

PHIL 104S: Intro to Philosophy

Summer Term I, 2021 (May 12 – June 21)

Course format: Asynchronous online

Day/time of optional live discussion meetings: W 12:30-2pm, F 12-2pm (EST)

Units: 1

Academic credit: EI, W, CZ

Prerequisites: None

Instructor information

Instructor: Valerie Soon (she/her/hers)

Email: vys6@duke.edu

Online office hours: By appointment.

Course description

This course aims to give you an accessible introduction to some longstanding topics in philosophy, such as the nature of knowledge, morality, welfare, personal identity, free will, consciousness, and justice. In grappling with these questions, we will work on developing philosophical skills, such as the ability to recognize, construct, and criticize arguments, consider different perspectives, and engage with interlocutors rigorously and charitably.

Since this course will be delivered asynchronously online, we will use a “flipped classroom” format. You are responsible for doing the readings and watching the videos. I will provide handouts with guiding questions for your writing assignments. While it is difficult to foster the usual discussion environment with an asynchronous format, we will use Sakai for discussion. I also highly encourage you to join the optional live discussion sessions and come to my office hours.

Learning objectives

Students will learn to:

- Analyze philosophical texts and clearly reconstruct philosophical arguments, both verbally and in writing.
- Understand major philosophical ideas and concepts accurately.
- Give accurate answers with supporting textual evidence to specific philosophical questions.
- Clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses of arguments, including their own.
- Synthesize concepts and understand how they relate to each other.
- Extrapolate creatively from their understanding of these concepts to develop their own related ideas.

Required texts

All readings and links to videos will be posted to Sakai under “Resources”.

Activities and assignments

- There will be **17 reading assignments** throughout the semester. Each week, I will upload 3 sets of materials: readings, videos, and a handout with guiding questions. Please do the readings first, then move on to the videos and handouts to guide you on a closer second

read. One usually has to read a philosophical text multiple times to gain understanding. These can be done at your own pace, but please complete them all by the end of the week so as to keep up with the course.

- Students will complete **10 response posts** related to the readings on Sakai. There will be various topics that you can post under. These posts are intended to foster discussion, so I encourage you to respond to others. These posts should be brief (no more than 2 short paragraphs). They should convey an accurate understanding of the idea you want to focus on and critically evaluate that idea. You could also respond to someone else's post. I'll put up some examples of these posts. They can be posted at any time during the semester, but **you must post at least 10 by June 21**. Do not leave them to the last minute! *(50% of your grade – 5% each. 5 for a very good post, 4 for a good post, 3 for an adequate post, <3 for inadequate posts).*
- There will be **2 short papers (5 pages each)** *(Each worth 15% of your grade: 10% for paper, 5% for peer-editing)*
 - Peer-editing: review a peer's draft and give written feedback for revision. I'll post guidelines for this feedback on Sakai.
 - 1st paper deadlines: Peers assigned by May 26. Draft due to peers on May 27. Feedback due on May 28. **Paper due on Sakai on June 1 at 11:59PM EST.**
 - 2nd paper deadlines: Peers assigned by June 4. Draft due to peers on June 5. Feedback due on June 6. **Paper due on Sakai on June 9 at 11:59PM EST.**
- There will be a **final paper (8-10 pages)** *(20% of your grade: 20% for paper, 5% for peer-editing)*
 - Peer-editing: review a peer's draft and give written feedback for revision. I'll post guidelines for this feedback on Sakai.
 - Final paper deadlines: Peers assigned by June 11. Draft due to peers on June 15. Feedback due on June 18.
 - **Final paper due on Sakai on June 23 at 11:59PM EST.**
- There will be two optional live discussion meetings per week. You are highly encouraged, but not required, to attend. Please come to my office hours if you have questions or just want to discuss philosophy 😊.

Grading policy

Percentage grades will be converted to final letter grades using the following scale: A+ 97-100, A 93-96, A- 90-92, B+ 87-89, B 83-86, B- 80-82, C+ 77-79, C 73-76, C- 70-72, D+ 67-69, D 65-66, F 0-65.

If you would like to contest a grade that you have received, please send an email in which you explain why you feel the grade was wrong. This does not guarantee that your grade will be changed, but I will give each complaint due consideration. There will never be any penalty for contesting a grade.

Late assignments

Assignments submitted after the deadline without a documented excuse will be subject to a penalty of 5 points per day. For example, an assignment that would have received a 95 had it been turned in on time will become a 90 on day 1, an 85 on day 2, etc. An assignment that is more than 5 days late will receive an F.

Course policies

Accommodations and extensions

Please see me or email me as soon as possible if you require special accommodations due to religious practice, disability, medical needs, family emergency, personal crisis, or for any other reason. Extensions will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Except under extenuating circumstances, extensions on assignments must be requested *at least 3 days* before the assignment is due. Do not email me requesting an extension at the last minute unless you have a very good reason for suddenly being unable to complete your assignment on time. Your chances of getting one are better if you can show that you have at least begun thinking seriously about the assignment, and if you have requested the extension further ahead of time.

Academic integrity and honesty

Students are required to comply with the university policy on academic integrity found in the [Code of Student Conduct](#). Any assignment that has been plagiarized will receive an automatic zero.

Accommodations for disabilities

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. Please let me know as soon as possible and get in touch with the [Student Disability Access Office](#) if you need accommodations.

Course Environment

In this course you are likely to encounter ideas, values, and viewpoints that are different from your own. Some of the material we read and discuss may challenge your deeply held beliefs and values. It is also important to remember that you are not expected to agree with everything we read nor are you expected to agree with my views on the issues we discuss. There are no easy answers to many of the questions we'll tackle and reasonable people can and do disagree about how to answer them. I will provide content warnings when I feel it is appropriate.

I will try my best to create an inclusive environment for all students. Please feel free to let me know at any point if you have concerns with the way class is being conducted. If you ever feel harassed or discriminated against by me or by another student, you may report it within the Philosophy Department to the Chair, [Robert Brandon](#), or the Director of Undergraduate Studies, [Andrew Janiak](#). You may also contact the Ombudsperson, [Ada Gregory](#), or report the incident to the [Office of Institutional Equity](#) or the [Office of Student Conduct](#).

Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1: Philosophy and its methodology (5/12-5/14)

| Read | Watch |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bertrand Russell, "The Value of Philosophy" Al-Ghazali, "Deliverance from Error" | Jeremy Fantl, The value of knowledge |
| | Geoff Pynn, Intro to critical thinking Julianne Chung, Truth and validity Paul Henne, Formal and informal fallacies |

Week 2: Knowledge and reality (5/17-5/21)

| Read | Watch |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Rene Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> 1-3 | Kevin McCain, The epistemic regress problem Jennifer Nagel, The problem of skepticism |
| David Hume, <i>First Enquiry</i> , "Doubts about the understanding" and "Skeptical solution of these doubts" | Jennifer Nagel, Three responses to skepticism |
| William Clifford, "The ethics of belief" William James, "The will to believe" | Thomas Donaldson, The will to believe |

Week 3: The self (5/24-5/28)

| Read | Watch |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Excerpt from John Locke, <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> | Jennifer Wang, The ship of Theseus Michael Della Rocca, Locke on personal identity, Part 1 ; Locke on personal identity, Part 2 ; Locke on personal identity, Part 3 |
| Excerpt from Derek Parfit, <i>Reasons and Persons</i> | |
| Marya Schechtman, "Empathic access: the missing ingredient in personal identity" | Elisabeth Camp, Personal identity (the narrative self) |

Week 4: The mind (5/21-6/4)

| Read | Watch |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Thomas Nagel, "What is it like to be a bat?" | Jeffrey Kaplan, "What is it like to be a bat?" |
| David Chalmers, "The hard problem of consciousness" | Jeffrey Kaplan, "The zombie argument" |
| Patricia Churchland, "The hornswoggle problem" | Patricia Churchland, "Neurophilosophy" |

Week 5: Free will and moral responsibility (6/7-6/11)

| Read | Watch |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Peter Van Inwagen, "The incompatibility of free will and determinism" | Richard Holton, "The problem of free will" |
| Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate possibilities and moral responsibility" | Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "Contrastivism (free will)" |
| Justin Coates and Neal Tognazzini, "The nature and ethics of blame" | Alfred Mele, "Free will and moral responsibility" Adina Roskies, "Free will and moral responsibility" |

Week 6: Morality and justice (6/14-6/21)

| Read | Watch |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Peter Singer, "All animals are equal" | Tyler Doggett, "Killing animals for food" Jeff Sebo, "Who has moral status?" |
| Eva Kittay, "At the margins of moral personhood" | Peter Singer, "The case for allowing euthanasia of severely disabled infants" |
| Excerpt from John Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i> | Luvell Anderson, "The original position" |
| Tommie Shelby, "Justice, deviance, and the dark ghetto" | Olufemi O. Taiwo, "Race and the carceral state" |