

Introduction to Philosophy

PHI 010 (Fall 2019)

Professor: Dr. Christopher Eliot, Associate Professor of Philosophy
Office: 104F Heger Hall (516-463-4516)
Office hours: Mon & Wed 9:30–10:00; Fri 1:30–3:30 and by appointment
Email: Christopher.Eliot@hofstra.edu (or Christopher.H.Eliot@hofstra.edu)
Texts: no texts to be purchased; all readings linked from <https://chreliot.github.io/phi10/>
Course time & place: Section 1 (91480): Mon, Wed, Fri 10:10–11:00 in Heger 100
Section 2 (91922): Mon, Fri 11:15–12:40 in Davison 17

Course website:

The course website is <https://chreliot.github.io/phi10/>

Important dates:

First essay due: Oct 2
First test/midterm exam: Oct 14
Second essay due: Nov 25
Second test/final exam: Dec 13 8–10 (section 1 only); 10:30–12:30 (section 2 only)

September	October	November	December
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 ② 3 4 5	1 2	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
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29 30	27 28 29 30 31	24 ⑮ 26 27 28 29 30	29 30 31

What we're doing here:

Philosopher Ted Sider writes “There is both truth and untruth in the common idea that philosophy is the dreamy contemplation of ‘the big questions.’” Philosophers do try to identify “big questions” — questions that are big because they are important to us and don’t have easy answers. Philosophers do ask questions like: What is the meaning of life? Is there one? What is the best kind of life to live? How do I know that I know anything? What kinds of things are real? However, philosophers do not, when they’re doing Philosophy, just dreamily contemplate those questions and float vague answers to them. They employ rigorous methods to try to achieve clarity about those problems and their possible answers.

This course introduces you to what philosophers do—to how they pose questions and how they answer them. It will expose you to a range of styles and topics of Philosophy, and it will get you started doing Philosophy yourself.

My goals for this course are that you:

1. become familiar with some significant philosophical questions and positions from the history and present of western Philosophy;
2. recognize what philosophers do and begin to do that;
3. recognize connections between philosophical questions and positions and some questions and positions in disciplines other than philosophy;

4. develop your skills at and comfort with formulating productive questions;
5. develop your skills at participating comfortably and productively in academic discussion;
6. develop your skills at identifying the arguments in sophisticated texts;
7. develop your skills at writing clearly and persuasively;
8. develop your sense of what role philosophical inquiry—whether academic or informal—might play in living a good life.

Course requirements:

1. You will need to **access the texts** and figure out your strategy for reading them and making notes on them.
2. You are expected to **read, and be prepared to discuss**, the assigned texts. You will receive a participation grade which figures in both your contributions to class and the apparent preparedness reflected in them. Participation is not mere attendance; it involves volunteering contributions. I may even call on you and expect you to have something relevant to say. Though presentations will help explain the readings, you cannot expect to understand our discussion without reading yourself. Much of the point of our meeting in person is that you bring you be able to engage *your independent scholarship* with that of other scholars—your peers and me. Obviously, that requires having both read and digested the text. Do it.
3. You are expected to **attend** the class sessions. I will be taking attendance regularly, at or after each session. Arriving late counts as half an absence. Absences beyond 2 will reduce your grade by .1/4 More than 2 sessions of missed attendance will be factored into your participation grade. You *do not* need to contact me about being absent! However, if you have doctors' notes or excuses from Hofstra officials, keep them on file until the end of the semester, in case you need to show why you had more than 2 absences.

Also, since you will be responsible on tests for knowing what happened in class even if you did not attend, it may be helpful to figure out someone in the class you can ask. I can tell you what topic we discussed in class, but I can't repeat the lecture or discussion or email notes. I don't have notes that would make sense to you. Others might.
4. You will need to figure out a strategy for taking **notes on paper**, not on a device. Sorry.
5. **Electronic devices** may be used during class to engage with assigned readings, and only for that purpose. I may ask that they be put away.
6. You will need to attend and take a **first/midterm test** and a **second test/final exam** at the end of the term. The final will be comprehensive, but will emphasize the second half of the course. For each test, I will circulate a list of questions in advance, from which the actual test will be drawn. There will therefore be no questions on the tests which you have not seen in advance. The second test will cover the entire course but will strongly emphasize the second half. No test bathroom breaks will be permitted. Make-up tests will not be permitted except with a note from a doctor or Hofstra official. Please make your travel plans accordingly.
7. There will be two out-of-class **writing assignments**. Each one will require writing as much as 1400 words and must be submitted through a Turnitin link on the course Blackboard site.
8. Finally, I always hope this goes without saying and am occasionally disheartened to find that it doesn't: I ask you to **be respectful** of the business of the class during class sessions. In this course it is acceptable drink or eat quietly during class, but please do not distract yourself and others by watching video, loudly chomping Doritos, etc. Especially as this will be a small discussion course, I expect polite engagement from you. That involves not nodding off and not engaging in distracting side-conversations, but also being sensitive to the need to make room for as many students' contributions as possible.

Evaluation:

I would prefer to teach entirely without grades, but their existence has various kinds of value for you. So we have them. Here is where yours come from:

To the degree it is practically feasible, I evaluate your work anonymously, to eliminate unconscious biases and approach objectivity. (Obviously, under certain circumstances, it is not practically feasible.) Your grades will be calculated according to the University's standards, relative to course expectations, and relative to other members of the class. This does *not* mean your grade will be "curved" to a mean score, but it may be adjusted upwards depending on overall class performance. That is, you will earn at least the score you deserve according to University standards, but also one related to how other students performed. Writing assignments and exams will be graded using a 4-point scale. "Incomplete" status will also not be given automatically, nor in the absence of a compelling, written request.

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

Participation	15%
First Essay	19%
Second Essay	22%
First Test	21%
Second Test	23%

I will circulate partial/preview grades for participation at the one third and two thirds marks, so you have a clear sense of how I think you're doing. Grades for writing assignments, quizzes, and tests will be converted to Hofstra's 4-point scale before calculation.

- 4 = **A** represents exceptional work.
- 3 = **B** represents superior work.
- 2 = **C** represents satisfactory work.
- 1 = **D** represents below-satisfactory work.

Instructor's own academic honesty policy:

Representing someone else's work as your own, or any other form of scholastic dishonesty (as defined by the University), will automatically earn you an F for the course, beyond the required dishonesty form. So this is the key point you should internalize now: If you ever find yourself in circumstances where it seems like a good idea to be dishonest, please come talk to me about what we can do about the circumstances instead. You will find that while *after* I've detected scholastic dishonesty, the outcome is severe and automatic, *beforehand* I try to be as helpful as possible.

Syllabus adjustments:

Unexpected events can lead to changes in the schedule and syllabi. However, it's important to me that you not feel that the rules have changed on you mid-stream, so, if any changes are necessary, I will make them as fair as possible.

Contacting me:

The best way to contact me is by email; I check it regularly. If you have a quick question, often we can take care of it by email. But if you need more help, don't hesitate to visit my office hours, listed above, or ask (in person or by email) to set up another mutually-convenient time. Phoning is not a reliable way to reach me.

General university policies:

The page at this URL describes university policies about academic honesty, student access services, university-wide deadlines, incomplete grades, discriminatory harassment, relationship violence, sexual misconduct, and absences

for religious observances: <http://www.hofstra.edu/about/administration/provost/provost-hofstra-policies.html>

Department's learning goals and objectives for this course:

Goals for Philosophy courses:

- ▷ Students understand major philosophical ideas accurately
- ▷ Students apply their understanding of ideas in novel contexts
- ▷ Students write effectively
- ▷ Students speak effectively
- ▷ Students argue with precision, balance, and insight
- ▷ Students read analytically, critically, and empathetically
- ▷ Students critically assess their own commitments and ideas

Specific learning objectives for Philosophy courses:

- ▷ Objective 1a: Students give accurate and relevant answers, complete with supporting details, to specific questions about philosophical ideas relevant to the course.
- ▷ Objective 1b: Students give accurate accounts of philosophical ideas relevant to the course in the context of criticizing or assessing those ideas.
- ▷ Objective 2a: Students speculate, in well-informed, well-supported, and plausible fashion, about what a given philosopher would say about a novel issue or problem.
- ▷ Objective 2b: Students extrapolate creatively and plausibly from their knowledge of philosophers or philosophical positions in developing their own related ideas.
- ▷ Objective 3a: Students write paragraphs that exhibit clarity, focus, a good command of the subject matter, and an orderly development of ideas.
- ▷ Objective 3b: Students write multi-paragraph pieces that exhibit clarity, focus, a good command of the subject matter and an ability to work with that subject matter creatively, and an orderly development of ideas both within and across paragraphs.
- ▷ Objective 4a: Students speak in clear, focused, well-informed, and orderly fashion.
- ▷ Objective 5a: Students state arguments accurately and clearly, and identify strengths and weaknesses of different arguments.
- ▷ Objective 5b: Students develop and defend their own arguments, taking into account a variety of philosophical positions but adding original insights or emphases.
- ▷ Objective 7a: Students explain difficult passages clearly, accurately, and thoroughly.
- ▷ Objective 7b: Students use apt quotations and creative, critical, plausible readings of texts in their writing.
- ▷ Objective 8a: Students are able to explain the weaknesses of their own present positions, and the strengths of competing positions.
- ▷ Objective 8b: Students are able to explain why their pre-theoretical commitments have or have not changed as a result of what they have learned in the course, and if they have changed how they have done so.

Final thought:

Inevitably, grades are a function of performance, not of effort in itself. I can't reasonably assess effort. What's challenging varies from student to student. You will need to figure out what *you* need to do to perform well. I will try to help you with what's hard for you, if I know you need help. In the end, you are responsible for your education, however, and if you are confused, you should ask a question, or I will assume you understand. Unless you discuss them with me in person or by email, I will also likely not be aware of any dissatisfactions you have with any aspect of the course. I hope you will not be dissatisfied. I think this material is useful and fun, and believe an important part of my job is to try to show you why it is.