

PHILOSOPHY 101 | ONLINE SECTION | FALL 2019

# INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

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COURSE WEBSITE: [danielwharris.com/teaching/101online](http://danielwharris.com/teaching/101online)

USERNAME: hunter password: wisdom

## ABOUT PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy deals with questions about the world and our place in it that the empirical sciences seem ill-equipped to handle. This course is designed to introduce students to philosophy by investigating some longstanding and persistent philosophical questions, including these:

- Can we have genuine knowledge of anything? If so, what?
- What is it to have a mind, and what does this have to do with having a body?
- Do we have free will, or are our actions predetermined?
- What are the differences between persons and non-persons?
- Do we have moral responsibilities toward animals? If so, why?
- What makes an action right or wrong, and what makes a person good or bad?
- What would a just society be like?

We'll consider how some influential philosophers of the past and present have attempted to answer these questions. Along the way, we'll learn some methods for asking and answering tough questions that should also prove useful outside the philosophy classroom.

## THIS IS A FULLY ON-LINE COURSE

The course content will be delivered to you via the course website and email. You absolutely need continual access to the website in order to pass the course.

\*Note: this course does *not* use blackboard.

## EMAIL COMMUNICATION

I will normally contact you by email, and I will use whichever email address is listed for you in the CUNYfirst system. It is *essential* that you regularly check this email address. If CUNYfirst has an email address listed for you that you prefer not to use, you can easily change it. Instructions for doing so are available here:

[http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/cunyfirst/repository/files/CUNYfirst\\_Email\\_Address.pdf](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/cunyfirst/repository/files/CUNYfirst_Email_Address.pdf)

This is your responsibility. If you are late with an assignment because an email from me went to the wrong address, you will not receive credit for the assignment.

You can contact me at any time at the following email address:

[danielwharris@gmail.com](mailto:danielwharris@gmail.com)

When you contact me about matters pertaining to this course, please make sure to put "101" somewhere in the subject line. If you don't do this, your email could get lost.

## COURSE WEBSITE

All of the readings, assignments, and other materials for the semester will be made available in electronic form on the course website:

[danielwharris.com/teaching/101online](http://danielwharris.com/teaching/101online)

To download some of the readings, you'll need to login with the username (hunter) and password (wisdom).

There is a tentative schedule of topics and required readings on the last page of this syllabus. However, the schedule is incomplete and may change, and the definitive schedule will always be what is listed on the website. Always use the website as your definitive guide to the schedule.

## WEEKLY UNITS

The course will be organized into thirteen units, spread across 15 weeks (plus a one-week break for Thanksgiving). Each of these weeks will include some required reading, listening, and/or viewing materials. Some of the weeks will also include a writing assignment which you will have to submit by email.

## CHOOSE YOUR SPEED

All of the readings and assignments, and even the final take-home exam for this course are already on the course website. Each assignment as well as the exam has a deadline, but you may also submit any of these things early. In principle, you could complete all of the work for this course and receive a final grade in the first two weeks if you would like to do so. It is a good idea to get ahead of schedule on weeks that are slow in your other courses. I will endeavor to grade assignments as soon as possible after they come in, so that you can have feedback before completing the next assignment.

## GRADE COMPONENTS

Eight Writing Assignments — 80% (10% each)

Write-at-home Final Exam — 20%

## WEEKLY WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

There will be eight short writing assignments due on odd-numbered weeks, including week 1. These assignments are designed to help you to engage with the readings. The assignments will take various forms.

Each week's assignment will be due on the Sunday night of the week in question at 11:59pm. Late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 10% per day. After 10 or more days, they will be worthless. (If you have a good, documented excuse to miss an assignment, we can talk.)

It is important that you do your own work. If two assignments resemble one another very closely, I will consider both to have been plagiarized. Although it's okay for you to discuss assignments with other class members, and to offer them help, you should keep your written assignments private until they're submitted to me.

## FINAL EXAM

The final consists of essay questions about the readings. It will cover topics from the whole semester. It will be due on 20 December, but you can complete it at any time during the semester. You will submit the final exam to me by email. Again: I will be very strict about plagiarism, and I will deduct points from late final exams at the same rate as with assignments.

## COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

If all goes well, here's what will happen this semester:

- You'll learn about some central philosophical questions and the ways that some influential philosophers have tried to answer them.
- You'll get better at thinking like a philosopher. This means thinking clearly about hard questions, taking a rationally critical attitude toward your own and others' answers to those questions, and being open-minded enough to go where the best reasons and arguments lead.
- You'll get better at reading like a philosopher. This means identifying what's important and controversial in an author's claims, distinguishing between rational and irrational support for those claims, and noticing the weak spots in their arguments.
- You'll get better at writing like a philosopher. This means being clear about what you're trying to say, giving the best possible rational support for your claims, and anticipating the objections of those who disagree.
- Since these ways of thinking, reading, and writing are useful for dealing with issues outside philosophy, you'll gain some skills that you can use in other courses, and in your everyday life.

## HOW TO GET A GOOD GRADE

Getting an A in this course will require you to do all of the following:

- Do each reading at least once, and preferably more than once.
- Work hard at understanding the theories we discuss and practice applying them to new cases.
- Learn to write in the clear, concise, and convincingly argumentative style that philosophers like.
- Ruthlessly revise and proofread your writing assignments until they are written in clear and grammatical English.

## 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.

	DATES AND TOPIC	READINGS
1	<b>First Things</b> 27 August–1 September	David Foster Wallace: Consider the Lobster Jim Pryor: Guidelines on Reading Philosophy Jim Pryor: Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper
2	<b>Consequentialist Ethics</b> 2–8 September	Peter Singer: About Ethics John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism Peter Singer: The How and Why of Effective Altruism (video)
3	<b>Deontological Ethics</b> 9–15 September	Immanuel Kant: Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals Onora O'Neill: Kantian Approaches to some Famine Problems Michael Sandel: Mind your Motive (video) The Trolley Problem (video)
4-5	<b>Justice</b> 16–29 September	John Rawls: A Theory of Justice (excerpt) Robert Nozick: Justice and Entitlement (Three videos by Michael Sandel)
6	<b>Gender</b> 30 September–6 October	Marilynn Frye: Sexism Hi-Phi Nation, Episode 8: Be A Man (podcast)
7	<b>Abortion</b> 7–13 October	John T. Noonan: An Almost Absolute Value in History Mary Anne Warren: On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion Judith Jarvis Thomson: A Defense of Abortion
8	<b>Skepticism</b> 14–20 October	Descartes: Meditation 1 Christopher Grau: Bad Dreams, Evil Demons, and the Experience Machine: Philosophy and the Matrix Kurzgesagt: Is Reality Real? The Simulation Argument
9	<b>The Structure of Knowledge</b> 21–27 October	René Descartes: Meditations 2–4
10–11	<b>Rationalism and Empiricism</b> 28 October–10 November	Plato: The Meno David Hume: Enquiry into Human Understanding, pp.1–28
12	<b>The Mind–Body Problem</b> 13–17 November	André Kukla and Joel Walmsley: Cartesianism Daniel Dennett: Why Dualism is Forlorn (pp. 33–39 of Consciousness Explained) Frank Jackson: Epiphenomenal Qualia (excerpt)
13	<b>Artificial Intelligence</b> 18–24 November	Alan Turing: Computing Machinery and Intelligence André Kukla and Joel Walmsley: Artificial Intelligence John Searle: Minds, Brains, and Programs
14	<b>The Self</b> 2–8 December	Paul Churchland: Eliminative Materialism Daniel Dennett: The Self as a Narrative Center of Gravity CGP Grey: You Are Two (video) Split Brain Behavioral Experiments (video)
15	<b>God</b> 9–15 December	Roger White: The Argument from Cosmological Fine-Tuning David Lewis: Divine Evil

Please note: The above schedule is tentative! The readings may change. The definitive schedule will appear on the website.