

# Introduction to Philosophy

## Syllabus (v1)

### Course Info

**Instructor:** Richard Fry, rfry@siue.edu

**Meeting Time:** Section 01: M/W, 1:30-2:45, Peck Hall 0412

Section 02: M/W, 3:00-4:15, Peck Hall 0412

**Office Hours:** Monday/Wednesday 12:15-1:15PM, Peck Hall 3210

### Course Description:

Philosophy asks us to come to see more clearly both how our lives are and how they should be. Fiction can also help us see just those same things. In this course, we will use a number of different philosophical readings and fictional stories to jump-start our thinking about our selves and the wider world around us. The media we look at will serve as a starting point for conversations about minds, individuality, government, politics, aptitude/merit, surveillance, and morals, among other issues. You will be assessed primarily through written papers. No antecedent familiarity with philosophy is required or expected.

### Course Goals:

This course has several goals:

- To use philosophical texts introduce you to classic philosophical problems.
- To cultivate your own thinking about central problems in ethics and other areas of philosophy, especially as they bear on your own life.
- To improve your analytical reading and writing skills.
- To develop essential life skills such as time management, communication when encountering difficulties, and thoughtful engagement with others.

### Required Texts:

*All course readings will be made available through Blackboard. You are required to bring these readings to class.*

### Schedule of class meetings, topics and readings:

The course Blackboard site has a list of class meetings, including the relevant topics, readings and reading questions. You are expected to read the material listed *before* the date it is listed for.

# Policies

## Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism:

- You are expected and required to uphold SIUE's standards of academic honesty in this course.
- **Plagiarism of ideas or words is unacceptable.**
- Confirmed academic dishonesty will result in automatic failure of the course.
- Familiarize yourself with what counts as plagiarism and SIUE's policies:
  - <http://www.siu.edu/lovejoylibrary/services/instruction/plagiarism.shtml>,
  - <http://www.siu.edu/policies/3c2.shtml>

## Personal Conduct:

- You are responsible for arriving on time, being prepared, and comporting yourself in an appropriate manner. This means treating your classmates with respect and courtesy.
- *You are responsible for helping to foster a safe and productive learning environment.*
  - Some of the topics we will address this semester can provoke powerful emotions, so be mindful of how topics under discussion may differently impact members of the class.

## Grades:

- Late work: For each 24 hours late after the due date for a piece of written work is submitted, 3% will be subtracted from whatever grade it earns.
  - All work more than a week late will receive an F.
- Extensions: If you need an extension for written work, email me with a brief description of your situation.
  - If I approve an extension, we will work out an appropriate timeframe.
  - Extensions must be requested at least 24 hours before the assignment is due.
- Missed exams: Missed examinations will be assessed at 0%, unless (a) a doctor's note is provided, or (b) we agree to an alternate examination time *at least 24 hours before the exam* due to, e.g., bereavement/funeral, or (c) evidence of some other catastrophic event is presented.
- Anonymous grading: The papers for this course will be graded anonymously.
  - Work submitted through Blackboard should *not* have your name in the text or the filename.
  - Failure to properly anonymize your submission will result in a 10% penalty to your grade.
- Grade appeals: If you believe your work deserves a different grade than it received, you may ask in writing for reconsideration.
  - Submit this request *within one week* but no sooner than *one day after* your work is returned.
  - Your written request must explain why you believe the work deserves a different grade.
  - Please note that if a change is made, the new grade may be either higher or lower.

## Changes:

- I reserve the right to change any part of this syllabus at any time.
- Changes will be announced in class and a new version of the syllabus posted to Blackboard.

# Assignments and Assessment

*More details about these assignments will be distributed online and in class throughout the semester.*

## Short Papers (60%)

- During the semester, you will write three short (400-600 word) papers.
- These papers will explain arguments from texts we talked about in class and raise an objection.
- You will work out arguments—not report opinions or personal experience.
- All three of these will count toward your final grade.
  - The best will count for 30% of your final grade.
  - The second best will count for 20% of your final grade.
  - The worst of the three will count for only 10% of your final grade.

## Exams (20%)

- In lieu of weekly reading quizzes, you will be given a multiple-choice mid-term and final exam covering all course material.
- This exam should be straightforward if you've come to class and paid attention throughout the semester (and reviewed your notes beforehand).
- Each class period I will show the class one question from the next test.
- Each exam will be worth 10% of your final grade.

## Reflection Papers (20%)

- You'll write two 'reflection' papers connecting themes from the course with your experience.
- Grading for these assignments will be primarily for effort.
- Each of these papers will be worth 10% of your final grade.

## Participation and Comportment

- I reserve the right to adjust your grade by  $\pm 3\%$  based on your comportment in class.
- This grade includes reading *and bringing* the assigned material, arriving on time, and participating in discussion. You can also participate by coming to office hours or emailing me.
- Not coming to class, sleeping, not bringing assigned readings, arriving consistently late, acting disrespectfully to me or your peers (by, e.g., having your phone out), *etc.*, will lose you points.

## Extra Credit

- For up to three events from the scholarly activities list I'll post on Blackboard, you may write up a 100-200 word summary of some argument the speaker made.
- If your summary is acceptable, you will receive +1% to your final grade, up to a total of +3%.
- Paragraphs should be turned in within a week of the event.

# Resources

## Philosophical Resources

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu>

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://www.iep.utm.edu>

Philpapers.org: <http://philpapers.org>

Tips on Writing a Philosophy Paper: <http://goo.gl/iDzgFb>

## Academic Resources

**Disability Support Services:** Student Success Center, Room 1270

<http://www.siu.edu/dss/> and [disabilitysupport@siu.edu](mailto:disabilitysupport@siu.edu)

Provides accommodations to disabled students. DSS also has services which students can use to increase skills in learning, time management, and test-taking.

**Instructional Services:**

<http://www.siu.edu/is/>

Provides instructional support unit for the students, faculty and staff. Helps the underprepared to prepare, the prepared to advance, and the advanced to excel.

**Writing Center:** in the Academic Advancement Center

<http://www.siu.edu/is/writing/>, 618-650-2045

The writing center assists you as you analyze your paper and explore ways to improve it. Our primary concern is to help you become a better writer. To do this, we challenge you to learn more about composition and the conventions of Standard English.

## Health and Wellness Resources

**Counseling Services:** Student Success Center room 0222

<http://www.siu.edu/counseling/>

Provides individual counseling, counseling groups, healthy living workshops, consultations, and referrals. Special attention is paid to the ongoing issues affecting college students.

**Student Health Clinic Services:** Student Success Center room 0222

<http://www.siu.edu/healthservice/clinic/index.shtml>

# Introduction to Philosophy

## Calendar with Topics, Readings and Questions

*You will read the material listed before the class-day listed.  
You are required to bring the material listed for a day to class that day.*

### **1: Introductions: What's going on here?**

09 Jan - Intro to Philosophy - What's philosophy? What good is it? What'll we talk about?

### **2: A Just Society: How should we organize our society?**

11 Jan and 18 Jan - Democracy: What makes democracy a good form of government?

Read: Quora, 'Why is Democracy Considered the Best form of Government?'

How many different reasons does Francis give in favor of democracy? What are they?

What basic goods does Francis take democracy to promote? Why are they good?

Read: Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (excerpt)

What does Mill think is good about democracy? How does this differ from Francis?

What forms of government does Mill compare it to?

What basic facts about humans and societies does Mill appeal to?

23 Jan - Voting: Do we have a moral obligation to vote?

Read: Hinkle, "No, You Don't Have an Obligation to Vote"

*In Class Watch: Futurama* s2e7, "A Head in the Polls"

What are the benefits of voting? What are the costs?

Does voting make a difference?

Do you think that any of the arguments Hinkle considers are better than he gives them credit for being?

25 Jan - Monarchy: What about Monarchy?

Read: Hobbes, *Leviathan* Ch.XIX (excerpt)

What reasons does Hobbes give against democracy?

How do those same considerations count in favor of monarchy?

What basic facts about humans and societies does Hobbes appeal to?

30 Jan - Meritocracy: What about Meritocracy?

Read: Plato, *Republic* Bk. VI (*excerpt*)

In Socrates's metaphor of the ship, who does Socrates think should rule the city?

What makes those individuals uniquely qualified?

What basic facts about humans and societies does Socrates appeal to?

Read: Bell, "The Theory, History, and Practice of Political Meritocracy" (*excerpt*)

What is 'political meritocracy'? Who practices it?

Why is it a challenge to democracy?

How does it satisfy the goals that Mill, Hobbes, and Socrates set out for a society?

01 Feb - The SAT and Aptitude: Does the SAT measure aptitude? Merit?

Read: Zumbun, "SAT Scores and Income Inequality: How Wealthier Kids Rank Higher"

Read: Tabarrok, "The SAT, Test Prep, Income and Race"

Read: Economist, "An Hereditary Meritocracy"

What connection is there between wealth and SAT score?

What role do SAT prep classes play in determining SAT score?

Do SAT scores predict college grades or success?

What might explain these connections or non-connections?

Should the SAT be used to determine college admissions? If so, how?

### **3: Intelligence: Who—or what—can think?**

06 Feb - Animals and Machines - Are animals machines? Can machines think?

Read: Descartes - *Discourse on Method* (*excerpt*)

What reasons does Descartes give to convince you that animals can't think?

What role does the analogy he draws with machines play?

What role does language play in his argument? Is it all, or only part?

**Short Paper 1 due by 11:59PM**

08 Feb - Animals - Do corvids think? Do they think about others' minds?

Read: Clayton & Emery, "Corvid Cognition"

What is 'food caching' and why do ravens, scrub jays and other corvids do it?

What factors influence where and how a jay caches its food?

Read: Shettleworth, “Clever Animals and Killjoy Explanations in Comparative Cognition”

Why does Shettleworth think we can explain everything we’ve observed in corvids without appeal to minds, or beliefs about others’ minds?

What import does Shettleworth think this has for study of human cognition?

Read: Newitz, “The Growing Evidence for Octopus Intelligence”

What evidence is there that octopodes are intelligent?

How are octopodes different from mammals?

How would octopode intelligence differ from human intelligence? Why?

13 Feb - Machines - Can computers think?

Watch: CNET, “What is the Turing Test?”

Watch: Languide, “The Turing Test”

What is the ‘turing test’? What is it supposed to show?

What objections might have to using it to determine what can think?

How does the Turing Test relate to Descartes’s tests?

Read: Véliz - “The Challenge of Determining Whether an A.I. is Sentient”

What imagined case does Véliz consider? What does she take it to show?

Why is it hard to determine which other beings are having qualitative experiences? Why does this question matter, if it matters at all?

Read: Kottke, “Our Creative, Beautiful, Unpredictable Machines”

Read: Metz, “Google’s AI Takes Historic Match Against Go Champ with Third Straight Win”

Why is Go an interesting test-case for artificial intelligence?

How does Alpha Go know how to play?

Why is it interesting, not just that Alpha Go won, but how it won?

15 Feb - Androids - Are androids people?

*In Class Watch: Star Trek: The Next Generation s2e09, “Measure of a Man”*

Is Data a person? Is he a human being? Can he be one and not the other?

## **4: Privacy & Surveillance: Why do we only care about privacy sometimes?**

20 Feb - Privacy - What do we share, and what do we keep private?

Read: Hill, “How Target Figured out a Teenage Girl was Pregnant before her Father did”

What information allowed Target to determine this?

Is what Target did wrong? Why or why not?

Listen: Golbeck, "What Can Companies Predict From Your Digital Trail?"

What kinds of things can Golbeck's group predict about you given your publicly available information?

What cases does Golbeck explicitly consider where this could be a problem?

Read: Hoover/FBI, "MLK Suicide Letter"

Read: Gage, "What an Uncensored Letter to MLK Reveals"

What has the FBI learned about King through their surveillance of him?

What do they suggest King do to prevent them from releasing this information?

How does having this knowledge give them power over him?

22 Feb - Governmental Surveillance - How much power should the government have to spy on us?

Read: Solove, "'I've Got Nothing to Hide' and Other Misunderstandings of Privacy" (*excerpt*)

Read: Stoycheff, "Mass Surveillance Chills Online Speech Even When People Have 'Nothing to Hide'"

What is the 'I've got nothing to hide' argument?

Why does Solove reject this argument?

What does Solove think is valuable about privacy? Who does he draw on to make this case?

How do Stoycheff's findings relate to Solove's argument?

### **Reflection paper 1 due by 11:59PM**

27 Feb - Surveillance and Daily Life

*In Class Watch: The Office* s2e09, "Email Surveillance"

Is Michael wrong to surveil his employees?

Is Jim doing something wrong by not inviting Michael to his party?

Is it OK for Jim to want to keep the info about the party from Michael?

## **5: Midterm**

**01 Mar - Midterm exam**

## **6: Personal Identity: What makes a person at one time the same person as a person at another time?**

13 Mar - Psychology: What role do our memories, minds or psychologies play?

Read: Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II.xxvi (*excerpt*)

Watch: Wireless Philosophy, “Locke on Personal Identity,” pt.1

What does Locke think makes a mass of matter the same over time? A plant? An animal?

What’s the difference between a ‘person’ and a ‘human’ for Locke?

What’s Locke’s criterion for personal identity?

How does he use imagined cases to make this point?

15 Mar - Bodily: What about our bodies?

Read: Michaels, “Persons, Brains, and Bodies”

What is Michaels’ conclusion?

What is each case that Michaels considers supposed to show?

How—or to what extent—does Michaels’ answer differ from Locke’s?

20 Mar - Problems: What if there is no ‘self’?

Read: Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* 1.4.6 (*excerpt*)

Watch: Crash Course Philosophy, “Arguments Against Personal Identity”

Where does Hume say the idea of ‘self’ would come from? What reasons does he give?

Why is he suspicious of it? What reasons does he give?

What if there is no self?

## **7: Death: How should death affect us?**

22 Mar - Death: How should we feel about death?

Read: Epicurus, “Letter to Menoecus”

Why does Epicurus deny that death is a harm to those that die?

What substantive commitments are required to make the argument make sense?

What does this argument miss?

Read: Chuang-Tzu, “A Taoist on Death”

What reason does Chuang-Tzu give for not mourning?

What should we think of the fact that Chuang-Tzu did mourn, initially?  
Where would he disagree with Epicurus?

### **Short Paper 2 due by 11:59PM**

27 Mar - A Good Life: What should we do with what life we have?

*In Class Watch: Sports Night* s1e9, "The Quality of Mercy at 29k"

How do projects give our lives meaning?  
How do connections with others change or influence the meaning of our lives?  
How do charity and compassion fit into a good life?  
How can art help to create a meaningful life?

## **8: Simulations and Reality - What if the world is merely simulated?**

29 Mar - Simulations - Are we living in a simulation?

Read: Bostrom, "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?"

What kind of simulation is Bostrom considering?  
Why would a civilization run such simulations?  
Is such a simulation possible today? What would it take for it to be possible?  
Does anything in principle make such a simulation impossible?

03 Apr - Killer AI - Should the that we're in a simulation change what we do now?

Read: Auerbach, "Roko's Basilisk, the Most Terrifying Thought Experiment"

What's Roko's Basilisk?  
What are the odds you're living in a punishment simulation right now?  
Why would we be worried about AI and the end of humanity?  
*In Class Watch: Star Trek: The Next Generation* s6e12, "Ship in a Bottle"  
Is Moriarty genuinely intelligent? How could we tell?  
How do we know that the characters, at the end of the episode, have really escaped?  
Should we try to prevent real AI from being created?

05 Apr - Simulations and the Afterlife - What about simulations after death?

Read: Banks, *Surface Detail* (excerpts)

Why would a civilization make an artificial afterlife?  
Why would they make a heaven? Why would they make a hell?  
What would a virtual 'hell' look like?

If we could make a virtual afterlife, what do you think it would look like?  
*In Class Watch:* Tom Scott, “Welcome to Life: the Singularity, Ruined by Lawyers”

## **9: Morals: How do we act correctly, and how do we know?**

10 Apr - Right Action - What are different systems that purport to tell us how to act correctly?

Watch: BBC4, “Kant’s Axe”

Watch: Wireless Philosophy, “Utilitarianism, Part 1”

Watch: BBC4, “Aristotle on Flourishing”

Watch: Learn Liberty, “Adam Smith”

12 Apr - Right Action - What are the arguments for these systems?

Read: Kant, *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals* (excerpts)

Read: Mill, *Utilitarianism* Ch.1-2 (excerpts)

What are Kant’s examples supposed to show us?

What argument does Mill give for prizing pleasure above all else?

Does Mill think such an argument is possible?

What fundamental differences in perspective are there between these two theories?

17 Apr - Good Character - What about systems that prize *good character*?

Read: Annas, “Virtue Ethics” (excerpts)

What does Virtue Ethics emphasize, how is it different from Deontology and Utilitarianism?

What role does character play? What role does seeing one’s life as a project play?

Read: Smith, *Theory of the Moral Sentiments* (excerpt)

What does Smith think matters in evaluating other’s actions?

What role does our imagination play?

How does Smith’s moral sentimentalism combine elements of the other three theories?

19 Apr - Moral Dilemmas - How do we confront moral dilemmas?

*In Class Watch:* *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* s6e19, “In the Pale Moon Light”

### **Reflection Paper 2 due by 11:59PM**

24 Apr - Environment and Children - Should we have fewer children to protect the environment?

Read: Ludden, “Should We Be Having Kids In The Age Of Climate Change?”

What impact does reproduction have on global CO<sub>2</sub> production?

What can be done about it?

What role does education play in reducing fertility?  
What problems might we see with this plan?

26 Apr - Class's Choice

Read: TBA

**Short Paper 3 due by 11:59PM**

*The final exam will be held at the place and time scheduled by the registrar.*