

**Course Information**

*Class meetings:* Tuesdays 5:40-8:30, Murray 211

Professor Elisabeth Camp, [elisabeth.camp@rutgers.edu](mailto:elisabeth.camp@rutgers.edu)

*Office Hours:* Tuesdays 3-4, 106 Somerset, Room 514; or Zoom by appointment.

Professor Ernie Lepore, [lepore@philosophy.rutgers.edu](mailto:lepore@philosophy.rutgers.edu)

*Office Hours:* Tuesdays 4-5:30, Room 511; or Zoom by appointment.

Joyce Carol Oates will also be a (visiting) co-instructor in the course.

The following books are required:

Joyce Carol Oates: *Wild Nights* (ISBN 9780061434822)

*The Man without a Shadow* (ISBN 9780062416094)

All other readings, handouts, assignments, and announcements will be posted on Canvas.

**Course Description**

In this course we will explore philosophical themes of self-knowledge, self-agency and self-sacrifice by comparing classic philosophical texts by authors like Plato and Nietzsche, classic literary texts by authors like Edgar Allen Poe and Emily Dickinson, and contemporary literary works by Joyce Carol Oates, National Book Award-winning author of more than 100 novels, short stories, plays and poetry. We will also use this exploration to investigate the different ways that philosophy and literature work to express ideas and engage audiences, and what differences this makes to the ideas expressed. Oates herself will participate actively throughout the course. Assessment will be based on class discussion and short assignments that practice implementing the ideas and techniques we discuss.

**Course Goals**

In this course, you will learn to:

- appreciate the complexity involved in being alive as a human being, and in being the particular person you are.
- understand some influential philosophical views about conscious experience, self-identity, and responsibility.
- identify different rhetorical techniques that philosophical arguments and literary works use to convince their audiences.
- apply these techniques in your own writing to express your own opinions.

In pursuing these course-specific goals, you will also acquire the following general skills:

- the ability to engage in close reading of writing from a range of disciplines.
- the ability to articulate clear and convincing arguments for your own conclusions.
- the ability to engage in respectful, reasoned, and passionate debate with your peers about complex topics that lack clear answers.

**Course Requirements**

- Weekly readings, to be completed before class and brought to class.
- Weekly forum posts (on Canvas) (20% of course grade).
- Class attendance & participation (20% of course grade).
- Three short (2-3 page) writing assignments (20% each of course grade).

We expect you to be familiar with and to abide by RU's policy on **academic integrity**: [academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy](https://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy)

If you need accommodations because of a **disability**, please have the Office of Disability Services ([ods.rutgers.edu](https://ods.rutgers.edu)) get in touch with us.

Life is especially hard right now, for everyone. We can be more helpful in making accommodations if you are proactive in telling us about them and demonstrate that you are addressing them in a responsible way.

If you are struggling with **mental health**, or just need some extra guidance, get in touch with CAPS ([rhscaps.rutgers.edu](https://rhscaps.rutgers.edu)) or Scarlet Listeners ([scarletlisteners.com](https://scarletlisteners.com)), or some other source of support. If you need to report a concern, you can do that here: [health.rutgers.edu/do-something-to-help](https://health.rutgers.edu/do-something-to-help).

If you are struggling with **academic responsibilities** – e.g. juggling assignments, studying or writing effectively – get in touch with the Learning Centers ([rlc.rutgers.edu](https://rlc.rutgers.edu)), Academic Advising ([sasundergrad.rutgers.edu/advising/advising](https://sasundergrad.rutgers.edu/advising/advising)), or Student Success ([success.rutgers.edu](https://success.rutgers.edu)).

To protect the health and well-being of all members of the University community, **masks must be worn** by all persons on campus in the presence of others. Any student not wearing a mask in class will be asked to leave. Each day before you arrive on campus or leave your residence hall, you must complete the brief survey on the [My Campus Pass symptom checker](#) self-screening app.

**Attendance**

In this class, we'll explore a core set of questions through rich and often challenging readings drawn from a range of disciplines. The class as a whole depends on your active, collaborative participation. This means you need to do the reading in advance, show up to class on time, pay attention to the class (not your phone!), and engage in a substantive and respectful way with your peers.

You can miss **2 classes** over the course of the semester without providing justification or incurring a penalty. If you need miss a class, use the University absence reporting website: [sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/](https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/). Let us know by email if you need a religious or other accommodation for attendance.

For the first two weeks of the semester, we will be meeting over Zoom. Once we return to meeting in person, we ask you NOT to come to class sick – for your own sake and those of your classmates (and us!). If you cannot attend in person because you are experiencing COVID-like symptoms, please forward one of us a screenshot of MyCampusPass showing that you are not eligible to enter campus. We will attempt to make audio recordings of the class sessions available soon after the class is over. If you need to miss class because you are quarantining or experiencing mild symptoms, we will excuse the absence if you post one extra question to the week's discussion forum. If you need to miss class because you are too sick to think straight, we will excuse the absence and work with you to get you back on track with the material.

## Participation

A productive intellectual community depends on good practices for inclusive discussion. Our department's norms for discourse are here: [philosophy.rutgers.edu/climate-v2/civil-discourse](http://philosophy.rutgers.edu/climate-v2/civil-discourse). Your in-class participation will be graded according to the following rubric:

A+	A	B	C	D	F
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>actively supports, engages and listens to peers</li> <li>arrives fully prepared at every session</li> <li>plays an active role in discussions</li> <li>comments consistently advance the level and depth of analysis</li> <li>contributions consistently improve the group dynamic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>actively supports, engages and listens to peers</li> <li>arrives fully prepared at nearly every session</li> <li>plays an active role in discussions</li> <li>comments typically advance the level and depth of analysis</li> <li>contributions often improve the group dynamic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>makes a sincere effort to interact with peers</li> <li>arrives mostly prepared at most sessions</li> <li>participates constructively in discussions</li> <li>makes relevant comments based on the assigned material</li> <li>contributions often improve (and never harm) the group dynamic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>limited interaction with peers</li> <li>preparation is inconsistent</li> <li>when prepared, participates constructively in discussions</li> <li>when prepared, makes relevant comments based on the assigned material</li> <li>contributions don't affect the group dynamic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>virtually no interaction with peers</li> <li>rarely prepared</li> <li>rarely participates</li> <li>comments are generally vague or ungrounded in the assigned material</li> <li>often displays lack of interest</li> <li>contributions often harm the group dynamic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>no interaction with peers</li> <li>never prepared</li> <li>never participates</li> <li>demonstrates a noticeable lack of interest in the material</li> <li>contributions often significantly harm the group dynamic</li> </ul>

## Weekly posts

- Every week**, everyone will post **two** separate **paragraphs** to the relevant week's Canvas forum.
  - By **Saturday night**, you need to *pose a question*. To do that, you need to:
    - do the reading*
    - motivate* your specific question by explaining how it connects to the topic for the week
    - contextualize* your question by grounding it in specific passages of the assigned readings.
    - sketch out a *next step* for addressing your question.
  - By **Sunday night**, you need to *address and extend a question*. To do that, you need to:
    - read* all of your classmates' posts and select one that interests you most for group discussion;
    - provide at least a partial and provisional *answer* to their question, incorporating their proposed next step if possible;
    - justify* your answer with a detail or explanation drawn from the readings or elsewhere;
    - extend* their question by raising an alternative answer, a possible objection, or a further issue.

Posts will be graded on a 5-point scale, based on how informed, relevant, and reflective they are. There is **no credit** for late posts. You can **miss or drop 4 posts** in total over the course of the semester without penalty.

- By **Monday night**, you must also 'like' one post from the forum; we will use the most 'liked' posts to guide discussion in class.

## Writing Assignments

The three **written assignments** will ask you to respond to one of positions on offer in the readings, and advocate for your own position, using rhetorical techniques we have encountered and identified in the course. (Rubrics will be included with the assignments.) Assignments should be **blinded** and submitted as .pdfs through Canvas **before the start of class** on the due date. In general, extensions must be granted well before the due date; **late papers** will be downgraded 1/3 grade per day.

## Schedule of Topics and Readings (highly provisional, subject to change – check Canvas)

1/18: Introduction

### Sensation and Embodiment

1/25: *Experience in Silicon: How does it feel to be alive?*

Joyce Carol Oates: “EDickinsonRepliLuxe”

Alan Turing: “Computing Machinery and Intelligence”

2/1: *Embodied Experience: How does it feel to see red?*

Frank Jackson: “What Mary Didn’t Know”

Emily Dickinson: “The name—of it—is ‘Autumn’—”

Pablo Neruda: “Ode to a Lemon”

Wallace Stevens: “The Snowman”

Christina Rossetti: “Goblin Market”

2/8: *Knowing Others’ Experiences: How does it feel to be someone else?*

Thomas Nagel: “What is it Like to be a Bat?”

*This American Life* (podcast): “Batman”

Lawrence Ferlinghetti: “Dog”

Galway Kinnell: “The Porcupine”

Reginald Dwayne Betts: “Blood History,” “Mural for the Heart”

2/15: *Knowing One’s Own Experiences: How do I know what I feel/felt/will feel?*

Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations* (excerpts)

Emily Dickinson: “After Great Pain, a Formal Feeling Comes,” “Pain Has An Element of Blank,”  
“I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died”

Oates: “Poe Posthumous, Or, The Light-House”

**First assignments handed out**

2/22: *Feeling and Thinking with Words*

Elisabeth Camp: “Metaphor and that Certain ‘Je Ne Sais Quoi’”

Peter Lamarque: “Poetry and Abstract Thought”

Ernie Lepore and Matthew Stone: “The Poetic Imagination”

## **Making Memories, Making Stories**

3/1: *Who am I without memories? without forgetting?*

John Locke: “Of identity and diversity” (*Essay on Human Understanding*, ch. 27)

Michael Della Rocca (WiPhi podcast): “Locke on Personal Identity” (Parts 1-3)

Christopher Nolan: *Memento*

### **FIRST ASSIGNMENT DUE**

3/8: *What is it like not to remember?*

Oliver Sacks: “The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat,” “The Lost Mariner,”  
“The Disembodied Lady”

Oates: *The Man without a Shadow*

## **3/15: SPRING BREAK**

3/22: *Recall and (Re)construction: What do I really remember?*

Plato: *Meno*

Marcel Proust: *Swann’s Way* (excerpt)

Toni Morrison: *Beloved* (excerpt)

Toni Morrison: “The Site of Memory”

Jorge Louis Borges: “Funes the Memorious”

3/29: *Self-Interpretation: When is my story true?*

David Velleman: “Narrative Explanation”

Henry James: “The Story in It”

Akira Kurosawa: *Rashomon*

### **Second assignments handed out**

## **Making And Unmaking Selves**

4/5: *Self-Construction: Who can I make myself be?*

Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Gay Science* (excerpt)

Marya Schectman: “The Narrative Self”

Elisabeth Camp: “Personal Identity (The Narrative Self)” (Wi-Phi podcast)

Oates: “The Master at St. Bartholemew’s”

4/12: *Self-Guidance: When should I trust myself?*

Ralph Waldo Emerson: “Self-Reliance”

Edgar Allan Poe: “The Imp of the Perverse”

Mark Twain: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (excerpt) 8-16, 33-35

### **SECOND ASSIGNMENT DUE**

4/19: *Self-Destruction: When Should I Sacrifice Myself?*

Judith Jarvis Thomson: “A Defense of Abortion”

Oates: “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?”

4/26: Review and Wrap-Up

**Tuesday May 10<sup>th</sup>, 5 PM: FINAL PAPER DUE**