

80-100 Introduction to Philosophy

Philip Sink (he/him) - psink@andrew.cmu.edu

Office Hours: 4pm-5pm in Baker 155 on Tuesdays

TA - Damini Kusum () - dkusum@andrew.cmu.edu

Office Hours:

1 Course Description

Do we have free will? What is the nature of consciousness? What is truth? These are the sorts of questions that keep us up at night. The purpose of philosophy is to make sense of these questions and attempt to answer them. In the tradition we shall be primarily exploring, philosophy proceeds via arguments. Philosophers begin with some conclusion they wish to argue for, some assumptions, and proceed via some process of inference from those assumptions to that conclusion. We call these sequences of inferences arguments. Breaking down philosophical arguments can help you to break down arguments you encounter in your day to day life, and help you to more adeptly and clearly construct arguments of your own.

2 Course Objectives

This course has three primary objectives. The first is to introduce you to the process of how one breaks down and understands an argument. Over the course of this (very short) semester, you will encounter a variety of arguments for various conclusions in the weekly readings. The goal each week will be for you to reconstruct the arguments from the given readings. In doing so, the idea is that you become better at breaking down and analyzing arguments in general.

The second objective is to learn how to *construct* an argument. To this end, you have a midterm and a final paper, each of which is expected to be 5-7 pages in length. In each of these papers you will rehearse one of the arguments we explored in class in careful detail. Then you will articulate your own views on that argument,

The third objective is to explore the kinds of questions that are considered philosophical and the various ways philosophers have approached answering philosophical questions. This course mostly, but not entirely, follows the Western analytic tradition of philosophy, so its scope is necessarily narrow. The hope is that the readings will provide a survey of various kinds of philosophical questions, and how some philosophers have approached solving them.

Through all of these objectives, the hope is to help you to discover and sharpen your own opinions on these difficult topics. All of you will come to this course with prior opinions and intuitions about many of the questions we shall explore. By learning about argumentative structure, and some of the history of these discussions, you will be able to refine and hone your own position in the discourse.

3 Course Structure

This course meets three times a week. Monday and Wednesday will be "Interactive Lectures" - don't let this freak you out! By this, all I mean is that I will be lecturing and will often ask questions of you, or do small activities. To that end it's imperative you do the readings!

Each week will typically follow the following structure, where each week is focused on a single particular paper. On Monday, I'll introduce some history about the author we're reading, and begin to explain the broad structure of the argument. On Wednesday, we'll continue that exploration. On Friday, you'll meet with the TA for recitation. Weekly Assignments will typically be due on Monday Evenings - this is so that you've had a chance to both do the reading and talk about it with me in class before attempting to do the assignment yourself.

My Office Hours will be from 6:45 to 7:45 in Doherty 4303 on Thursdays.

4 Evaluation

Evaluation will break down as follows:

- Weekly Assignments: 50%
- Participation: 10%
- Midterm Paper: 20%
- Final Paper: 20%

Over the course of the semester there will be 11 Weekly Assignments based on the readings for that week. You are expected to complete 10 - the lowest grade will be dropped automatically, even if the assignment is incomplete. Diagrams are due on Monday evenings as indicated on the schedule.

Participation will be assessed by your participation in weekly recitation sessions. During those, we will be offering our own thoughts on the readings we've been exploring for that week, and debating with our classmates as to what perspectives we prefer. Some of these topics will be controversial, and you may be personally offended by some of the arguments presented. If you do disagree with a reading, or something I or a classmate says, please argue against it! Arguing for your positions is the purpose of philosophical thinking. No thoughtful person could agree with everything that will be said this semester. Nevertheless, during class, it is expected that we will treat each other and our ideas with respect and care. If you feel uncomfortable for any reason, do not hesitate to reach out. If you're not comfortable speaking up during recitation sections or cannot attend one week, you can come to my Office Hours instead.

The midterm and final papers will each be 5-7 pages and is due the last day of classes. The goal of this assignment is to articulate your own opinions on a philosophical debate. To that end, you will pick one of the weeks readings that you found interesting. You will articulate the argument from that paper, and then elaborate on your own opinions of that argument. A more detailed rubric will be provided later in the semester.

My latework policy is to remove 20% of your final grade for each day an assignment is late. Please feel free to request an extension if you require one - I will generally grant them, but for the sake of getting things graded promptly, please try to request extensions before assignments are due,

5 Schedule

- Week 1 Jan 16 - Sept 19 (Is there a God? pt. 1)
 - M: No Class (MLK Jr. Day)
 - W: Introduction/How to do Argument Diagrams
- Week 2 Jan 22 - 26 (Is there a God? pt. 2)
 - M: Aquinas pt. 1 (Aquinas Argument Diagram due Tuesday)
 - W: Aquinas pt. 2
- Week 3 Jan 29 - Feb 2 (Do We Have Free Will? pt. 1)
 - M: van Inwagen pt. 1 (van Inwagen Argument Diagram due Tuesday)
 - W: van Inwagen pt. 2
- Week 4 Feb 5 - 9 (Do We Have Free Will? pt. 2)
 - M: Frankfurt pt. 1 (Frankfurt Short Response due Tuesday)
 - W: Frankfurt pt. 2
- Week 5 Feb 12 - 16 (What is Consciousness? pt. 1)

- M: Turing pt. 1 (Turing Argument Diagram due Tuesday)
 - W: Turing pt. 2
- Week 6 Feb 19 - 23 (What is Consciousness? pt. 2)
 - M: Searle pt. 1 (Searle Argument Diagram due Tuesday)
 - W: Searle pt. 2
- Week 7 Feb 26 - Mar 1 (What is Truth? pt. 1)
 - M: Aristotle pt. 1 (Aristotle Short Response due Tuesday)
 - W: Aristotle pt. 2 (Midterm Paper due)
- Week 8 Mar 11 - 15 (What is Truth? pt. 2)
 - M: Peirce pt. 1 (Peirce Argument Diagram due Tuesday)
 - W: Peirce pt. 2
- Week 9 Mar 18 - 22 (Feminist Philosophy pt.1)
 - M: Catharine MacKinnon pt.1 (MacKinnon Short Response due Tuesday)
 - W: Catharine MacKinnon pt.2
- Week 10 Mar 25 - 29 (Feminist Philosophy pt. 2)
 - M: Christopher Hookway pt.1 (Hookway Short Response due Tuesday)
 - W: Christopher Hookway pt.2
- Week 11 Apr 1 - 5 (What is Pragmatism? pt. 1)
 - M: Cornel West (West Short Response due Tuesday)
 - W: Cornel West/Johnathan Flowers
- Week 12 Apr 8 - 12 (What is Pragmatism? pt. 2)
 - M: Johnathan Flowers (Flowers Argument Diagram due Tuesday)
 - W: Cornel West/Johnathan Flowers discussion (No Class Friday, Carnival)
- Week 13 Apr 15 - 19 (Africana Philosophy pt. 1)
 - M: F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo pt. 1
 - W: F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo pt. 2
- Week 14 Apr 22 - 26 (Africana Philosophy pt. 2)
 - M: Kwame Gyekye pt. 1
 - W: Kwame Gyekye pt. 2 (Final Essay Due)

6 Invitation for Students with Disabilities

If you have a learning disability that could impair your progress in this course, please contact Equal Opportunity Services on campus (<http://hr.web.cmu.edu/dsrg/students.htm>). We can arrange to accommodate your learning style based on EOS recommendations. Please notify me at the semester's beginning of your learning needs—do not wait until the semester becomes overwhelming to acknowledge the problem.

7 CMU Philosophy Department Statement on Citing and Plagiarism

“The straightforward disclosure of the sources used in completing course work is essential to the integrity of the educational process. In that way one acknowledges the ideas of others and helps to highlight what is distinctive of one’s own contribution to a topic. It also enables instructors to be more effective teachers by providing an accurate sense of the student’s grasp of course material.

Students are expected to use proper methods for citing sources; such methods can be found in style guides like the Chicago Manual of Style, or the most recent MLA Handbook. In general, an acceptable method of citation provides enough information to allow a reader to track down the original sources. You should consult your professor, if you have any questions about which method to use, or which kinds of collaboration or assistance to disclose.

Failure to acknowledge the ideas of others is a serious violation of intellectual integrity and community standards. It is the individual student’s responsibility to be aware of university policies on academic integrity, including the policies on cheating and plagiarism. This is available online at: <http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/Academic%20Integrity.htm> and in the section on “University Policies” in the most recent edition of The Word: Undergraduate Student Handbook.

Students who cheat or plagiarize face serious sanctions at both the course level, and the university level. At the course level, faculty at Carnegie Mellon University have significant discretion to determine the sanctions that are appropriate to individual cases of cheating and plagiarism. Within the Philosophy Department, it is customary to give plagiarized assignments a failing grade and, where appropriate, to fail students for the course. Additionally, a letter is sent to the Dean of Students indicating that the student in question has submitted plagiarized material and received a course-level sanction. Plagiarism is also a violation of the community standards of Carnegie Mellon University. As such, allegations of plagiarism may be brought before a University Academic Review Board which will determine whether a violation of community standards has taken place and level additional sanctions if appropriate. Although this body also has significant discretion over the sanctions that it levels, plagiarism can result in academic probation, suspension, and even expulsion.”¹

To add to this, I am entirely comfortable with you using AI to help you complete your assignments this semester. If you choose to avail yourself of these tools, however, I have one request. Please clearly denote which sections of your assignments have been generated with AI. This is not only necessary and honest citation (and so failure to do so may be counted as plagiarism) but furthermore, knowing when and how you are using AI will help both myself and the TA give you more thorough and specific feedback.

This syllabus borrows from elements of Dr. Joel Smith’s and Dr. Simon Cullen’s syllabi for the same course.

¹<https://www.cmu.edu/dietrich/philosophy/graduate/ta-handbook/academic-honesty.html>