browser. Questions are displayed in the front of the class, and students input their answers on their devices. The responses are recorded and displayed—anonously—in front of the room. We then discuss the answers. Altogether, the quiz takes 10 minutes. We will do a practice quiz the first day.

What will the questions be like?

The questions are multiple choice. Most of them are designed to be very easy if you have done the reading and impossible if you have not. A small percentage of the questions require you to not only have done the reading, but to have understood it.

Are there other details that you could not naturally fit into this question-and-answer format?

The quizzes serve as a de-facto way to taking attendance. When calculating your final grade, your lowest 4 quiz grades will be dropped.

Exams:

There will be a midterm exam and a final exam. These will be conducted through Canvas. The final exam will be cumulative in the sense that some questions on the final exam will concern material covered during the first half of the course. More details about the exams will be distributed in class during the semester. (Course specific SLOs 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5; GPR SLOs 1, 2, &3).

Grade Breakdown:

1. Beginning-of-Lecture Quizzes¹ (35%)
2. Midterm (30%)
3. Final Exam (35%)

Constructive, thoughtful, enthusiastic, and polite class participation will be used to ‘bump up’ borderline grades.²

Grading Scale:

A	93-100%
A-	90-92%
B+	87-89%
B	83-86%
B-	80-82%
C+	77-79%
C	73-76%
C-	70-72%
D+	67-69%
D	63-66%
D-	60-62%
F	0-59%

REQUIRED TEXTS:

¹ This is the average grade of all beginning-of-lecture quizzes, except for the 4 lowest grades, which are dropped when calculating this portion of the grade.

² In extremely rare instances, disruptive class participation will harm a student’s grade.

All of the readings for the course will be printed in a ‘course packet’ that can be purchased from the UNCG bookstore, in the Elliott University Center, for somewhere in the neighborhood of \$15-\$20. You must have physical, printed copy of the course packet, and you must bring it to class.

Why?

Because we will be referring to the readings in class, and you cannot use electronic devices during class. In particular, you need a printed copy of the first reading by the time we discuss it in class. If you are reading this on the first day of class, then that is soon!

Is there a lot of reading for this course?

No. But also, yes. This is an introductory course, and the readings are appropriate for first-time philosophy students. Some of the readings are short (in some cases, only a few paragraphs). But they are dense and may be more difficult than what you are accustomed to reading. It is not unreasonable to read a text three or four times, put it aside, and later read it several more times. Most of the readings come with reading guides, which say what to read and provide guidance without actually explaining the content of the readings. Passing this course will require a significant amount of time and effort.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

This schedule is subject to change. You should complete the reading assignments *before* the date associated with that assignment, and be prepared for the beginning-of-lecture quiz. Also, many of the readings are accompanied by reading guides. These are documents written by me, your instructor, to help make the readings easier to understand. They include definitions of obscure terms, and they tell you which sections of the reading are most important. The reading guides also say which portions of the reading to read, and which portions should be skipped entirely. So they should be read first (i.e., before the readings that they are guides to). If a reading has an associated reading guide, it is followed by an asterisk (*).

W	Aug 21st	Introductory Meeting; no reading
René Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> (1641)		
F	Aug 23rd	René Descartes, <i>Meditation 1</i> ³
M	Aug 26th	
W	Aug 28th	René Descartes, <i>Meditation 2</i> ⁴
F	Aug 30th	
M	Sept 2nd	Labor Day. No classes at UNCG.

³ With explanatory notes by Jeffrey Kaplan.

⁴ With explanatory notes by Jeffrey Kaplan.

W	Sept 4th	René Descartes, <i>Meditation 3</i> ⁵
F	Sept 6th	
M	Sept 9th	No class.
W	Sept 11th	René Descartes, <i>Meditation 4</i> ⁶
F	Sept 13th	
M	Sept 16th	René Descartes, <i>Meditation 5</i> ⁷
W	Sept 18th	
F	Sept 20th	René Descartes, <i>Meditation 6</i> ⁸
M	Sept 23rd	
W	Sept 25th	Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, <i>Correspondence with Descartes</i> *
F	Sept 27th	Review for Midterm Exam
M	Sept 30th	No class. Rosh Hashana.
W	Oct 2nd	Jennifer McWeeny, <i>Princess Elisabeth and the Mind-Body Problem</i>
F	Oct 4th	Gilbert Ryle, <i>Descartes' Myth</i> *
M	Oct 7th	
W	Oct 9th ⁹	No class. Yom Kippur.
F	Oct 11th	David Armstrong, <i>The Nature of Mind</i> *
M	Oct 14th	Fall Break. No classes at UNCG.
W	Oct 16th	David Armstrong, <i>The Nature of Mind</i> * continued
F	Oct 18th	Hillary Putnam, <i>Brains and Behavior</i> *
M	Oct 21st	
W	Oct 23rd	U.T. Place, <i>Is Consciousness a Brain Process?</i> *
F	Oct 25th	
M	Oct 28th	Adam Bradley, <i>A Primer on Multiple Realizability and Functionalism</i>
W	Oct 30th	
F	Nov 1st	

⁵ With explanatory notes by Jeffrey Kaplan.

⁶ With explanatory notes by Jeffrey Kaplan.

⁷ With explanatory notes by Jeffrey Kaplan.

⁸ With explanatory notes by Jeffrey Kaplan.

⁹ Oct 11th is the last day to withdraw from a course without incurring a WF grade (withdraw failing).

M	Nov 4th	John Searle, <i>Can Computers Think?</i>
W	Nov 6th	
F	Nov 8th	Austin Andrews, <i>A Primer on Inverted Qualia</i>
M	Nov 11th	Martine Nida-Rümelin, <i>Pseudonormal Vision: An Actual Case of Qualia Inversion?</i> ¹⁰
W	Nov 13th	Thomas Nagel, <i>What Is it Like to Be a Bat?</i>
F	Nov 15th	
M	Nov 18th	Frank Jackson, <i>Epiphenomenal Qualia</i>
W	Nov 20th	
F	Nov 22nd	David Chalmers, <i>The Puzzle of Consciousness</i>
M	Nov 25th	Amy Kind, <i>Chalmers' Zombie Argument</i>
W	Nov 27th	Thanksgiving Break. No Classes at UNCG.
F	Nov 29th	Thanksgiving Break. No Classes at UNCG.
M	Dec 2nd	TBD
W	Dec 4th	Review for Final Exam

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY: Students are expected to abide by the UNCG Honor Code. For all major assignments, students will be required to sign the university's academic integrity policy.

ATTENDANCE POLICY: I will not be taking attendance, but coming to class regularly is essential to success in this course. Moreover, the beginning-of-lecture quizzes function to impose an attendance policy of sorts. When calculating that portion of the final grade, each student's 4 lowest quiz grades will be dropped.

FINAL EXAMINATION: There will be a final exam for this course, which will be administered on Canvas (so you do not need to be on campus during the scheduled final exam time slot for this course). More details will be provided during the semester.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS:

Electronic Devices Policy:

Students are not permitted to use any electronic devices (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc.) during class.

- *Why?*

Here is a list of *real things that I actually witnessed* students do on the internet during lecture:

¹⁰ This reading, "Pseudonormal Vision: An Actual Case of Qualia Inversion?" is optional.

- Browsed Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- Shopped for boots (did not make a purchase)
- Googled “how to focus in class”
- Booked round-trip ticket to Paris
- Read half of the Wikipedia entry on Plato
- Played first-person shooter game

No one comes to lecture planning to play a video game. What happens, I suspect is the following. Listening to a lengthy philosophical lecture is difficult and requires a good deal of focus. Inevitably, students zone out. This is the crucial moment: will they listen with even greater focus and figure out what they missed while continuing to take in the new information, or will they give up? Access to the internet makes giving up almost irresistible.

- *Are there any exceptions to this policy?*

Yes, the only exceptions are (a) if you have a relevant disability with official documentation by the UNCG Office of Accessibility and Services and (b) for the beginning-of-lecture quizzes, explained above.