

Introduction to Philosophy

Syllabus (v1)

Course Info

Instructor: Richard Fry, rfry@siue.edu

Meeting Time: Section 01: M/W, 3:00-4:15, Peck Hall 0307

Section 02: M/W, 4:30-5:45, Peck Hall 0307

Office Hours: M/W 1:30-2:30PM, 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:

- Use philosophical texts introduce you to classic philosophical problems.
- Cultivate your own thinking about central problems in ethics and other areas of philosophy, especially as they bear on your own life.
- Improve your analytical reading and writing skills.
- 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.siue.edu/lovejoylibrary/services/instruction/plagiarism.shtml>,
 - <http://www.siue.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.

Phones and Laptops:

- We will discuss phones and laptops in class on January 8th and create a policy. This syllabus will be updated to reflect our decisions.

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 objections
- 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 25% of your final grade
 - The second best will count for 20% of your final grade
 - The worst of the three will count for only 15% 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.
- These exams will be given online, through Blackboard.
- These exams 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 (15%)

- You'll write three short 'reflection' papers related to media we'll watch in class.
- Grading for these assignments will be primarily for effort.
- Each of these papers will be worth 5% of your final grade.

Daily Participation Questions (5%)

- Every class meeting, there will be one question online at the beginning of class
 - These questions may be short answer, multiple choice, true/false, etc.
- These questions will be on Blackboard, but they will be password protected
 - The password will be given at the beginning of class
 - They will only be available for the first five minutes of class
- These questions are designed to (1) ensure that you've brought the appropriate technology to class, (2) ensure that you have access to the readings for the day, (3) get us started thinking about the course material for our class discussion
- Questions will be graded on a completed/not-completed basis
- Of the 26 questions, 21 of them will count toward your final grade

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.siue.edu/dss/> and disabilitysupport@siue.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.siue.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.siue.edu/is/writing/>

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.siue.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.siue.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.*

0: Introductions: What's going on here?

08 Jan - Intro to the Course - What's philosophy? What's expected of me?

Read: ScienceDaily, "The Mere Presence of your Smartphone Reduces your Brainpower"

Read: May, "Students are Better Off without a Laptop in the Classroom"

What do these studies suggest about cellphone use?

What do these studies suggest about laptop use?

Read: Pryal and Jack, "When You Talk About Banning Laptops, You Throw Disabled Students Under the Bus"

What conflicting considerations do Pryal and Jack raise?

What is their ultimate solution, at the end of the article?

1: The State: What government makes for a good society?

10 Jan - Monarchy: Is monarchy the best form of government?

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?

17 Jan - Democracy: Is democracy a good form of government?

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

What does Mill think is good about democracy?

What forms of government does Mill compare it to?

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

22 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?

24 Jan - The SAT and Aptitude: Does the SAT measure 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?

2: Privacy: When and why should we care about privacy?

29 Jan - 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: Dvoskin & Timberg, "Google Now Knows When Users Go to the Store and Buy Stuff"

Read: Chen, "Visiting Websites with Your Smartphone on Mobile Data Can Reveal Your Full Name, Phone Number, Address, and Even Location"

Read: Hill, "How Facebook Figures out Everyone you've Ever Met"

Do regular users of these services/companies know that they do this?

Should they? Should companies be required to clearly disclose these uses of data?

What ramifications might these tracking technologies have?

31 Jan - Governmental Surveillance - How much power should the government have to spy on us? What do we lose by giving it to them?

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 is he drawing on to make his case?

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

05 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?

Short Paper 1 due by 11:59PM

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

07 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?

12 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?

What alternative explanations could we give for corvids’ behavior?

Read: Kennedy, “Ravens Surprise Scientists by Showing That They Can Plan”

What new evidence does Kennedy offer that is relevant to Clayton & Emery’s case?

Does this further evidence make the Clayton and Emery’s easier or harder to undermine?

14 Feb - Animals - What about other animals?

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?

Read: Balcombe, "Fishes Have Feelings, Too"

What evidence is there that manta rays and other fishes are intelligent?

Is that evidence stronger or weaker than with corvids or octopodes?

Are there alternative ways of explaining that evidence?

Read: de Rohan, "Why Dolphins are Deep Thinkers"

What evidence is there that dolphins are intelligent?

How is the evidence for dolphin intelligence similar to or dissimilar from the evidence for octopode intelligence? What about corvids?

Do dolphins' similarities to us make it more or less likely that we're right to ascribe intelligence to them?

19 Feb - Machines - Can computers think?

Watch: CNET, "What is 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: Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" (excerpt)

What two objections does Turing consider in this excerpt?

How does he respond to those objections?

Are his responses compelling?

21 Feb - Contemporary AI - What are computers doing these days?

Read: Metz, "What the AI Behind AlphaGo Can Teach Us About Being Human"

In what way is Google's AlphaGO different from past game-playing AIs?

How does AlphaGO play Go? (That is, how does it choose its moves?)

How does AlphaGO play Go? (That is: *well, poorly, creatively, boringly*, etc.)

Why does it matter not just *that* AlphaGO won, but *how*?

Read: Kennedy, "Computer Learns To Play Go At Superhuman Levels 'Without Human Knowledge'"

How does AlphaZero differ from AlphaGo?

How compelling is Marcus's claim that AlphaZero's accomplishments weren't its own?

Read: Dvorsky, “Why it Matters that Poker Pros are Getting Trounced by an AI”

Read: Newman, “Veteran Pilot Loses Simulated Dogfight to Impressive Artificial Intelligence”

Read: Metz, “The Rise of the Artificially Intelligent Hedge Fund”

What does it matter that AIs are winning these particular sorts of games?

What does this suggest about what kinds of jobs AIs will be suited for?

26 Feb - Thinking Machines - What *would* make a machine like us?

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?

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?

How do we know?

Reflection paper 1 due by 11:59PM

Interlude: Exam #1

28 Feb - Midterm Exam - Online

4: Death, Life and Simulations: How should death affect us?

12 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?

14 Mar - Immortality and Boredom: Would an infinitely long life be worth living?

Read: Tanyi and Karlander, "Immortal Curiosity" (excerpt)

Why does Williams think that an infinitely long life would be boring?

Why does he think it would *necessarily* be boring?

What role does having a stable character play for Williams's argument?

Read: Smuts, "Immortality and Significance" (excerpt)

How is Borges's argument different from Williams's?

What role does having finite capacities play in Borges's argument?

How does the fact that we will die help create meaning in our lives?

Short Paper 2 due by 11:59PM

19 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?

21 Mar - Simulations and Living - What if we could continue on in a simulation after bodily death?

In Class Watch: Black Mirror s3e4, "San Junipero"

What reasons do the characters give in favor of or against living in San Junipero?

How do considerations about immortality figure in to their decisions?

How do they weight what their lives *were* like against what they *will* be like?

26 Mar - Simulations and the Afterlife - What about an artificial afterlife?

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"

5: Morals: How do we act correctly, and how do we know?

28 Mar - Right Action - How should we treat other people?

In Class Watch: Black Mirror s3e1, Nosedive

Reflection Paper 2 due by 11:59PM

02 Apr - Kant's Ethics - What's wrong with using other people as means?

Watch: BBC4, "Kant's Axe"

Read: Fieser, "The Categorical Imperative" (*excerpt*)

What is Kant's one main moral rule ("The Categorical Imperative")?

What are some of Kant's background assumptions?

What makes an action morally worthy, for Kant?

Read: Rachels and Rachels, "Kant and Respect for Persons" (*excerpt*)

Why does Kant think we should respect other persons?

What kinds of rules or principles does this kind of respect generate?

04 Apr - Mill's Ethics - What about the consequences of our actions?

Watch: Wireless Philosophy, "Utilitarianism, Part 1"

Read: Timmons, "Utilitarianism" (Ch. 5, §1-3)

What are consequentialists most concerned with? (That is, what's valuable?)

What are the four main features of utilitarianism (p.114)?

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

In Class Watch: The Good Place s1e5, "Category 55 Emergency Doomsday Crisis" (excerpt)

In Class Watch: Gross (Le Guin), "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas, a film adaptation"

09 Apr - Good Character - What about good character?

Watch: BBC4, "Aristotle on Flourishing"

Read: Athanassoulis, "Virtue Ethics" (IEP)

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

What role does character play? What role does practical wisdom play?

Watch: Learn Liberty, "Adam Smith"

Read: Broadie, "Smith on the Moral Sentiments" (SEP)

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?

11 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 3 due by 11:59PM

16 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?"

Read: Carrington, "Want to Fight Climate Change? Have Fewer Children"

What impact does reproduction have on global CO₂ production?

What can be done about it?

What role does education play in reducing fertility?

What problems might we see with this plan?

18 Apr - Social Media - How should we treat others and ourselves on social media?

Read: Nguyen, "China Might use Data to Create a Score for Each Citizen"

Read: Botsman, "Big Brother Meets Big Data as China Moves to Rate its Citizens"

Why would someone want a system like the one China is developing?

How might this system lead us into bad moral territory?

23 Apr - The Law: Should I think I'm (morally) obligated to follow the law?

Read: Plato, *Crito* (excerpt)

What are Socrates's main reasons for accepting his punishment?

How does his past profit from the laws of Athens figure in to his decision?

Is Socrates right that we're morally obligated to follow the law?

25 Apr - Class's Choice

Read: TBA

Short Paper 3 due by 11:59PM

The final exam will be held online at the time scheduled by the registrar.