

Fall 2025 Furman University



Course	PHL 101 (07) Introduction to Philosophy	Instructor	Thiago Xavier de Melo
Time	MWF 11:30am–12:20pm	Office hours	MW 2:30–4pm, and by appointment
Location	Furman Hall 214	Email	tdemelo@furman.edu

Course Description

This is an introduction to some of the classic problems of philosophy, with emphasis on understanding the nature of philosophical reflection and reasoning. It includes epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, and other major branches of philosophy. 4 credits.

More detailed description

Starting with the ancient Greeks, many philosophers have noticed that philosophy often begins with puzzlement and wonder about our basic assumptions. Philosophy starts when, after carefully reflecting on something that is, in a fundamental way, taken for granted in our practical and cognitive lives, we find them to be deeply puzzling. To introduce ourselves to philosophy, we will do exactly this: we will think carefully about some basic things, and we will get puzzled about them. The topics (the 'basic things') in this course will be: knowledge, our minds, our selves, our actions, moral responsibility, happiness, and rationality. For example, we will think carefully about the basic assumptions that *knowledge is valuable and possible*, that *our minds are part of the physical world and connected to our bodies*, that *our selves span over many years*, that *our actions are up to us*, that *we are responsible only for what is in our control*, and that *what makes us happy is shaped by ourselves*. On the way to getting puzzled about these and other assumptions, we will develop intellectual skills. We will learn how to distinguish good from bad reasoning, how to identify unarticulated assumptions, and how to inquire into the very nature of things. Getting deeply puzzled is just the beginning. The skills that will allow you to get to this state of mind are also the ones that will help you be autonomous to solve those practical and cognitive puzzles by yourself.

Learning goals

By the end of this course, you will have developed both general, transferable skills and skills that are more philosophical. More specifically, you will have developed general abilities to reason, write, and read, including: your abilities to assess, reconstruct, and create arguments, conceptual analyses, theses, and theories; your ability to interpret text; and your ability to write argumentative texts. The specific philosophical skills include the ability to reflect on foundational assumptions, to make subtle conceptual distinctions, to explain classic philosophical problems, and to explain how different theories propose to solve those problems.

Course Materials

- **Required Materials:** All readings will be available on Moodle. See the reading schedule below for details.

Grade distribution

- 60% — Multiple sets of written assignments and quizzes
- 15% — Exam 1
- 15% — Exam 2
- 10% — Class participation and in-class activities

Grade	Description	Number Grade
A	Excellent. The mark of highest distinction earned by those students whose work represents the best that can be expected of a student at Furman.	A- (90-92) A (93-98) A+ (99-100)
B	Good. The mark of distinction earned by those students whose work represents a high degree of achievement in meeting the characteristic demands of the course.	B- (80-82) B (83-87) B+ (88-89)
C	Satisfactory. The mark earned by those students who have attained such familiarity with the content of the course and such ability to apply this knowledge as may be expected of a student who gives to the course a reasonable amount of time, effort, and attention.	C- (70-72) C (73-77) C+ (78-79)
D	Marginal. The lowest passing grade representing inferior work. It indicates that the student would be seriously handicapped in attempting subsequent courses for which this work is a prerequisite.	D- (60-62) D (63-67) D+ (68-69)
F	Failure. The mark indicates unconditional failure. No credit earned.	< 60

Policies

Course Expectations & Policies

Academic Integrity: All activities and assignments that you complete during this course are governed by the Furman University academic integrity policy (www.furman.edu/integrity). Furman University asks all students to abide by the integrity pledge ([found here](#)). You should familiarize yourself with the important definitions and examples of plagiarism found on the University's academic integrity website (see above). Trust and respect are vital to the success of collaborative learning endeavors. As such, any and all integrity violations will be taken extremely seriously and will be adjudicated according to Furman's policy 190.6.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI): Generative artificial intelligence (GAI) is a powerful tool that has its uses in certain contexts, but it is not appropriate for the learning goals in this course. In this Introduction to Philosophy, we want you to develop critical thinking skills. These skills are developed through practice. This course gives you the opportunity to do just that: practice and grow your intellectual autonomy. *All assignments submitted must be 100% **your** original work;* GAI

tools should **not** be used for any stage of any assignment or activity. Violations of this policy will be considered academic misconduct.

Assignment Deadlines: Written assignments are to be turned in by the date and time indicated on the syllabus and Moodle. Assignments are generally due at the beginning of class unless stated otherwise. **Please double check both the Tentative Schedule and Moodle to keep track of assignment deadlines.** Assignments will lose 5% of the final grade for each calendar day after the due date. Under emergency circumstances (illness, family emergency, etc.), and with appropriate documentation, I can offer full credit for late assignments. **If you are having trouble completing an assignment, please talk to me before the assignment is due so we can resolve the issue together.**

Attendance & Participation: Coming to class is the easiest way to learn the material covered in this course. In order for us to have the sorts of engaging discussions I am looking forward to, I need each of you to show up – awake, prepared, and on time. Participation is a part of your semester grade so if you miss class it will necessarily lower your grade. Of course, there may be times when you may need to prioritize other things. Illness, family emergencies, religious observances, and traveling to participate in athletic competitions or artistic performances are all examples of excused absences, provided that you let me know ahead of time (or as soon as possible) so you can arrange to make up what you missed. Under these circumstances, or **if you have encountered a personal challenge that necessitates an absence or temporary remote attendance, I expect that you provide me with verification of your concern through the Associate Academic Dean's Office via the [Absence Request Form](#).** I value your presence. Please make every attempt to be here.

If you are a first-year student who miss more than 15% of the class meetings or an upperclassman who misses more than 25% for any reason you will be in violation of the maximum established by the University (p. 40 of the Furman University Catalog) and will be dropped from the course with a grade of "F."

Course Notifications: Announcements related to the class will be communicated via Moodle announcements, which you will also receive via your Furman email. You are responsible for checking Furman email and Moodle announcements regularly and frequently throughout the semester. Moodle is accessible via MyFurman.

Class Discussions: I recognize and value the many perspectives students bring to the classroom. Many factors—social identities, visible and invisible disabilities, family circumstances, physical location, mental health, access to the internet—all influence the experiences that every individual can have in this course. I am committed to building an environment to support your learning, and I also expect you to be an agent in collectively building an environment where we all feel safe, respected, and included. I consider this classroom to be "open." That is, everyone has a right to their opinion on the issues that we discuss. As part of the class, I expect each student to be fully prepared to engage in critical dialogue on educational issues as they relate to a variety of topics such as race, class, gender, democracy, power, etc. I want every student in my class to feel comfortable expressing their views and opinions. My hope is that this class will challenge you intellectually and help you to learn from your classmates while exploring new ideas in the process.

Classroom Civility: Because the learning that will take place in this course occurs best in a safe, inviting, and respectful community, participants who disrupt our community trust and integrity by their words or actions also disrupt our collective opportunity to learn. Rude, sarcastic, dismissive, discriminatory, obscene, or disrespectful speech and disruptive behavior have a negative impact on everyone's learning. When a person disrupts the class in these ways, I will remove the disruptive person from the class. If an incident occurs:

- 1st Incident: I will address the behavior with you immediately and follow-up with a scheduled meeting as soon as possible.
- 2nd Incident: I will refer you immediately to the Associate Academic Dean, who will remind you that repeated deviations from expected classroom behavior may result in disciplinary action.

Classroom Technology and Distractions: Please SILENCE and STORE all electronic devices while in class, with the exception of a computer. You are welcome to utilize a computer to take notes or for in-class activities, but please be aware that if I notice you checking email, surfing the web, or attending to other items while in class that are not supportive of your learning, I will address these disruptions. Please resist the temptation to leave the classroom conversation on your device. If I notice you are on your phone for reasons not related to our course, this will also negatively affect your grade.

Course Activity Recordings: Furman University prohibits the recording of classes by students without obtaining prior, written permission of the instructor, except in cases where Furman permits a qualified student with a documented disability to record classes as a reasonable accommodation. Students are advised of this policy in the [Student Handbook](#). Under no circumstances should recorded classes be used in any way that denigrates and/or decontextualizes the instructor or any student whose class remarks are recorded. Unauthorized dissemination of any recorded classroom proceedings, including distribution for compensation, is strictly prohibited. The improper sharing of recorded material by students or others may constitute a violation of U.S. copyright law and is a violation of campus policy.

Nondiscrimination Policy & Sexual Misconduct: Furman University is committed to providing programs, activities and an educational and work environment free from unlawful Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment. In furtherance of this commitment, Furman encourages all members of the community to report any Discrimination or Discriminatory Harassment promptly, so it can be addressed.

The University's Non-Harassment and Non-Discrimination [website](#) and [policy](#) sets forth available resources, describes prohibited conduct, and establishes procedures for responding to complaints of Discrimination, Harassment and Retaliation.

The University's Sexual Misconduct Policy identifies prohibited Sexual Misconduct, establishes grievance procedures for addressing Sexual Misconduct, describes supportive measures and sets forth available resources. For information about Title IX, measures Furman takes to prevent Sexual Misconduct, [reporting options](#), and supportive measures and resources visit [Furman's Title IX page](#).

Name/Pronoun Use__: I am committed to an environment that affirms people of all gender expressions and gender identities. I will gladly honor the name or gender pronouns that are correct for you. I will never require you to disclose this information, as I view it as your choice to share if and when you desire. If you choose to share this information, please advise me early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

Student Support and Resources:

I encourage you to take advantage of the many services offered at Furman. These include:

The Center for Academic Success employs professional staff who work with students to assist with executive functioning skills, test-taking strategies, study strategies and other academic success-related skills. Students can directly access resources on the website at any time.

The Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) program features comprehensively trained Peer Learning Consultants who lead class-specific, content-based learning in small group settings. Students can [sign up for a session here](#). If their course is not currently offered, students may submit a request.

The Writing and Media Lab is available to support students with writing and multimedia projects. Students may schedule individual appointments with consultants.

Library Support is provided by a dedicated team of librarians who can assist locating documents, information, and resources for your course or research projects. For more information about how to utilize these resources, visit the **Library website**.

Malone Center for Career Engagement: Whether you are still exploring career paths or looking to land that first position after Furman, the **Malone Center** has resources to help you in each step of your career journey.

The Office for Spiritual Life provides individual confidential counseling for students, faculty and staff in person and online. Contact OSL@furman.edu, 864-294-2133, or contact a chaplain directly: vaughn.crowetipton@furman.edu, alexis.thomas9@furman.edu.

Counseling on demand is available through the Furman University Mental Health and Crisis Support Line – Call the Trone Center for Mental Fitness at 864-294-3031, press #3 (confidential, available 24/7/365 from anywhere).

Sexual Misconduct Reporting: If you have encountered any form of discrimination or harassment, including sexual misconduct (e.g. sexual assault, sexual harassment or gender-based harassment, sexual exploitation or intimidation, stalking, intimate partner violence), we encourage you to report this to the institution. If you wish to report such an incident of misconduct, you may contact Furman's Title IX Coordinator, Melissa Nichols (Trone Center, Suite 215; Melissa.nichols@furman.edu; 864.294.2221).

If you would like to speak with someone who can advise you but maintain complete confidentiality, you can talk with a counselor, a professional in the Student Health Center or someone in the Office of Spiritual Life. If you speak with a faculty member, understand that as a mandated reporter of the University, the faculty member **MUST** report to the University's Title IX Coordinator what you share to help ensure that your safety and welfare are being addressed, consistent with the requirements of the law. However, unless there is an ongoing safety risk to you or to the Furman community, you will determine whether the university initiates any formal process. You are entitled to supportive measures (such as a no contact order or academic accommodations) regardless of whether you decide to initiate a formal process.

Additional information about Furman's Sexual Misconduct Policy, how to report sexual misconduct and your rights can be found at the Furman Title IX Webpage at www.furman.edu/titleix. You do not have to go through the experience alone.

Accommodations: It is my goal to fully include everyone in our classroom. The Student Office for Accessibility Resources (SOAR) is committed to helping qualified students with disabilities achieve their academic goals by providing reasonable academic accommodations under appropriate circumstances. If you have a disability and anticipate the need for an accommodation in order to participate in this class, please register with the Student Office for Accessibility Resources. They will assist you in getting the resources you may need to participate fully in this class. You can contact the SOAR office at 864.294.2320 or at soar@furman.edu. You can find additional information and request academic accommodations at the **SOAR webpage**.

ITS and Help Desk: If you have technical problems with Moodle, or if you have any other computer issue that is preventing your access to course materials and sessions, please contact the ITS Service Center by calling 294-3277 or by **emailing service.center@furman.edu**.

Detailed Schedule

Below you will find a detailed schedule. Here are a few observations about it:

- This schedule is tentative. I will announce any changes in class and will update this schedule on Moodle. Please consult the schedule on Moodle if you think you may have missed any updates.
- I will make all readings, including *optional readings*, available on Moodle.
- Optional readings are optional; you don't *have to* read them. But they are likely to be quoted and somehow relevant to classes. So, take a look at them if you find some extra time before or after class.
- All other texts listed below are non-optional: you must read them. Assignments and exams will be based on lectures *and* readings.
- I recommend that you read non-optional texts *before* class unless otherwise stated. Moreover, I also recommend that you read them a second time after class. (Explanation: Some texts below aren't super obvious. Philosophy is fun but often hard. The arguments, concepts, and views expressed in those texts tend to be subtle and intricate. Thus, although taking a look at them *before* class will be helpful, I also recommend that you take a second look at them after class.)
- Some parts of the *recommended viewings* (movies, shows, etc.) below will be shown in the classroom. I will do my best to announce trigger warnings for viewings. But if you decide to watch the viewings below (and many others that I will end up recommending this term) at home, please look on the Internet for trigger warnings. Here are some sources: imdb.com (in the section 'parents guide'), doesthedogdie.com, unconsentingmedia.org.)

When	What (topics & assignments)	To do (read, watch, or submit)
Week 1		
Wed, Aug 27	What if we carefully reflect on our most basic assumptions? (Or, a quick path to philosophy)	
Fri, Aug 29	Is the value of knowledge in it being true? Methods: necessary and sufficient conditions.	— Plato. Excerpt from <i>Meno</i> — (After class read:) Rosen et al. 'What is knowledge ?' pp. 133–135
Week 2		
Mon, Sep 1	<i>Labor Day - No Class</i>	
Wed, Sep 3	Seeking justification in absolute certainty (Or, imagining ways of being wrong about things)	— Descartes. 'Meditation I' in <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i>
Fri, Sep 5	Is there anything we can't doubt?	— Recommended viewing: <i>The Matrix</i> (1999)
Sun, Sep 7	<i>Assignment due</i>	Assignment 1 (Available on Moodle)
Week 3		
Mon, Sep 8	Is there anything we can't doubt? (cont.)	— Descartes. 'Meditation II' in <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i>
Wed, Sep 10	Descartes's response to the skeptical challenge	— Descartes. 'Meditation III' in <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i>
Fri, Sep 12	Methods: arguments, and how to evaluate them? (Deductive Arguments)	— Melo. 'Arguments and How to evaluate them?' Part I.

When	What (topics & assignments)	To do (read, watch, or submit)
Week 4		
Mon, Sep 15	What if knowledge is easier to get? (Or, another response to the skeptical challenge) Methods: how to evaluate arguments (Cogency)	— Moore. 'Proof of an External World' — Optional: Melo. Arguments and How to evaluate them? Part II.)
Wed, Sep 17	What if knowledge is easier to get? (Or, yet another response to the skeptical challenge) Methods: how to evaluate arguments? (Abductive arguments.)	— Russell. 'Appearance and Reality and the Existence of Matter' (Excerpts from <i>Problems of Philosophy</i> .)
Fri, Sep 19	Do we know what knowledge is? Methods: conceptual analyses (or, how to inquiry into the very nature of things)	— Gettier. 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?' — Optional: Plato. Excerpt from <i>Theaetetus</i>
Sun, Sep 21	<i>Assignment due</i>	Assignment 2 (Available on Moodle)
Week 5		
Mon, Sep 22	Is luck compatible with knowledge? Methods: the method of counter-examples and how to amend conceptual analyses	— Cornman, Lehrer, Pappas. 'An Analysis of Knowledge'
Wed, Sep 24	What if we can't define knowledge?	— Zagzebski. 'The Inescapability of Gettier Problems' — Optional: Williamson. 'Knowledge and Belief'
Fri, Sep 26	Is induction justifiable? Methods: how to evaluate arguments? (Inductive arguments.)	— Hume. Excerpt from An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding'
Sun, Sep 28	<i>Assignment due</i>	Assignment 3
Week 6		
Mon, Sep 29	What is the relationship between our bodies and our minds?	— Descartes. Excerpts from the Sixth Meditation
Wed, Oct 1	Are our minds physical?	— Elisabeth of Bohemia. Letter to Descartes — Optional: Ryle. 'Descartes's Myth' — Optional: Papineau. 'The Case for Materialism'
Fri, Oct 3	Are our minds computer-like?	— Churchland. 'Functionalism and Eliminative Materialism'
Week 7		
Mon, Oct 6	Can computers think? (kind of)	— Turing. 'Computing Machinery and Intelligence'
Wed, Oct 8	Can computers think? (no)	— Searle. 'Minds, Brains and Programs'

When	What (topics & assignments)	To do (read, watch, or submit)
Fri, Oct 10	What do we learn when we experience something? (Or, is phenomenal consciousness physical? no)	— Jackson. 'The Qualia Problem' — Optional: Nagel. 'What is it like to be a bat?'
Week 8		
Mon, Oct 13	<i>Fall break - No Class</i>	
Wed, Oct 15	What do we learn when we experience something? (cont.) (Or, is phenomenal consciousness physical? yes)	— Churchland. 'Are Mental States Irreducible to Neurobiological States?' — Optional: Gertler. 'In Defense of Mind-Body Dualism'
Fri, Oct 17	Midterm exam	
Week 9		
Mon, Oct 20	Personal Identity (Or, who are you, how do you span over many years, and when do you cease to exist?)	— Locke. 'Of Identity and Diversity' — Optional: Perry. 'A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality'
Wed, Oct 22	Personal Identity (cont.)	— Recommended viewing: Severance 'Good News About Hell'
Fri, Oct 24	Personal Identity: a dualist view	— Swinburne. 'The Dualist Theory'
Week 10		
Mon, Oct 27	Personal Identity: a psychological view	— Parfit. 'Personal Identity' (excerpt from Reasons and Persons) — Optional: Excerpt from Rosen et al.
Wed, Oct 29	Personal Identity (cont.)	— Johnston. Excerpt from 'Personites, Maximality, and Ontological Trash'
Fri, Oct 31	Methods: are there limits to thought experimentation?	— Gendler. 'Exceptional Persons: on the limits of imaginary cases' — Optional: Williams. 'The Self and the Future.'
Sun, Nov 2	<i>Assignment due</i>	Assignment 4
Week 11		
Mon, Nov 3	Free Will: Are our actions up to us?	— Ney. 'Free Will' (Chapter 7 of Metaphysics: an introduction)
Wed, Nov 5	Free Will: Determinism, Indeterminism, and a Dilemma	— Churchland. 'Is Determinism Self-refuting?'
Fri, Nov 7	Free Will: Compatibilism (Do freedom and responsibility require the possibility of doing things differently?)	— Frankfurt. 'Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility'
Week 12		
Mon, Nov 10	Free Will: Incompatibilism	— Pereboom. 'Why We have No Free Will and Can Live Without It' — Optional: Sartorio. 'Causation and Free Will'

When	What (topics & assignments)	To do (read, watch, or submit)
Wed, Nov 12	Free Will and Moral Responsibility	— Wolf. 'Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility' — (Optional: Arpaly. 'Why Moral Ignorance is no excuse')
Fri, Nov 14	Are you morally responsible only for what is in your control? (Or, is there moral luck?)	— Nagel. 'Moral Luck' (Excerpt of <i>Mortal Questions</i>)
Sun, Nov 16	<i>Assignment due</i>	Assignment 5
Week 13		
Mon, Nov 17	What do you owe to the poor?	— Singer. 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality'
Wed, Nov 19	Is it ok to eat non-human animals?	— Norcross. 'Puppies, Pigs, and Persons'
Fri, Nov 21	Do intentions matter?	— Foot. 'The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect'
Week 14		
Mon, Nov 25	Is morality objective?	— Enoch. 'Why I am an Objectivist about Ethics (And Why You Are, Too)'
Wed, Nov 26	<i>Thanksgiving Holiday - No Class</i>	
Fri, Nov 28	<i>Thanksgiving Holiday - No Class</i>	
Sun, Nov 30	<i>Assignment due</i>	Assignment 6
Week 15		
Mon, Dec 1	Is morality objective? (cont.)	— Street. 'Does Anything Really Matter or Did We Just evolve to Think So?'
Wed, Dec 3	Is being moral good for you?	— Wolf. 'Moral Saints'
Fri, Dec 5	Does happiness depend on how the world is?	— Nozick. Excerpt from <i>Anarchy, State and Utopia</i> . — Chalmers. 'Can you lead a good life in a virtual world?' (Chapter 17 of <i>Reality+</i>)
Week 16		
Mon, Dec 8	Does happiness depend on how the world is? (cont.)	— Heathwood. 'Faring Well and Getting What You Want'
Mon, Dec 15 12:00–2:30pm	Final Exam	