

PHIL 101 - Introduction to Philosophy: Main Problems

UNC Chapel Hill

Sample Syllabus

Instructor Information

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Course Overview

This course has two related objectives.

First, this course aims to both acquaint you with and afford you the opportunity to participate in some of the most prominent debates in the western philosophical tradition. To this end, you will be asked to think carefully and critically about the merits of various different philosophical responses to the following three questions:

- (1) Do we have free will?
- (2) What makes the person that I am now the same as the person that I was yesterday or the person that I will be tomorrow?
- (3) What does having a conscious mind involve?

By the end of the term, you will be well-positioned to begin developing and defending your own answers to these questions.

Second, but perhaps more importantly, this course aims to equip you with a certain set of skills can be usefully applied in a variety of different domains outside of philosophy. Both in your writing and through discussion with your peers, you will learn to communicate clearly and concisely, reconstruct arguments for a position or view from a piece of text, critically evaluate arguments, construct persuasive arguments of your own in defense of a position or view, and anticipate and address potential objections to arguments that you find persuasive.

This course has no prerequisites and is designed for students without prior exposure to philosophy.

Required Texts

Almost all readings will be taken from Lewis Vaughn's *Great Philosophical Arguments: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, Copyright 2013). You should purchase a copy of this text. If you have trouble acquiring this text in a timely manner, please let me know.

The readings for this course that are not included in *Great Philosophical Arguments* will be posted in the "readings" folder under the Resources section of Sakai.

Course Requirements

Reading: You are expected to come to class on any given day having already done the assigned reading for that day. Generally speaking, we will not spend a great deal of time in class reviewing the material that has been covered in the reading. Instead, we will use class time to critically discuss the points that have been raised in the assigned text. For this reason, it is crucial that you make sure that you are relatively comfortable with the material presented in the assigned reading *before* you come to class. Since the readings for this course are often dense and difficult to digest, you will likely need to read through and annotate or take notes on the assigned text more than once before class. Especially as you are first starting out, I strongly encourage you to use the Guide to Reading Philosophical Texts that I have posted on Sakai to steer the way in which you approach the readings for this course.

Response Papers: You will be expected to write 10 short response papers (no more than 300 words) over the course of the semester, five of which must be completed before fall/spring break. NOTE: If you fail to submit five response papers before fall/spring break, you will not be able to make up for the papers that you failed to submit by writing extra response papers after the break. The purpose of writing response papers is help you prepare to contribute effectively and insightfully to class discussion.

Since you will only receive credit for 10 response papers, you need not and should not submit a response paper for every posted response paper prompt. A response paper prompt will be posted under the assignments section of the course Sakai site at least 36 hours before all class meetings for which there is assigned reading. Response paper prompts will typically ask you to complete two, related tasks. The first task is *expository*: you will be asked to explain an argument or bit of reasoning that appears in the assigned reading. The second task is *critical*: you will be asked to evaluate the argument or reasoning that you have just explained. Each response paper is due at 3pm on the day of the class meeting for which it is assigned.

I will grade-for-quality every other response paper you submit by applying roughly the same grading standards that I will apply to your critical papers (see below) and I will return these response papers to you with comments that are aimed at helping you improve your both your critical thinking and your writing skills. The remaining five papers that you submit will be graded for satisfactory completion. This means that graded-for-satisfactory-completion papers that betray gross misunderstanding of the assigned texts, have a significant number of grammatical or spelling errors, or are difficult to parse will not receive full credit. Your “Response Papers Grade” will be calculated as follows: each graded-for-quality paper will be worth 15 points, each graded-for-completion paper will be worth 5 points (for example, if you were to submit 10 response papers and you were to receive a 13/15 on each of the 5 graded-for-quality papers, you would receive a 90% or A- as your response papers grade)

Class Participation: You will be expected to be actively engaged in and to contribute to both small group and entire class discussions. Come to class prepared to respond carefully and critically to the material presented in the readings. If you regularly miss class, your class participation grade will suffer as a result, but merely attending every class meeting does not guarantee that you will receive an A for class participation. In order to receive high marks for class participation, you must attend all or almost all class meetings, you must be an active participant in classroom activities and

discussion, and your contributions must display your careful and thoughtful engagement with the assigned reading prior to class.

Critical Papers: You will be expected to submit two critical papers (no more than 1250 words) for this course. Each paper assignment will be posted under the assignments section of the course Sakai site two weeks before its due date. At least one week before each paper is due, you will be expected to submit a short outline of your paper (no more than 1 page). Failure to submit an outline will result in a 10% deduction in your final grade for the relevant critical paper assignment. I will return your outline with comments no less than 5 days before the paper is due. Instructions for constructing your outline will be posted on Sakai along with the relevant paper assignment. I strongly encourage you to find a time to meet with me outside of class during my office hours or by appointment as you are developing your outline. You may also wish to consult the Guidelines for Philosophical Writing provided by the [Writing Center](#) before you begin writing your paper.

Critical Paper Rewrites: You will be given the opportunity to rewrite each of your papers in light of my comments. The due dates for each paper rewrite are included in the schedule below. You are not required to submit a rewrite. Should you choose to submit a paper rewrite, your paper grade will be calculated by averaging that grade that your original submission earns with the grade that your rewrite earns. So if your original grade on Critical Paper 1 was 80 percent and you earn a 90 percent on your Critical Paper 1 Rewrite, then your Critical Paper 1 grade would be recorded as an 85 percent.

Final Exam: The final exam will be completed on Sakai and will require students to write one short essay. A bank of essay prompts (modeled on response paper prompts) will be provided at the time of the exam from which you will select one prompt to which you will respond. The exam will be open-book and open-note. Unless there is some documented reason why a student was unable to do so, a student who fails to complete the final exam during the scheduled time period will not be permitted to make-up either exam at another time.

The final exam will be given in compliance with UNC final exam regulations and according to the UNC Final Exam calendar. The final exam will be an in class exam and must be completed in *** on *** between *** and ***. Since the final exam will be administered through Sakai, students are responsible for bringing a laptop that can connect to the campus network to the exam. If you anticipate that you will not be able to bring a laptop on which to complete your final to the exam, you must contact me before the last class meetings to make alternate arrangements (failure to do so may result in failing to receive credit for the final exam).

Submitting Assignments

All assignments will be submitted through the Assignments section of the course Sakai site.

I do not accept late work. If you fail to submit an assignment on time without having secured an extension on the assignment, you will receive 0 points for your work. Exceptions to this policy will only be made if the student provides documentation (e.g. a note from a doctor) that s/he was unable to submit the assignment on time as a result of unforeseeable and unavoidable circumstances.

I will not grant extensions response papers. However, I will consider granting an extension on any other assignment for this course. Requests for an extension must be made by email to me at least 24 hours prior to the assignment's due date/time.

I will grade "blind" whenever possible. Thus, if an assignment requires you to upload your submission to Sakai, you should make sure that your name does not appear anywhere in the filename or in the body of your submission. The name of the file you upload must be in the following format: AssignmentName-YourPIDnumber.pdf or AssignmentName-YourPIDnumber.docx (for example: CriticalPaper1-714447247.docx). **Work that is not properly formatted may not be graded and so if you fail to format your work properly, you may receive 0 points for your work.**

Grading is a matter of comparing and ranking student work, which means that the standard for grades is ultimately set by students. Student performance determines the level of knowledge and skill required for each grade. When I grade your assignments, I am comparing your work to that of other students in this class but also in past classes. Because the standard is set by a larger set of students than this class alone, it is possible for any given class to do more or less well than average.

The comparative nature of grading means that it is important for students to have the same assignments and opportunities. It would be very difficult to determine each student's understanding and skill relative to others if everyone were given different assignments or opportunities. Occasionally, a student will ask to do extra work in order to raise a grade, but in fairness to other students, I must refuse such requests.

Like most instructors I know, I do not approach an assignment with the idea that it starts with an A, and then loses points for errors. If anything, I approach the assignment initially as if it is average work, which then receives a higher or lower grade according to whether it indicates more or less understanding and skill than average. It is for this reason that an exam or paper response that makes no obvious errors may not earn top marks. Other students may have written responses that demonstrated greater depth of understanding, were better organized, or more easy for a reader to follow.

The grade I assign any particular assignment reflects only the quality of that assignment. It is not a personal judgment either of you or your abilities. I am aware that you are all juggling many responsibilities, and I will not be offended if philosophy is not your first priority. Nevertheless, it would be unethical for me to base anyone's grade upon effort or reasons for needing a high grade, instead of on the quality of the work he or she submits.

If, after having read my comments, you believe that a grade you receive on a particular assignment does not accurately reflect the quality of the work, please contact me with this concern. I am always happy to talk through my grading standards and explain where and why a piece of work fell short of a top score.

Course Grade:

Your final grade in this course will be calculated as follows:

Class Participation – 10%
Response Papers – 20%
Critical Paper 1 – 30%
Critical Paper 2 – 30%
Final Exam – 10%

The philosophy department has set an average final course grade target of B-/C+ across its course offerings. So, if at the end of the semester the class average in this course is less than 79.5%, final grades will be curved to bring the class average up to 79.5%. If the average grade in the course at the end of the semester is above 79.5%, final grades will not be curved.

Conversion from percentages to letter grades will be as follows:

92.5%-100% is an A
89.5%-92.4% is an A-
87.5%-89.4% is a B+
82.5%-87.4% is a B
79.5%-82.4% is a B-
77.5%-79.4% is a C+
72.5%-77.4% is a C
69.5%-72.4% is a C-
67.5%- 69.4% is a D+
62.5% - 67.4% is a D
<62.5% is an F

Honor Code

You are bound by the UNC-Chapel Hill [Honor Code](#), which states that:

“It shall be the responsibility of every student at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to obey and support the enforcement of the Honor Code, which prohibits lying, cheating, or stealing when these actions involve academic processes or University students or academic personnel acting in an official capacity.”

The Honor Code applies to all of your work in this course. Instructors are required by the Honor Code to report *every* incident of *suspected* plagiarism or cheating, including first offenses.

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

	Topic	Assigned Readings
Week 1	Introduction to the Course/Introduction to the Problem of Free Will	Peter van Inwagen’s “An Argument for Incompatibilism”

Week 2	Free Will	• Timothy O'Connor's "Agent Causation" • David Wiggins's "Toward a Reasonable Libertarianism"
Week 3	Free Will	• Susan Wolf's "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility"
Week 4	Free Will	• Hilary Bok's "Freedom and Practical Reason"
Week 5	Free Will	Outline of First Critical Paper Due at 9pm on ***
		• Peter Strawson's "Freedom and Resentment"
Week 6	Free Will	• Derk Pereboom's "Living Without Free Will: The Case for Hard Incompatibilism"
		First Critical Paper Due at 9pm on ***
Week 7	Free Will	• Daniel Wegner "Who is the Controller of Controlled Processes?" • Patricia Churchland's "The Big Questions: Do We Have Free Will"
Week 8	Personal Identity	• John Perry's "A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality"
Week 9	Personal Identity	• Derek Parfit's "Personal Identity" • Eric Olson's "Is Psychology Relevant to Personal Identity?"
		First Critical Paper Rewrite Due at 9pm on ***
Week 10	Personal Identity	• Lynn Rudder Baker's "Persons and Other Things"
Week 11	What is Mindedness?	• Pages 1 – 83 of Valentino Braitenberg's <i>Vehicles: Experiments in Synthetic Psychology</i>

		Outline of Second Critical Paper Due at 9pm on ***
Week 12	What is Mindedness?	• John Searle's "Minds, Brains, and Programs"
		Second Critical Paper Due at 9pm on ***
Week 13	What is Mindedness?	• William Lycan's "Machine Consciousness" • David Cole's "Artificial Intelligence and Personal Identity"
Week 14	What is Mindedness?	• Thomas Nagel's "What is it Like to Be a Bat" • Daniel Dennett's "Quining Qualia"
Week 15	Wrap-up/Review	There will be no new reading this week.
		Second Critical Paper Rewrite Due at 9pm on ***
		Final Exam at *** on ***