# Introduction to Philosophy

## Syllabus (v1)

## Course Info

**Instructor:** Richard Fry, rfry@siue.edu  
**Meeting Time:** M/W, 12:00-1:15, Peck Hall 0302  
**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. 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 in humans, animals and machines, privacy, poverty, and morals, as well as death and the meaning of life. You will be assessed primarily through written papers. No antecedent familiarity with philosophy is required or expected.

## Course Goals

- Use philosophical texts to 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.
Policies

Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism

- You are expected and required to uphold SIUE’s standards of academic honesty.
- 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/lovejoylibrary/services/instruction/plagiarism.shtml)
  - [http://www.siue.edu/policies/3c2.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.

Laptops, Tablets and Phones

- In order to adequately participate in class activities and discussion, you will need (1) a copy of the day’s reading and (2) an internet-connected device capable of accessing Blackboard.
  - This means you will need either (a) a laptop or tablet or (b) a printed copy of the reading and a smartphone.
- Smartphones will only be allowed in the first few minutes of class to answer the daily participation question on Blackboard; afterward, they should be stowed away.
  - If there is an emergency situation you must monitor, you may keep your phone out, provided you notify me of this before class begins
- Laptops and tablets can be used to access the readings when we are close reading and when needed to complete activities during class.
  - But I will (often) ask you to close and/or store them during class discussions.
  - If your laptop or tablet is distracting others around you, I will ask you to put it away, regardless of what we are doing.
- If I feel at any point that laptops/tablets are producing more distraction than they are worth, this policy will be amended to completely ban all electronics (after the daily participation question is completed) and require printouts of the reading.

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 no more than 70%.

• **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.

• **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 to you.
  • 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.

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**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.

Assignment A1-1 (Group) - 20%

- A short, 300-500 word paper
  - Explains an argument from an author in the first section of the course
  - Does not report opinions or personal experience
- You will work together in groups of four to produce a single document
- The primary work for this assignment will be done in class on January 28th
  - Absence on that day without a documented medical or bereavement excuse will lower your personal grade for this assignment by at least 50%

Assignment A1-2 (Solo) - 20%

- A short, 500-1000 word paper
- This paper builds on what your group produced in Assignment A1-1
- Working alone, you will:
  - Correct your group’s paper in light of my feedback
  - Expand the paper to consider an objection

Assignment A2-1 (Group) - 20%

- A short, 300-500 word paper
  - Take a stand on an issue from the second section of the course
  - Consider and rebut obvious objections
  - Do not merely report opinions or personal experience
- You will work together in groups of four to produce a single document
- The primary work for this assignment will be done in class on March 6th
  - Absence on that day without a documented medical or bereavement excuse will lower your personal grade for this assignment by at least 50%

Assignment A2-2 (Solo) - 20%

- A short, 500-1000 word paper
- This paper builds on what your group produced in Assignment A2-1
- Working alone, you will:
  - Correct your group’s paper in light of my feedback
  - Expand the paper to include considerations raised by authors in the third part of the course to help support or undermine the argument that your group made
Reflection (Hybrid) - 10%

- A short, 500-1000 word paper
- Each of your four group members will contribute a paragraph on the topic of the final section of the course
- Working on your own, you will respond to these other views
- The primary work for this assignment will be done in class on April 29th
  - Absence on that day without a documented medical or bereavement excuse will lower your personal grade for this assignment by at least 50%

Daily Participation Questions (10%)

- In lieu of reading quizzes or exams, you will be given one question to answer at the beginning of each class session
  - These questions may be short answer, multiple choice, true/false, etc.
- Questions will only be available in class for the first five minutes of class
- These questions are designed to (1) ensure that you've brought the readings for the day and (2) get us started thinking about the course material for our class discussion
- Of the 24 questions, 20 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
Course Calendar
with Topics, Readings and Assignments

Read the material listed before the class-day listed.
Bring the material listed for a day to class that day.

Each class will be oriented around answering the following questions. Thinking about these questions before you get to class will make for a more fun, more rewarding class experience. (And you’ll get better grades, too.)

1. What question is the author addressing?
2. Why is that question interesting or important?
3. What do they claim is the answer to that question?
4. What reasons do they give to believe that claim?
5. Are those reasons good reasons? Should we be convinced by them?

0: Introductions: What’s going on here?

14 Jan - Intro to the Course
Read: OUP, “The Truth about Philosophy Majors”
Read: ScienceDaily, “The Mere Presence of your Smartphone Reduces your Brainpower”
Read: May, “Students are Better Off without a Laptop in the Classroom”
Read: Mills, “Against Laptops & Phones in Class”
Read: Pryal and Jack, “When You Talk About Banning Laptops, You Throw Disabled Students Under the Bus”

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

16 Jan - Do animals think?
No reading; instead, think about why it is that you believe that animals can think, reason and feel, if you do, or why it is that you don’t, if you don’t.

23 Jan - Animals are Machines?
Read: Descartes - Discourse on Method (excerpt)
Read: Balcombe, “Fishes have Feelings, Too”
28 Jan - Group Writing Day #1

No new reading, but review the Descartes. Come prepared to help your group write about it. **Absence on this day without a documented medical or bereavement excuse will result in you earning at most 50% of what your group earns for this assignment.**

30 Jan - Corvids and Dolphins

Read: Clayton & Emery, “Corvid Cognition”
Read: de Rohan, “Why Dolphins are Deep Thinkers”

**Assignment A1-1 due by 11:59PM (midnight)**

04 Feb - Machines

Watch: CNET, “What is the Turing Test?”
Read: Turing, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” (excerpt)

06 Feb - Contemporary AI

Read: Somers, “How the Artificial Intelligence Program AlphaZero Mastered Its Games”
Read: Dvorsky, “Why it Matters that Poker Pros are Getting Trounced by an AI”
Watch: CGP Grey, “How Computers Learn”

11 Feb - Humanity

Read: Véliz - “The Challenge of Determining Whether an A.I. is Sentient”
Read: Valente, *Space Opera*, ch.13

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

13 Feb - Plants

Read: Livni, “Debate Over Plant Consciousness is Forcing us to Confront the Limitations of the Human Mind”

2: Applied Ethics: What in the world should we do?

18 Feb - Privacy

Read: Hill, “How Target Figured out a Teenage Girl was Pregnant before her Father did”
Listen: Golbeck, “What Can Companies Predict from Your Digital Trail?”
Read: Stoycheff, “Mass Surveillance Chills Online Speech Even When People Have ‘Nothing to Hide’”
In Class Watch: The Office s2e09, “Email Surveillance”
Assignment A1-2 due by 11:59PM (midnight)

20 Feb - Enhancement
Read: Savulescu, “A Doping Manisfesto”
Read: Giubilini and Sayal, “The Ethics of Human Enhancement”

25 Feb - Poverty and Charity
Read: Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”

27 Feb - Climate Change
Read: Ludden, “Should We Be Having Kids In The Age Of Climate Change?”
Read: Carrington, “Want to Fight Climate Change? Have Fewer Children”

04 Mar - Social Engineering
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”
Read: Chun, “China’s New Frontiers in Dystopian Tech”
Read: O’Kane, “China will ban people with poor ‘social credit’ from planes and trains”

06 Mar - Group Writing Day #2
No new reading, but chat with your group about which of these topics you’d like to write about.
Review it, and come prepared to help your group write about it.
Absence on this day without a documented medical or bereavement excuse will result in you earning at most 50% of what your group earns for this assignment.

3: Morals: What makes something right or wrong?

18 Mar - Introduction to Morals
No new reading. But before class, reflect on what it is that makes an action right or wrong, why, and how you know.
In Class Watch: Black Mirror s3e1, “Nosedive”
Assignment A2-1 due by 11:59PM (midnight)

20 Mar - Deontology
Read: Fieser, “The Categorical Imperative” (excerpt)
Optional Read: Rachels and Rachels, “Kant and Respect for Persons” (excerpt)
In Class Watch: BBC4, “Kant’s Axe”

25 Mar - Consequentialism
Read: Timmons, “Utilitarianism” (Ch. 5, §1-3)
In Class Watch: Wireless Philosophy, “Utilitarianism, Part 1”
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”

27 Mar - Virtue
Watch: BBC4, “Aristotle on Flourishing”
Read: Athanassouli, “Virtue Ethics” (IEP)

01 Apr - Sentiments
Watch: Learn Liberty, “Adam Smith”
Read: Broadie, “Smith on the Moral Sentiments” (SEP)

03 Apr - Moral Dilemmas
In Class Watch: Star Trek: Deep Space Nine s6e19, “In the Pale Moon Light”

4: Death, etc.: How should death affect us?

08 Apr - Death
Read: Epicurus, “Letter to Menoeceus”
Read: Chuang-Tzu, “A Taoist on Death”
Assignment A2-2 due by 11:59PM (midnight)

10 Apr - Immortality
Read: Tanyi and Karlander, “Immortal Curiosity” (excerpt)
Read: Smuts, “Immortality and Significance” (excerpt)

15 Apr - Life
Read: Bradford, Achievements (excerpt)
In Class Watch: Sports Night s1e9, “The Quality of Mercy at 29k”
17 Apr - Simulations
Read: Bostrom, “Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?”

22 Apr - Living
Before Class Watch: Black Mirror s3e4, “San Junipero”

24 Apr - After-living
Read: Banks, Surface Detail (excerpts)
Read: Nozick, “The Experience Machine”
In Class Watch: Tom Scott, “Welcome to Life: the Singularity, Ruined by Lawyers”

29 Apr - Group Writing Day #3
No new reading, but think carefully about this section of the course. Come prepared with some ideas about how you’ll write your paragraph about the meaning of life.
Absence on this day without a documented medical or bereavement excuse will result in a 25% penalty to your grade.

01 May - Review and Open Question Time
No new reading, but think about the structure, content and assignments of the course. We’ll have time to discuss any remaining philosophical issues, your feelings about the course and then there will be time for you to ask me any questions—at all!—that you might have.

Reflection Assignment due by 11:59PM (midnight)
Resources

Philosophical Resources

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: [http://www.iep.utm.edu](http://www.iep.utm.edu)
Philpapers.org: [http://philpapers.org](http://philpapers.org)
Tips on Writing a Philosophy Paper: [http://goo.gl/iDzgFb](http://goo.gl/iDzgFb)

Academic Resources

ACCESS (Accessible Campus Community & Equitable Student Support):
Student Success Center, Room 1270, [http://www.siue.edu/dss/](http://www.siue.edu/dss/) and [myaccess@siue.edu](mailto:myaccess@siue.edu)
Provides accommodations to students in need of them. ACCESS also has services which students can use to increase skills in learning, time management, and test-taking.

Instructional Services: [http://www.siue.edu/is/](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/](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/](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](http://www.siue.edu/healthservice/clinic/index.shtml)