

# Philosophy 2101 – Introduction to the Problems of Philosophy

Spring – Thursday 12:50-3:30 – Boylan 3109

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Office Hours: Boylan 3316 – after class or by appointment.



## Course Goals

1. To become familiar with core philosophical questions, concepts, arguments, and techniques.
2. To enhance critical thinking skills, logical reasoning, philosophical writing skills, and argumentative abilities.
3. To develop a richer and deeper understanding of the world.



## Readings and Class Attendance

If you haven't taken a philosophy class before, you may find some of the readings to be quite challenging. When writing, philosophers tend to assume that their audience has a familiarity with certain philosophical concepts and debates—a familiarity which some of you may not have. **Please do not be**

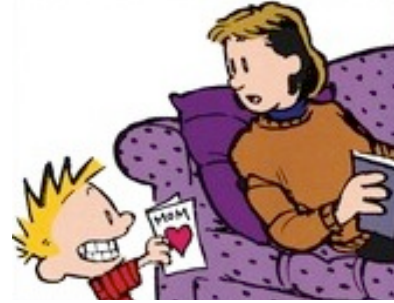


**discouraged;** the relevant background for any given assigned reading will be discussed in class along with an explanation of the paper's argument. However, this means that it is very important to come to class, as you may find yourself lost without the context/explanation provided in the lectures.

Even though we will go over the readings in class, it is important to attempt to read them on your own

for two reasons. First, doing the reading will give you time to think about any questions that you might want to ask in class. Second, it is good to practice interpreting the arguments on your own so that you develop the ability to independently pursue philosophy. The lecture will then offer you the opportunity to compare your interpretation to the one presented in class.

Also, **please try to be on time for class.** Most lectures will go over key concepts right at the beginning, so arriving late will make it difficult for you to understand much of the rest of the lecture. Arriving late also distracts other people, so please be considerate.



## Note Taking

It's highly recommended that you (a.) take notes (b.) by hand instead of using a laptop or some other electronic device. Regarding (a.), it is a common experience to understand an argument in the moment only to forget the details later. To avoid this problem, be sure to take notes on the lecture and other thoughts you have while in class. You will find these notes to be immensely helpful when you want to refresh your memory in the future—for example, when it's your turn to teach an introductory philosophy course.



With respect to (b.), there is evidence that taking notes by hand enhances both retention of the material and one's ability to answer conceptual questions about the subject matter (Mueller & Oppenheimer 2014).

Further, with written notes there is no temptation to do things like send emails. Given how the lectures are structured, even a short lapse of attention might leave you lost for the rest of the discussion. The use of electronic devices—with all the associated distractions—is, thus, strongly discouraged.

If you do elect to use an electronic device, I ask that you sit in the back of the classroom so that the screen will not serve as a distraction to others sitting behind you.

## Democracy in the Classroom

This course is taught for the benefit of those taking it. Further, those taking the course are assumed to be the best judges of whether or not they are getting what they want out of the course. Thus, in this class students are

given the final say regarding all matters that pertain to the content and structure of the course (grading excluded, unfortunately).

This means that students are free to propose any changes to the course that they would like (e.g., changing what we read; switching from lectures to moderated small-group discussions, etc.), with a class vote then determining if those changes are to be adopted.

Any proposed changes to the course must be publically announced (at the end of class) one week prior to a vote to allow for adequate time for discussion. Anyone who wants to propose a change should email me before class so that I know to leave some time at the end for their announcement.



To limit tyranny of the majority while still adhering to a democratic and fair voting procedure, the voting process will go as follows:



1. Each person will write down their vote on a piece of paper.
2. All votes will be placed in a container.
3. One person's vote will be drawn at random.
4. That vote will determine the outcome.

(Note: any proposed changes to this voting procedure must be approved by all members of the class—or at least not rejected by any member. Similarly, once an issue has been voted on, the outcome of the vote can only be changed if all members of the class approve of the change.)

## Grades

Grades will be deemphasized in this course in favor of detailed written comments. Final grades will reflect the percentage of assignments successfully completed where “successful completion” requires simply that a good-faith effort has been made to complete the assignment (with the instructor being the final arbiter of what counts as a “good-faith effort”).

Students get 20% for each assignment successfully completed. Thus, a student who successfully completes only two of the five assignments will



receive a 40% or an F. Any student who successfully completes three assignments will receive a 60% or a D minus. Four completed assignments will result in an 80% or a B minus. And those who successfully complete all five assignments will receive an A.

## Assignments

Students will be asked to complete a **short writing assignment**, write **two papers**, and take **two in-class exams** (a midterm and a final). The writing assignment will simply be a statement of the *position* of one of the papers covered in class (two sentences). The two papers will (a.) state a position of one of the papers covered in class, (b.) explain the author's argument for that position and (c.) raise an objection to that argument. These papers should each be around 800-1200 words. Both exams will be exclusively long-answer written responses to prompts.



Students interested in attempting a more ambitious paper should consult with me first.

Late papers will not be accepted without an adequate explanation of why the assignment was not submitted prior to the due date. Make-up exams will only be offered under special circumstances (e.g., illness, death in the family, etc.). Paper rewrites are encouraged.

## Brooklyn College Disability Policy

In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations, students must first be registered with the Center for Student Disability Services (CSDS). Students who have a documented disability or suspect they may have a disability are invited to set up an appointment with the Director of the Center for Student Disability Services, Ms. Valerie Stewart-Lovell by calling 718-951-5538. If you have already registered with CSDS, please provide the instructor with the



course accommodation form and discuss your specific accommodation with them as soon as possible.

## Brooklyn College Policy on Plagiarism/Cheating

The faculty and administration of Brooklyn College support an environment free from cheating and plagiarism. Each student is responsible for being aware of what constitutes cheating and plagiarism and for avoiding both. The complete text of the CUNY Academic Integrity Policy and the Brooklyn College procedure for implementing that policy can be found at:

<http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/bc/policies>.

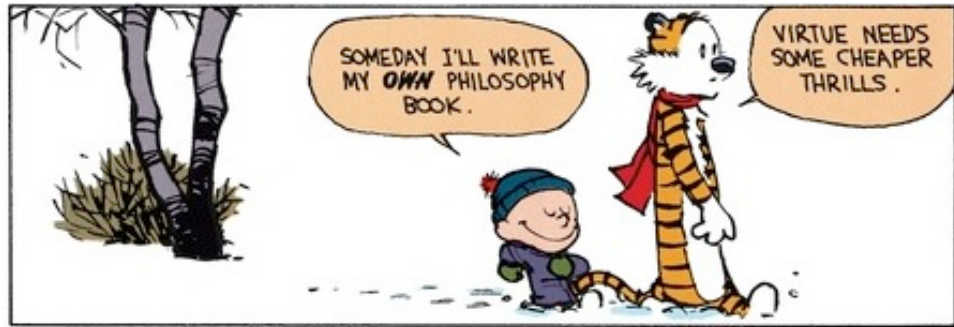
If a faculty member suspects a violation of academic integrity and, upon investigation, confirms that violation, or if the student admits that violation, the faculty member **must** report the violation.

## Brooklyn College Nondiscrimination Policy

To read Brooklyn College's complete set of policies regarding nonattendance on the basis of religious belief—as well as nondiscrimination toward those with disabilities—please see:

<http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/web/about/initiatives/policies/nondiscrimination.php>







# Schedule of Readings

This schedule is tentative and subject to revision based upon what we cover in class as well as democratic procedure.

## Introduction

**2/2** – What is Philosophy?

Arguments and Logic.

## Epistemology

**2/9** – What is Knowledge?

Reading: Edmund L. Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”  
Recommended: Linda Zagzebski “What is Knowledge?” and “The Inescapability of Gettier Problems.”

Skepticism

Reading: René Descartes, excerpt from *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

**2/16** – Are You a Brain in a Vat?

Reading: Hilary Putnam “Brains in a Vat.”  
Recommended: Watch this 15-minute talk by Heather Logue:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZI9MhmewNTQ>

Hume and the Problem of Induction

Reading: David Hume, excerpt from “An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding.”

## Metaphysics

**2/23** – Free Will/Determinism/Incompatibilism

Reading: Peter van Inwagen “The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism.”  
Recommended: Elizabeth Barnes and Ross Cameron, “The Open Future: Bivalence, Determinism, and Ontology.”

Empiricism/Compatibilism

Reading: Helen Beebe and Alfred Mele, "Humean Compatibilism."

Recommended: Helen Beebe, "The Non-governing Conception of Laws of Nature."

### **3/2 – When Are You Still *You*—and Does it Matter?**

Reading: Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity."

Recommended: Susan Wolf, "Self-Interest and the Interest in Selves."

Does God Exist? (Yes.)

Reading: Roger White, "Does Origins of Life Research Rest on a Mistake?"

Recommended: Introduction and Section 2 of the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*'s entry on "Ontological Arguments":

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ontological-arguments/>

### **3/9 – Writing Assignment Due**

Does God Exist? (No.)

Reading: Stephen Law, "The Problem of Good."

Recommended: Sections 4 and 5 of the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*'s entry on "Ontological Arguments":

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ontological-arguments/#ObjOntArg>

Rationalism

Reading: Michael Della Rocca, "PSR."

Recommended: Shamik Dasgupta, "Metaphysical Rationalism"

## **Race and Gender**

### **3/16 – Is Time Travel Possible?**

Reading: David Lewis, "Paradoxes of Time Travel."

Recommended: L. A. Paul, "Temporal Experience."

Gender and Race – What Are They?

Reading: Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?"

Recommended: Kwame Anthony Appiah, "But Would That Still Be Me? Notes on Gender, 'Race,' Ethnicity as Sources of Identity."



### **3/23 – Midterm Exam**

#### **3/30 – Race Thinking and Racism**

Reading: Paul Taylor, “Three Challenges to Race Thinking.”

Recommended: Massimo Pigliucci and Jonathan Kaplan, “On the Concept of Biological Race and Its Applicability to Humans.”

#### **Gender Essentialism**

Reading: Charlotte Witt, “What is Gender Essentialism?”

Also: <https://aeon.co/essays/would-you-be-the-same-person-if-you-were-a-different-gender>

Recommended: Simone de Beauvoir, excerpt *The Second Sex*

## **Philosophy of Science**

### **4/6 – First Paper Due**

#### **What is Science?**

Reading: Karl Popper, “Science: Conjectures and Refutations,” sections 1-2, 4-10

Recommended: Helen Longino, excerpt from *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry*.

#### **The Trouble with Science**

Reading: Imre Lakatos, “Science and Pseudoscience”

Recommended: Mary Hesse, “Duhem, Quine and a New Empiricism”

### **4/13 – No Class – Spring Break**

### **4/20 – No Class – Conversion Day**

## **Ethics**

#### **4/27 – Do You Save the Drowning Child?**

Reading: Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality.”

Recommended: Judith Jarvis Thompson, “A Defense of Abortion.”

## Utilitarianism/Consequentialism

Reading: J. J. C. Smart, excerpt from “An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics.”

Recommended: Peter Singer, excerpt from *Practical Ethics*.

## 5/4 – Kantianism/Deontology

Reading: Christine Korsgaard, “On the Sources of Normativity”

Recommended: Christine Korsgaard, “Fellow Creatures: Kantian Ethics and our Duties to Animals.”

## Aristotelianism/Virtue Theory

Reading: Philippa Foot, “Virtues and Vices.”

Recommended: Rosalind Hursthouse, “Applying Virtue Ethics to our Treatment of Other Animals.”

# Political Philosophy

## 5/11 – Liberalism

Reading: Rawls, excerpt from *A Theory of Justice*

Recommended: Susan Moller Okin, “Liberalism, Justice, and Gender”; Charles Mills, “Rawls on Race/Race in Rawls.”

## Libertarianism

Reading: Robert Nozick, excerpt from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*

Recommended: Onora O’Neill, “Nozick’s Entitlements”; Barbara Fried, “Wilt Chamberlain Revisited: Nozick’s ‘Justice in Transfer’ and the Problem of Market-Based Distribution.”

## 5/18 – Second Paper Due

## Socialism

Reading: G. A. Cohen, chs. 1-2 of *Why Not Socialism?*

Recommended: Elizabeth Anderson, “The Fundamental Disagreement between Luck Egalitarians and Relational Egalitarians.”

## Anarchism

Reading: A. John Simmons, “Associative Political Obligations.”

Recommended: Margaret Gilbert, ch. 11 from *A Theory of Political Obligation*.

**5/26 -- FINAL EXAM 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm.**

(The exam will not be graded on a curve; it will be graded in the manner specified in the “Grades” section of the syllabus.)

