

Introduction to Symbolic Logic

PHI 154 (Fall 2020)

Instructor: Dr. Christopher Eliot, Associate Professor of Philosophy
Office: online this semester; personal zoom room
Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 3:00–4:00 & by appointment
Email: Christopher.Eliot@hofstra.edu
Christopher.H.Eliot@hofstra.edu also works)
Texts: documents on course site or under Course Documents documents on the course's Blackboard s
Course time & location: MW 12:50–2:45 (Zoom Room via Blackboard)
Course site: <https://chreliot.github.io/phi154/>

What we're doing here

This course asks about what “the meaning of life” is, and whether life has a meaning, and indeed what it would *mean* to have a meaning. In doing so, it engages students with how philosophers engage difficult questions, exposing them to what philosophers do and helping students learn philosophical methods for answering them.

My goals for this course are that you:

1. become familiar with some significant ways of asking and answering about the meaning of life, and closely related questions, from anglophone philosophy and its precursors;
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 meaningful life.

Course site

The schedule of readings and assignments, as well as other important information and requirements for the course, is at <https://chreliot.github.io/phi14f/>. Consider bookmarking it for the semester on any device you may use to check it.

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 online. I will be taking attendance regularly, at or after each session. I will automatically ignore two absences. Beyond that, unexcused 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 two 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 my presentations or the discussion or email notes. I don't have notes that would make sense to you. Others might.

4. We plan to have **small group sessions** on campus to discuss particular topics. Depending on your availability, these may be offered at times other than our main scheduled class time. The scheduled class time may be reduced to make room for such activities. I will communicate more-detailed plans about these discussions as we go along. If you find that outlined plans don't work for you, please just get in touch with me to discuss. I will be flexible.
5. You will need to 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.
6. There will be two out-of-class **writing assignments**. The instructions will be posted on the course website. Each one will require writing as much as 1400 words and must be submitted through a Turnitin link on the course Blackboard site.

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	25%
First Essay	17%
Second Essay	20%
First Test	18%
Second Test	20%

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.

But what if I still don't understand/have questions after we've reviewed the homework?

1. Discuss with others. One of the best ways to learn something is to explain it to others; consequently, even helping someone else doesn't need to be a one-way transaction.
2. Email me. Please let me know if you *do not want* me to post your anonymized question — that is, without your name — and an answer on the course site.
3. Visit my office hours or arrange an appointment with me for other times. Further information about reaching me during office hours will appear on the course site.

University Academic Honesty policy

Hofstra University Honor Code: “As a member of the Hofstra community I pledge to demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior in all aspects of my life, both inside and out of the classroom. I understand that I am accountable for everything I say and write. I will not misrepresent my academic work, nor will I give or receive unauthorized assistance for academic work. I agree to respect the rights of all members of the Hofstra community. I will be guided by the values expressed in the P.R.I.D.E. Principles. I accept the responsibility to follow this Honor Code at all times.”

Honor Code Short Form: “I pledge on my honor that I have done this work with honesty and integrity, without giving or receiving unauthorized assistance.”

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.

Test calendar

1. October 12 - first (midterm) test, during class period
2. December 2 - second (final) test, 10:30–12:30 PM

September	October	November	December
1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 ② 3 4 5
6 7 8 9 10 11 12	4 5 6 7 8 9 10	8 9 10 11 12 13 14	6 7 8 9 10 11 12
13 14 15 16 17 18 19	11 ⑫ 13 14 15 16 17	15 16 17 18 19 20 21	13 14 15 16 17 18 19
20 21 22 23 24 25 26	18 19 20 21 22 23 24	22 23 24 25 26 27 28	20 21 22 23 24 25 26
27 28 29 30	25 26 27 28 29 30 31	29 30	27 28 29 30 31

Additional University policies

“For specific policies relating to COVID-19 guidelines including mask wearing, class attendance, and class seating see

<https://www.hofstra.edu/about/administration/provost/provost-information-for-students.html>.

Information about Academic Dishonesty; Student Access Services; Deadlines and Grading Policies; Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Misconduct; and Absences for Religious Observance, is also available.”

Final thought

Inevitably, here as elsewhere, grades are a function of performance, not of effort in itself. I can't reasonably assess effort. What's challenging varies. 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 fun and useful, and believe an important part of my job is trying to show you why it is.