

**PHL 101: Introduction to Philosophy**

Mondays and Wednesdays 11:00 – 11:50 am

(Students must also enroll for a recitation section to be held on Thursday or Friday.)

Instructor: Professor Ney

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Email: [alyssa.ney@rochester.edu](mailto:alyssa.ney@rochester.edu)

Office Hours: Mondays and Tuesdays 1-2pm, and by appointment

Teaching Assistants:

Matt Facemyer

Recitations:

Thursdays 3:25-4:15pm (Morey 501)

Fridays 11-11:50am (Lattimore 431)

Email: [sisyphusishappy@gmail.com](mailto:sisyphusishappy@gmail.com)

Office: 534 Lattimore Hall

Office Hours: Thursdays 11:15am -  
12:15pm and by appointment

Jason Rogers

Recitations:

Fridays 12-12:50pm (B&L 315)

Fridays 2-2:50pm (Dewey 4162)

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Office: 534 Lattimore Hall

Office Hours: Tuesdays 11am-12pm and  
by appointment

Course Description:

This course will introduce students to the methods and topics of analytic philosophy. Emphasis is on developing tools for understanding and analyzing complex arguments through engagement with contemporary sources. Topics will include consciousness; knowledge and skepticism; the compatibility of free will with determinism; the value of truth; and moral relativism. No prior knowledge of philosophy is presupposed.

Texts:

Feinberg, Joel and Russ Shafer-Landau. eds. *Reason and Responsibility*, 13<sup>th</sup> Edition. Thomson-Wadsworth, 2005.

Frankfurt, Harry. *On Bullshit*, Princeton University Press, 2005.

Other, short texts will be distributed in class.

Assessment:

Assessment in this course will be on the basis of homework, short papers, a final examination, attendance, and participation in weekly recitation sections.

I. Homework (each worth 10% of grade)

Two, brief homework assignments will be due early in the term. Answers will be discussed in recitation session.

II. Essay Component (each essay counts for 25% of the final grade):

Students will be required to turn in two short papers over the course of the semester. Their purpose is to slowly work one toward command of writing a philosophy paper. Topics will be handed out in advance along with clearly detailed descriptions of how the essays will be graded.

*Essay #1 Due Friday, November 16:* Each student will become skilled at explaining the view of a specific author on a complex philosophical issue, and presenting an argument for his or her own position on the topic. (4-5 pages)

*Essay #2 Due Thursday, December 13:* Students, building on the skills used in the homeworks and first essay, will write a comprehensive philosophical paper. Each student will clearly present a complex philosophical issue, present an argument for his or her own position on the topic, and respond to objections that an intelligent opponent would likely raise. (5-6 pages)

Essays are to be turned in via Blackboard on or before the deadlines listed above. For each 24 hours a paper is late, five points will be deducted. There is no penalty for submitting papers before the deadline.

Students are *strongly* encouraged to submit rough drafts to the instructor, teaching assistant, or the Writing Center.

III. Final Examination (worth 30% of the final grade):

The final examination will be composed of three types of question: True/False (of the kind seen on the first homework), short answer, and essay questions. Familiarity with the main concepts and arguments discussed in classroom lectures, including the basic logical concepts introduced in the first weeks, will be presupposed. Periodic in-class quizzes will be held for the purposes of ensuring that students are keeping up with the concepts and arguments covered. Grades on these quizzes will not directly contribute to the students' final grade in the class. However, poor performance on these quizzes will correlate with poor performance on the examination at the end of the term.

IV. Attendance:

Classroom attendance for both lectures and recitation sections is mandatory. In the last five minutes of every lecture, students will be asked to fill out a brief questionnaire. Attendance will be taken using these responses beginning September 12. Students can miss three lectures (excused or unexcused) over the course of the semester without any impact on their final grade. Each additional absence beyond that will result in 1 point subtracted from the final grade.

Sometimes, instead of a questionnaire, there will be a pop quiz at the end of class. Scores on these will not impact the final grade, but are intended to help you prepare for the kind of questions you will see on the exam.

IV. Recitation Sections:

Recitation sections will begin meeting Thursday, September 13 and Friday, September 14. In these sections, homework and quizzes will be reviewed. The teaching assistants will promote discussion on the topics from the lectures and be happy to review any difficult concepts and arguments that were covered. I am a firm believer in the Socratic method. The only way to get at a genuine understanding of the material is by interactive discussion. You will not learn the methods or concepts of philosophy merely by reading them in a book or listening to lectures. Consistent attendance and participation in recitation sections will bump up your final grade at the end of the term.

Schedule of Topics and Readings:

*All readings in the textbook unless otherwise indicated.*

I. Introduction to Logic and Critical Reasoning

*A brief homework will be assigned to be turned in Monday, September 17 in class.*

II. Consciousness

Required Reading:

- Frank Jackson, “The Qualia Problem”, pp. 297-300

*A brief homework will be assigned to be turned in Wednesday, October 17 in class.*

III. Knowledge and Skepticism

Required Reading:

- Rene Descartes, *Meditations I and II*, pp. 166-173
- G.E. Moore, “Proof of an External World”, pp. 216-219

*Students will attend a screening of “The Matrix” Monday, October 15 at 7pm in our usual classroom.*

IV. Truth, Relativism, and Bullshit

Required Reading:

- Harry Frankfurt, *On Bullshit*
- Russ Shafer-Landau, “Ethical Subjectivism”, (just the first half) pp. 555-560
- Martha Nussbaum, “Judging Other Cultures: The Case of Genital Mutilation”, pp. 668-677

*First Essay Due: November 16*

V. Free Will and Determinism

Required Reading:

- A.J. Ayer, “Freedom and Necessity”, pp. 414-419

- Robert Kane, “Free Will: Ancient Dispute, New Themes”. pp. 445-458
- Derk Pereboom, “Why We Have No Free Will and Can Live Without It”, pp. 464-477

*Second Essay Due: December 13*

The final examination will be held: Thursday, December 20 at 7:15 pm.