

Syllabus
PHIL 100-13 (3 Cr.)
Introduction to Philosophy
Winter 2024

Instructor: Dr. Kristopher G. Phillips
Office: Pray Harrold 702-B
Student Hours: T: 9:30-12:00 (Zoom), W: 9:30-12:00p (PH 702B) & also by appointment

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Class Meets:
MW 2:00p-3:15p in Pray-Harrold 213

COURSE DESCRIPTION: An introduction to philosophy through classical and contemporary readings on perception, metaphysical problems of personal identity, and the relation between happiness and the good life. Over the course of this semester we explore not what one ought to think, but *how* to think about fundamental problems in all of these areas and how to use our reasoned conclusions in service of the ultimate aim of living well. This course fulfills the *Humanities Knowledge Area* for the General Education Program.

Course Learning Outcomes (GE):

- Contextualize and think critically about texts, ideas, and genres in the humanities.
- Use and construct arguments.
- Reflect on personal growth with respect to imagination, empathy, or social and • • political agency using the methods of the humanities.
- Draw connections between course content and contexts outside of the classroom using the disciplinary tools of the humanities.

Evaluation of these learning outcomes will be done through papers, in-class assignments and weekly reading responses.

Course Learning Outcomes (Personal):

- Epistemic Humility: The successful student will begin to demonstrate an awareness of their own epistemic limitations and the complexity of the evaluation and propriety of knowledge claims.
- Sense of Self and Others: The successful student will demonstrate a stronger sense of self both in belief and behavior by deploying philosophical concepts in epistemology and metaphysics as they relate to self and identity.

I will evaluate your progress on these outcomes through the reading responses (outlined below).

TEXTS: The material for the introductory, epistemology and metaphysics sections of this course is available on Canvas. I expect you to print out each of the readings (or make sure you have a copy on your tablet, computer, etc.) and bring them to class with you so that we can discuss them.

Happy Lives, Good Lives (ISBN: 978-1-55481-100-7) by Jennifer Mulnix and M.J. Mulnix, Broadview Press (2015) is available at the bookstore and is *Required*.

SOME GENERAL ADVICE: This course presupposes a willingness to work hard and think critically about some very difficult problems. Philosophy is hard, you'll see – there really is no shallow end to the pool here. Students who read reflectively and attend class regularly are more likely to remain interested in (and maybe even enjoy) the material, benefit from the class discussions, and develop the philosophical skills and level of comprehension required to continually improve on the exams and papers. Some notes will be provided every week, but these, the lectures, and class discussion will very likely be hard to follow if you don't do the readings or if you miss previous classes and do not pursue any of the options available for getting caught up. Please take advantage of student hours, get to know your peers, and chat about these issues with folks who are not in the class! I think you'll find that philosophy is best done through dialogue, so build a philosophical community!

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SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

This list of readings is tentative. Specific reading assignments will be given on a day-to-day basis.

Weeks 1-2

Introduction

Bertrand Russell: *The Value of Philosophy* (Canvas)

Nathan L. King: *Why Good Thinking Matters* (Canvas)

Richard Fumerton and Diane Jeske: *Philosophical Analysis, Argument, & the Relevance of Thought Experiments* (Canvas)

Weeks 2-5

Epistemology, Skepticism, and Problems of Perception

Rene Descartes: *First Meditation* (Canvas)

Rene Descartes: *Second Meditation* (Canvas)

George Berkeley: *The First Dialogue* (Canvas)

Susanna Rinard: *Reasoning One's Way out of Skepticism* (Canvas)

****Recommended:** Michael Huemer: *Why Study Skepticism* (Canvas)

[First Exam/Paper]

Weeks 6-11

Metaphysical Problems of Personal Identity

John Locke: *Of Identity and Diversity* (Canvas)

Joseph Butler: *Of Personal Identity* (Canvas)

Jacob Berger: *A Dilemma for the Soul Theory of Personal Identity* (Canvas)

Susan Brison: *Outliving Oneself: Trauma, Memory, and Personal Identity* (Canvas)

Chike Jeffers: *Du Bois, Appiah, and Outlaw on Racial Identity* (Canvas)

****Recommended:** Sally Haslanger: *Family, Ancestry, and Self...* (Canvas)

****Recommended:** Beverly Daniel Tatum: *The Complexity of Identity* (Canvas)

[Second Exam/Paper]

Weeks 12-15

Happiness and the Good Life

Mulnix & Mulnix: *The Feel Good Feature of Happiness* (Ch. 4, 61-92)

Mulnix & Mulnix: *Taking Pleasure in Things and Feeling Joy* (Ch. 5, 93-114)

Mulnix & Mulnix: *Satisfied with What?* (Ch. 6, 117-145)

Mulnix & Mulnix: *It's All About Perspective* (Ch. 7, 146-172)

Mulnix & Mulnix: *Is Ignorance Bliss?* (Ch. 8, 175-196)

Mulnix & Mulnix: *Happiness, Virtue and the Purpose of Life* (Ch. 9, 197-231)

[Final Paper]

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ASSIGNMENTS, EVALUATION, POLICY:

Three Exams/Papers (60%; 20% for each paper)

The first exam will cover the material from the epistemology section of the course and the introductory material, and will be a mix of short answer questions and a longer paper. I will give you ungraded short answer assignments as we reach relevant material in the class, and then provide you with feedback on your written answers. You should adjust your short answer responses in light of my comments and submit the revised answers with your paper (which will come at the end of each unit). You *must* indicate where you have made revisions to your paper. I will provide more information on the revision process in class.

The second exam/paper will cover personhood and personal identity.

The final paper will cover value theory and happiness.

I welcome revisions on both of the first two exams in light of my comments. I firmly believe that we get better at writing, thinking, and so forth by returning to our work and refining it in light of feedback. I want you to succeed, but as this is likely to be your first (and perhaps your *only*) introduction to philosophy, I'd like to afford you the opportunity to get as much as you can out of this class. As the final paper is due during finals week, there will not really be an opportunity to revise that paper, but my hope is that by that point in the term you'll have a better idea of how to write a philosophy paper than you do during the first week, so you should be in good shape.

In-Class Short Writings (15%) At random intervals in class I will ask you to break up into groups of 3-4 and analyze a piece of text, or produce a brief response to a topic/theme in class. Philosophy is notoriously difficult to read and understand, so we will practice identifying and reconstructing arguments, identifying the "voice" in a passage, and stepping back and considering why we are reading and discussing the material. This will be an in-class activity, so you must be in class and participate to receive credit. I will not allow you to make up any of these you miss for any reason, but I do understand that life happens. If you miss class for what seems to be a good reason, I'll excuse these missed assignments. I will say more about what counts as good reasons in class.

Ten Reading Responses (25%; 2.5% for each) In addition to your exams and argument analyses, I expect you to keep up on the reading. To facilitate discussion and keep you on track, you are expected to complete 10 weekly critical summaries. You are to complete the reading for the week (assigned by Wednesday) and write a 1-page critical discussion of the reading. You are to submit them to Canvas by **11:59p on Sunday**. You can miss up to 5 before it has any direct impact on your final grade in the class.

Your responses must include:

- a short summary of the main point(s) of the text
- a list of terms or vocab that you do not recognize or understand
- any passages or arguments you find confusing
- any questions, comments, criticisms, or reflections that come to mind

Note: I recognize that the texts are challenging and that you can probably find a summary of most of them online. Please do *not* do this. This is a low-stakes opportunity to practice getting better at reading and interpreting challenging texts. There are a number of times in your life where people will rely on your inability or unwillingness to read difficult material and will thus hide things in obscure writing. This is an opportunity to head that off.

Late Work: I get that life happens and things sometimes take longer than we anticipate. As a result, I will accept late work for up to 24 hours after the deadline with no questions asked. I ask that you do your best to meet the deadlines – please consider that I too am a busy person with a life outside of school, and that I have to budget and schedule my time carefully. If too many people turn in papers late, it throws off my plans and creates more work for me. Please try to be mindful of the work you create for others. If you are going to need more than 24 hours, you must contact me we can discuss how to move forward.

If you miss an in-class textual analysis, you are allowed to make those up on your own time. Here is what you must do:

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1. Write out each sentence of the passage as it appears in the text.
2. Explain what the sentence is saying in your own words.
3. Identify any ambiguous referents (“this” or “that” or any ambiguous pronoun use), and define any key terms that the author is using.
4. Move on to the next sentence and continue for the whole passage.
5. After doing this with the whole passage, identify the conclusion – what is the claim the author is trying to convince you of in the passage as a whole?
6. Identify the premises put forth in support of that conclusion.

You may then submit this document to Canvas.

Grade Disputes: If you feel that your work has been unfairly assessed, I welcome you to ask that I reconsider. I am, after all, a human with a unique perspective and various background experiences and beliefs that may lead to different interpretations of your work than what you had in mind. I will do so **only if** you submit to me a one-paragraph explanation of why you believe that your work has been unfairly evaluated, along with the graded exam itself. You must indicate the grade you believe yourself to deserve and explain clearly why it is that you deserve that grade. Your dispute must be submitted within **one week** of receiving your grade.

Extra Credit and Final Grades: I will *not*, under any circumstances, offer extra credit. If you are concerned about your grade, consider taking advantage of the help available (e.g. come to my student hours). Please do so before the end of the semester. But also consider whether the grade really is the most important thing. I understand that there are practical considerations (including scholarships) but think about why you’re in school – are you here to get grades, to learn, to better yourself, etc. Where do your priorities lie, and why?

Academic Dishonesty Academic dishonesty of any kind is expressly prohibited. Engaging in academic dishonesty of any kind will result in failure of the course, a referral to the [Office of Wellness and Community Responsibility](#) for disciplinary action, and a deeply uncomfortable final conversation at the end of the term. You’re already paying an awful lot of money to take this class, and I am committed to helping you develop the philosophical, intellectual, and personal skills to the best of your ability. Engaging in any form of cheating really cuts against the whole purpose of the whole education thing.

I don’t like doing this, and let me be clear – I trust you. I am not going to look to bust you, and I do not see our professional relationship as adversarial. If you’re struggling and you don’t know what to do, how to cite sources, etc. **please come talk to me.**

A Note on AI, Large-Language Models, and Their Use Using AI tools appropriately is a big part of our cultural development at this point in our history. This class is focused on building your philosophical skills, especially interpreting, designing, and critiquing arguments and theories. AIs can sort of do some of these things, but there are myriad reasons *not* to employ them in place of doing the work yourself. One such reason is that allowing an AI to do any part of the coursework for you is not just cheating yourself out of the opportunity to get better at philosophy (that is, thinking, reading, writing, and being a person), it is failing to do what the assignment is asking you to do – display and develop *your* philosophical abilities. If there is good reason to believe an AI did the work for you, any of the following may well occur: you will be asked to meet to discuss the work, you will be asked to redo the work without the help of generative AI, you will receive a 0 for the assignment, or you will fail the class. In class we will discuss further reasons to refrain from having AI do the work *for* you, as well as ways that it *can* appropriately be employed.

Classroom Conduct: The classroom constitutes a community of which we are each an important part. The very foundation of philosophy as a discipline is the ability to charitably listen, understand and represent the views of ourselves and others. Philosophy as a discipline requires careful dialogue. As such, respect for your fellow student, your instructor, and the course is of critical importance. We can, should, and will disagree with one another often, but this *MUST* be conducted with respect. As such threatening behavior, offensive language (including “hate speech”) will not be tolerated.

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Attendance: I do not have a formal attendance policy, but philosophy is hard even if you come to class. AND! The in-class assignments cannot be made up, so skip at your own risk. You are responsible for information that I offer in lecture that is not in the readings. I will not provide notes for absences so get to know your classmates.

OTHER IMPORTANT POLICIES & RESOURCES

University Policies In addition to the articulated course specific policies and expectation, students are responsible for understanding all applicable university guidelines, policies, and procedures. The [EMU Student Handbook](#) is the primary resource provided to students to ensure that they have access to all university policies, support resources, and student's rights and responsibilities. Changes may be made to the EMU Student Handbook whenever necessary, and shall be effective immediately, and/or as of the date on which a policy is formally adopted, and/or the date specified in the amendment. Electing not to access the link provided below does not absolve a student of responsibility. For questions about any university policy, procedure, practice, or resources, please contact the Office of the Ombuds: 248 Student Center, 734.487.0074, emu_ombuds@emich.edu, or visit the website at www.emich.edu/ombuds. [CLICK HERE to access the University Course Policies](#)

Disability Resource Center I warmly welcome any of you who have disabilities. Students with medical, psychological, learning or other disabilities desiring academic adjustments, accommodations, or auxiliary aids must contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC). The [DRC](#) works collaboratively with students, faculty, and staff to create an accessible, sustainable, and inclusive educational environment.

Recording Class I will not record class meetings and I ask that you also please refrain from recording the class meetings without prior permission both from me and from your classmates.

University Library Research support is available to all students, 24/7. This includes getting started with research, identifying sources to search, developing search strategies, evaluating resources, and more. See <https://www.emich.edu/library/help/ask.php> for all of the ways in which you can get help with research. Some University Library services have changed, and may continue to change, in response to the pandemic. Please check for current information at <https://www.emich.edu/library/news/covid.php>

University Writing Center The [University Writing Center](#) (UWC) offers writing support to all undergraduate and graduate students. In doing so, we value the diversity of our campus and honor all students and the languages they bring with them to the university.

Holman Success Center Provides [Academic Support](#) through a variety of virtual and in-person services.

Title IX Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex under any education program or activity receiving federal financial aid. Sexual assault and sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by Title IX. [What you need to know about Title IX](#)

Student and Exchange Visitor Statement The Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) requires F and J students to report numerous items to the [Office of International Students & Scholars](#) (OISS)

Disclaimer: Information contained in this syllabus, other than the grading, late assignments, makeup work, and attendance policies are subject to change, with advance notice, as I deem appropriate.