

Phil1002: Introduction to Philosophy

Instructor: Prof. David Thorstad (Office hours: Tu/W 5-6PM, Furman Hall 113, <https://calendly.com/dthorsta/office-hours>)

Teaching assistants: Eli Aleinikoff, Jennifer Lowell, Alyssa Tudor (Office hours: TBD)

Last update: November 7. Readings correct through end course.

1. About this course

This course is an introduction to philosophy. We will take a deep dive into some big questions around free will and moral responsibility; knowledge of the external world; the nature of mind; personal identity; and scientific method. I hope that by the end of this course you will learn to (1) think philosophically, (2) write clearly and well about philosophical problems, (3) understand some central problems and approaches in philosophy, and perhaps even (4) come to enjoy doing philosophy.

2. Course materials

Most readings, along with some required podcasts, will be posted on the course site. However, you will need to buy one book. Please do purchase exactly this edition, so we will all be on the same page.

Descartes, *Meditations on first philosophy*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge, 2nd edition, 2017, print ISBN 9781107665736, digital ISBN 9781107416277).

3. Course structure

3.1. Assignments

- I **Participation (10%)**: Teaching assistants will assign grades for participation during discussion sections.
- II **Response papers (30%)**: Each week that an essay is not currently assigned, students will be assigned a brief, 1-page (double-spaced, reasonable font/margins) reading response on a set question. When assigned, response papers are due end of day the following Monday. *The lowest 2 response paper grades will be dropped.*
- III **Essays (60%)**: Argumentative essays on topics chosen from an assigned list. Essays should be double-spaced in a reasonable 12-point font and reasonable margins.
 - i **Essay 1 (10%)**: 3 pages. (Assigned September 25, Due October 4).
 - ii **Essay 2 (20%)**: 3 pages. (Assigned October 25, Due November 8).
 - iii **Essay 3 (30%)**: 4 pages. (Assigned December 1, due December 11).

3.2. Assignment submission

I **Submitting assignments:** Please submit essays and response papers on the course website.

II **Late assignments:** Except in the case of a written extension by your teaching assistant, late assignments will be penalized by ten percent if they are submitted no later than a week beyond the submission deadline. Submissions more than a week late are ordinarily not accepted without a written extension. If you find yourself running very late, I strongly urge you to contact your teaching assistant to discuss your situation.

3.3. Discussion sections

Weekly discussion sections will focus primarily on moderated discussion of readings. Discussion sections are also a forum for you to ask questions about course materials, assignments and policies.

4. Schedule

4.1. Introduction

August 23: Course introduction.

August 28: Thinking philosophically.

- i **Readings discussed:** Pryor, “Guidelines on writing a philosophy paper” and “Guidelines on reading a philosophy paper”.
- ii **Assigned:** Response Paper 1 assigned.

4.2. Knowledge of the external world

Big questions:

I **Knowing the external world:** In virtue of what can I know anything about the external world?

II **Alternative possibilities:** Could the world be radically different from how it appears? How do I know, for example, that I am not living inside a simulation?

August 30: Al-Ghazali, *The rescuer from error*.

- i **Readings discussed:** Al-Ghazali, *The rescuer from error* (excerpts).
- ii **Due:** Response Paper 1 due (Thurs, 12PM).

September 4: Descartes’ method of doubt.

- i **Readings discussed:** Descartes, *Meditation 1*.
- ii **Assigned:** Response Paper 2 assigned.

September 6: Descartes' *cogito*: Knowing our own minds.

- i **Readings discussed:** Descartes, *Meditation 2* + Philosophy Bites, "A.C. Grayling on Descartes' Cogito."
- ii **Due:** Response Paper 2 due (Thurs, 12PM).

September 11: Against materialism.

- i **Readings discussed:** Berkeley, Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous (Dialogue 1).
- ii **Assigned:** Response Paper 3 assigned.

September 13: Subjective idealism.

- i **Readings discussed:** Berkeley, Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous (Dialogues 2-3).
- ii **Due:** Response Paper 3 due (Thurs, 12PM).

September 18: Moore is having none of it.

- i **Readings discussed:** The partially examined life, "Moore's proof of mind-independent reality" (Parts 1-2) + Moore, "Proof of an external world."
- ii **Assigned:** Response Paper 4 assigned.

4.3. Free will and moral responsibility

Big questions:

- I **Freedom of the will:** What does it mean to have a free will? How can anyone be free in a deterministic universe?
- II **Freedom and moral responsibility?:** Do I need to have a free will in order to be morally responsible for my actions?

I **September 20:** Incompatibilism.

- i **Readings discussed:** Van Inwagen, "The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism".
- ii **Due:** Response Paper 4 due (Thurs, 12PM).

II **September 25:** Moral responsibility and reactive attitudes.

- i **Readings discussed:** Strawson, "Freedom and resentment".
- ii **Assigned:** Essay 1 assigned.

III **September 27:** Moral responsibility and reactive attitudes.

i **Readings discussed:** Strawson, “Freedom and resentment”.

IV **October 2:** Freedom and moral responsibility: Frankfurt cases.

i **Readings discussed:** Frankfurt, “Alternate possibilities and moral responsibility”.

V **October 4:** Freedom and moral responsibility: Frankfurt cases.

i **Readings discussed:** Frankfurt, “Alternate possibilities and moral responsibility”.

ii **Due:** Essay 1 due.

VI **October 9:** Sanity and moral responsibility.

i **Readings discussed:** Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility”.

ii **Assigned:** Response Paper 5 assigned.

VII **October 11:** Sanity and moral responsibility.

i **Readings discussed:** Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility”.

4.4. The nature of mind

Big questions:

I **Nature of mind:** What kind of thing is my mind? A physical thing? An immaterial substance? A functional kind?

II **Can machines think?:** What would it take for a machine to have mental states? Could machines ever have mental states? Do some machines have mental states right now?

III **Nature of consciousness:** What does it mean to be conscious? What things are, or could be conscious?

I **October 16:** Dualism.

i **Readings discussed:** Descartes, *Meditation 6*.

ii **Due:** Response Paper 5 due (Today, end of day).

iii **Assigned:** Response Paper 6 assigned.

II **October 18:** Dualism

i **Readings discussed:** Descartes, *Meditation 6* (continued) and Princess Elisabeth, correspondence with Descartes (excerpts).

III **October 23:** Physicalism

- i **Readings discussed:** Antony, “The mental and the physical”.
- ii **Due:** Response Paper 6 due (Today, end of day).

IV **October 25:** Physicalism

- i **Readings discussed:** Antony, “The mental and the physical”.
- ii **Assigned:** Essay 2 assigned.

V **October 30:** Functionalism

- i **Readings discussed:** Putnam, “The nature of mental states”.

VI **November 1:** Functionalism

- i **Readings discussed:** Putnam, “The nature of mental states”.

VII **November 6:** Can machines think?

- i **Readings discussed:** Searle, “Can computers think?”.

VIII **November 8:** Can machines think?

- i **Reading discussed:** Searle, “Can computers think?” + Podcast, “Daniel Dennett on the Chinese Room” (Philosophy Bites).
- ii **Due:** Essay 2 due.

4.5. Identity and survival

Big questions:

- I **Personal identity:** Who am I? How is it that I am now the same person that I was when I was very young, even though I have changed a great deal?
- II **Survival:** What is the relationship between personal identity and survival? Could I survive stepping into a teleporter? What about having my consciousness uploaded into a computer?

I **November 13:** Locke on personal identity.

- i **Reading discussed:** Locke, *An essay concerning human understanding*, Book 2, Chapter 27.
- ii **Assigned:** Response Paper 7 assigned.

II **Nov 15:** Locke on personal identity.

- i **Readings discussed:** Review Locke + view (required) podcast, “John Locke on personal identity.”

III **Nov 27:** Reid on personal identity.

- i **Readings discussed:** Reid, *Essays on the intellectual powers of man* (excerpts).
- ii **Due:** Response Paper 7 due (end of day).
- iii **Assigned:** Response Paper 8 assigned

IV **Nov 29:** Reid on personal identity.

- i **Readings discussed:** Reid, *Essays on the intellectual powers of man* (excerpts).
- ii **Assigned:** Final essay assigned.

V **Dec 4:** Parfit on personal identity.

- i **Readings discussed:** Parfit, *Reasons and persons* (excerpts).
- ii **Due:** Response Paper 8 due (end of day).

VI **Dec 6:** Parfit on personal identity.

- i **Readings discussed:** Parfit, *Reasons and persons* (excerpts).

VII **Dec 11:** (No class)

- i **Due:** Essay 3.

5. Course policies

5.1. Office hours

Office hours are a good way to ask questions about the course and to enrich your understanding of course material. I will hold office hours each Tuesday and Wednesday from 5-6PM in Furman Hall 113. Pre-booking is recommended, but not required, as priority will be given to pre-booked meetings. Book here: <https://calendly.com/dthorsta/office-hours>.

Your teaching assistants will also hold office hours. Their office hours will be announced during discussion sections.

5.2. Accessibility

This class respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities. If there are circumstances that make your learning environment and activities difficult, if you have medical information that you need to share with me, or if you need specific arrangements in case the building needs to be evacuated, please let me know. I am committed to creating an effective learning environment for all students, but I can only do so if you discuss your needs with me as early as possible. I promise to maintain the confidentiality of these discussions. If appropriate, also contact Student Access Services to get more information about specific accommodations.

5.3. Grade disputes

Students have the right to know why they have received the grades that they have been given, and to seek redress if necessary. If you are unsure why you have received a given grade, please follow exactly the procedure below:

- I **Wait 24 hours:** Please wait a minimum of 24 hours after grades are assigned before contacting your teaching assistant. This wait period is often helpful for processing feedback.
- II **Submit written request for clarification:** Write to your teaching assistant specifying the portions of the assignment and its grading that you would like to discuss. Please submit requests in writing to guide future conversations in a clear direction.
- III **Discuss with teaching assistant:** Your teaching assistant will meet with you to clarify any issues raised by your written request.
- IV **(Optional) Request re-grading:** If you are still unsatisfied with your grade, please send a written request to your teaching assistant to have your assignment re-graded, and include a specification of any points in the initial grading that you are unhappy with.
 - i **Re-grading:** If your teaching assistant judges there to be satisfactory grounds for re-grading, a different teaching assistant will be assigned to re-grade the assignment. This teaching assistant will not be provided with any information about the initial grading process. Whether your final grade increases, decreases, or stays the same, *the re-graded mark will stand, even if it is lower than your original mark.*
 - ii **Appealing re-grading denial:** If your teaching assistant judges there are insufficient grounds for re-grading, the original mark will stand. If you are still unsatisfied, please email the course instructor at this stage (but not before).

5.4. Academic integrity

All classes at Vanderbilt are governed by the undergraduate honor policy. The library has a helpful guide to avoiding plagiarism (<https://researchguides.library.vanderbilt.edu/plagiarism>).

In particular, **at no point may text written by an electronic tool**, whether a large-language model or otherwise, be used at any stage of drafting an assignment, even at stages prior to submission.

I recognize that students sometimes find themselves in difficult situations with too many deadlines to meet at once. If this happens to you, I would warmly encourage you to speak to your teaching assistant, or to myself. Often it is possible to arrange an extension.

I take academic dishonesty very seriously. Please don't cheat in my class.

6. Resources

- I Vanderbilt's **writing studio** offers individualized consultation on writing assignments. Highly recommended, but please plan ahead.

II **Your instructors:** We're here to help!