

Instructor: Colin McLearn  
Course: PHIL 101  
Time: T/R 9:30-10:20 a.m.  
Location: TEAC 105  
Office: 1003 Oldfather Hall

<http://colinmclear.net>  
UNL Philosophy  
Office Hours: By  
appointment

# Introduction to Philosophy

The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term

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*Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man*  
Wilfrid Sellars

## Course Overview

The subject matter of philosophy traditionally concerns the articulation of "big" questions such as, "Can we know anything?"; "What is real?"; "What kinds of things exist?". Philosophers use rigorous and disciplined methods of thinking, in the hopes of bringing such questions under intellectual control. This course will be an in-depth look at a few specific topics, rather than a comprehensive survey of the field and its history. You will learn what philosophy is all about and how to do it yourself.

## Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course students should be able to (i) find the argument of a text and restate it clearly in their own words; (ii) explain viewpoints clearly that are not their own; (iii) think critically about the philosophical ideas discussed in this course; (iv) write papers using theses, organization, arguments, evidence, and language suitable to analytical writing in general and the discipline of philosophy in particular.

## Required Materials

Readings will be posted on the course website. There is only one required book.

- Vaughn – *Writing Philosophically*. New York: Oxford Press. 2006.

**Students are expected to bring all relevant materials to class.**

## Course Requirements

- **Preparation:** You are expected to attend every class meeting fully prepared to discuss each assigned reading, to submit written work punctually, and to offer thoughtful and constructive responses to the remarks of your instructor and your classmates. Make sure that you bring the relevant readings with you to every lecture class. I further expect you to treat both the texts at hand and your classmates' ideas and writing with openness and respect.
- **Attendance:** Attendance is required. You are also expected to attend every section meeting. Absences will not be excused except in documented cases. 1/2 a letter grade will be deducted from your final course grade for every absence after your third one.
- **Website:** We will use a course website for all materials. The site is available at: <http://colinmclear.net/phil101>. Upcoming assignments and readings will be posted here. Please let me know if you have any problems. Technical glitches, computer malfunctions and crashing hard drives are not excuses for failing to complete work in this class.
- **Format for Papers:** Please submit work either as a PDF or as a .doc or .docx file. All work must be typed. I will not accept any handwritten work aside from that we do in class. Your papers should be in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced with margins set to one inch on all sides. Your name, my name, the date and assignment should appear in the top left hand corner of the first page. Your last name and page number must appear in the top right hand corner on each subsequent page. Please staple or paperclip hard copies of papers and drafts. You are responsible for the presentation of your papers.
- **Late Work:** Late papers and assignments will standardly be marked down by **1/3 of a letter grade for each day the work is late** (for example, from A- to B+, from B+ to B, and so on).

## Evaluation

### Two Written Essays: 30%

- **Paper One:** Exposition. Explain and analyze a philosophical argument. Topics will be provided. Approximately 2 pages. 10%
- **Paper Two:** Critical Analysis. Explain and critically assess a philosophical argument. Topics will be provided. Approximately 3-6 pages. 20%

### **Two Exams: 50%**

- The exams will involve a combination of short answer and short essay questions.
  - Mid-Term: 20%
  - Comprehensive Final: 30%

### **Five Reading Responses: 10%**

- Explain and discuss issues raised by the reading. What, in the reading, did you understand and what didn't you? Reading responses should be a minimum of 200 words and maximum of 600 words in length and are due at least 24 hours before your scheduled section (exact deadline will be set by your section leader). You may choose which assignments you wish to respond to. **However, at least two responses must be submitted by the time of the mid-term exam** All responses should be emailed to your section leader. The subject line must read: "Intro Philosophy Reading Response" along with the date.

### **Participation Grade: 10%**

- The participation grade takes into account your attendance in class and section as well as the quantity and quality of your participation.

## **Policies**

- **Academic Integrity:** All the work you turn in (including papers, drafts, and discussion board posts) must be written by you specifically for this course. It must originate with you in form and content with all contributory sources fully and specifically acknowledged. Make yourself familiar with UNL's Student Code of Conduct and Academic Integrity Code, available [online](#). **In this course, the normal penalty for any violation of the code is an "F" for the semester.** Violations may have additional consequences including expulsion from the university. Don't plagiarize – It just isn't worth it.
- **University Policies:** This instructor respects and upholds University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to physically handicapped, visually and/or hearing impaired students; plagiarism; sexual harassment; and racial or ethnic discrimination. All students are advised to become familiar with the respective University regulations and are encouraged to bring any questions or concerns to the attention of the instructor.

- **ADA:** In compliance with University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for students with disabilities. Students are encouraged to register with Student Disability Services to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.
- **Misc.:** Please turn off cell phones, beeping watches, and other gadgets that make noise before entering our classroom. Absolutely no texting is permitted during class. I will subtract up to five points from your participation grade each and every time your phone rings or I see you texting during class.

## Further Resources

- **Jargon:** It's important to be on top of the technical terms used by philosophers. Please ask for clarification of terms in class. You can also consult Jim Pryor's online ["Philosophical Terms and Methods."](#)
- **Writing a Philosophy paper:** Papers should adhere to some consistent practice of footnoting and citation (Chicago, MLA, etc.). I don't really mind which one you use as long as you are consistent. On writing a philosophy paper, there is no better on-line guide than [Jim Pryor's](#). Please consult it. Hacker's [A Writer's Reference](#) is also extremely helpful. Useful online references may be found at the [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#).
- **Help with writing:** The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Writing Center can provide you with meaningful support as you write for this class as well as for every course in which you enroll. Trained peer consultants are available to talk with you as you plan, draft, and revise your writing. Please check [the Writing Center website](#) for locations, hours, and information about scheduling appointments.
- **Reference:** [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](http://plato.stanford.edu): <http://plato.stanford.edu>.

## Course Topics

### The Placement Problem: Science vs. the Manifest Image

Science tells us that the world consists of a multitude of microscopic particles and elementary forces. But the world we experience is a world of macroscopic objects and living beings whose sensible features we are intimately familiar with. Given the successes of the scientific image, how do we place various aspects of the everyday world with which we're so familiar? Over the course of the semester we'll explore this issue as it plays out in various different areas.

- **Color:** Nothing could be more obviously true than the claim that all material objects are colored. But physics gives us good reason to think that no material object is in fact colored. Which view is correct?
- **Consciousness:** One reason to think that objects are colored is that we are conscious of colors. But what *is* consciousness? Is there a place for it in the physical world?
- **Representation:** The physical world as described by science is a world of particles, waves, fields, and forces. Things, understood in this way, act upon each other, but there is no clear explanation of how one thing could come to be *about* another thing. How, for example, could a bunch of colored dots on a page or screen (as in a photo) come to represent or be about some event, person, or place? How is it that we ourselves could have mental states, such as beliefs and desires, that are about the world? Can we understand and explain this kind of representational aboutness in a way that is compatible with our understanding of the physical world?
- **Value:** When we say that something is good or bad, beautiful or ugly are we attributing a property to that thing? Is it plausible that physical objects could have such properties or would they be too strange to be the kind of thing compatible with what physics tells us objects are like? If nothing is good or bad, beautiful or ugly, would that mean that nothing matters? What could we do in the face of an absurd world?
- **Alternate Replies—Skepticism and Common Sense:** So far we've assumed that science gives us knowledge about how the world really is, and that this could trump our common sense conception of the world. But perhaps there is reason to think that this is impossible.