

80-100 Introduction to Philosophy

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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 Structure

The structure of this course will be as follows: Monday and Tuesday we will explore an argument for something (say, the nature of free will) from one perspective, and Wednesday and Thursday we will explore an opposing view. On that Monday, you will have to turn in an argument diagram for the Monday/Tuesday reading, and on Wednesday the same for the Wednesday/Thursday reading. On Friday, we will have a discussion section. The idea with these is that they will mostly be led by the students. We will explore your thoughts on the strengths and weaknesses of that week's readings, sharing our thoughts and arguing with each other some. It is expected that you be respectful of each other and each other's beliefs during discussions.

The first and last weeks have a slightly different schedule due to the shorter weeks. See the schedule below for more detail. Also note you have a final paper due the last day of class.

3 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 one final paper, which is expected to be 3-5 pages in length. In this paper you will rehearse two competing views we explored, carefully reconstructing the arguments of those authors. Then you will offer your own detailed thoughts as to which side (if any) you prefer, and why.

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 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.

4 Evaluation

Evaluation will break down as follows:

- Argument Diagrams: 50%
- Participation: 20%
- Final Paper: 30%

Over the course of the semester there will be 9 Argument Diagrams based on the readings for that week. You are expected to complete 8 - the lowest grade will be dropped, even if the assignment is incomplete. Aside from the first and last week, diagrams will be due on Monday and Wednesday, just before we begin discussing an author. The readings on which you will make the diagrams will be posted to Canvas.

Participation will be assessed by your participation in weekly Discussion 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 Discussion sections or cannot attend one week, you can come to my Office Hours instead.

The Final Paper will be 3-5 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 (starting with Week 2) that you found interesting. You will articulate the two arguments from the readings that week, and then give your own detailed thoughts as to which is preferable (if any).

5 Schedule

- Week 1 July 5-9: The Nature of Arguments
 - M: (No Class)
 - T: Introduction/What is an argument?
 - W: How to do an argument diagram.
 - T: Aquinas.
 - F: Introduction to Discussions: Russell and Aquinas. HW due: Aquinas argument diagram.
- Week 2 July 12-16: Free Will
 - M: Peter van Inwagen: The Consequence Argument. HW due: van Inwagen argument diagram.
 - T: Peter van Inwagen: The Consequence Argument pt. II
 - W: A.J. Ayer: Freedom and Necessity. HW due: Ayer argument diagram.
 - T: A.J. Ayer: Freedom and Necessity pt. II
 - F: Discussion: van Inwagen vs. Ayer
- Week 3 July 19-23: Consciousness
 - M: Turing's Theory of Mind. HW due: Turing argument diagram.
 - T: Turing's Theory of Mind pt. II
 - W: Searle's Response. HW due: Searle argument diagram.
 - T: Searle's Response pt. II
 - F: Discussion: Turing vs. Searle

- Week 4 July 26-30: What is Truth?
 - M: Aristotle’s Metaphysics. HW due: Aristotle argument diagram.
 - T: Aristotle’s Metaphysics pt. II
 - W: Charles Sanders Peirce: How to Make Our Ideas Clear. HW due: Peirce argument diagram.
 - T: Charles Sanders Peirce: How to Make Our Ideas Clear pt. II
 - F: Discussion: Aristotle vs. Peirce
- Week 5 August 2-6: Feminism
 - M: Rorty: Feminism and Pragmatism. HW due: Rorty argument diagram.
 - T: Rorty: Feminism and Pragmatism pt. II
 - W: Lovibond’s Reply. HW due: Lovibond argument diagram.
 - T: Lovibond’s Reply pt. II
 - F: Discussion: Rorty vs. Lovibond
- Week 6 August 9-13: Personal Identity
 - M: Parfit: The Unimportance of Identity
 - T: Parfit: The Unimportance of Identity pt. II and Lewis: Survival and Identity
 - W: Lewis: Survival and Identity pt. II
 - T: Discussion: Parfit vs. Lewis. HW due: Final Paper
 - F (No Class)

6 Covid

Due to Covid, this course will be hosted online. So I can be as effective as possible in my teaching, it is crucial you keep your cameras on. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to teach a blank picture. The same is true of discussions - it’s also very difficult to share your ideas to a room of blank pictures. If you have concerns about this please reach out to me via email.

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

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