

**PHIL 100: Problems of Philosophy**  
**Spring 2019**  
MWF 9-9:50 in HUM 117

Instructor: Brian Miller  
Email: brianmiller@rice.edu  
Office: HUM 204  
Office hours: by appointment

### **Course Description**

This course is an introduction to some central issues in philosophy and to the methods that philosophers use to address those issues. We'll be asking three sorts of questions:

**Metaphysical questions:** What sorts of things exist, and what is the fundamental nature of those things?

**Epistemological questions:** What is knowledge? What is required in order to obtain knowledge? What should I believe?

**Ethical questions:** What is valuable in life? How should I act? How should we organize the political institutions in our society?

### **Course Objectives**

This course will introduce students to the methods and the subject matter of philosophy.

### **Course Materials**

All readings will be made available through Canvas.

### **Evaluation**

Student performance will be evaluated using three in-class exams and ten pop-quizzes.

Exam 1	2/15	25 points
Exam 2	3/22	25 points
Exam 3	4/19	25 points
10 pop-quizzes	[they pop]	2 points each

Exams: One week prior to each exam I will provide a list of possible essay prompts. On exam day you will be asked to respond to **two** of the possible prompts on the list. Exams will be closed-note and closed-book. Exams are non-cumulative. Responses will be written in blue-books (available in the Campus Store in the Student Center – be sure to bring your own blue-books). On exam day do not put your name on your blue-book until I say to.

Pop-quizzes: The quizzes will be quick and typically pretty easy, provided that you are present in class, have done the reading, and are paying attention to the lecture. They will typically be a surprise, but I might tell you that one is coming up. I might even tell you what the questions will be. In order to take a quiz and receive any credit for it, you must be present when it is administered (or have a document excuse). No make-up quizzes will be offered unless you have a documented excuse!

**Eleven quizzes will be given, and your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.**

Quizzes are graded coarsely: only full letter grades are possible (no +'s or -'s). Three correct answers is an A+, two correct answers is a B, one is a C, zero is a D, and quizzes not taken receive a 0. There's a big difference between a D (=1.34/ 2) and a 0 (=0/ 2), so come to class!

Grading: All exams, quizzes, and papers will be assigned letter-grades. Canvas will convert letter-grades to numerical scores. Final grades are determined by the weighted average of exam, paper, and quiz grades.

Grading Scale:

A+	97 - 100	B+	87 - <90	C+	77 - <80	D+	67 - <70
A	94 - <97	B	84 - <87	C	74 - <77	D	64 - <67
A-	90 - <94	B-	80 - <84	C-	70 - <74	D-	60 - <64

IMPORTANT: In order to pass this course you must: be present to take all three exams (or have a documented excuse for any missed exam) AND be present to take at least 6 quizzes (or have a documented excuse for your absence) AND receive a D or higher on the term paper .

### Helpful Resources

Jim Pryor (NYU) has a helpful guide for reading philosophy and another for writing philosophy. They can be found at:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

and

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Tyler Burge (UCLA) offers the following words of wisdom concerning the study of philosophy:

Whatever the reader's background and interests [...] I offer this council, firmly and insistently: patience. Patience is a primary virtue in philosophy. Genuine understanding is a rare and valuable commodity, not to be obtained on the cheap. One cannot reap philosophy's rewards breathlessly, or by looking for the intellectual equivalents of sound bites. Very large claims are at issue here, claims that bear on understanding some of the matters most important to being human. Understanding requires investing time, close reading, and reflection.

### Participation

You are encouraged to ask questions and to discuss the readings. The best way to learn philosophy is by doing philosophy, and part of doing philosophy is talking about philosophy. Come to class ready to talk and don't rely on others to carry the weight. Try answers on for size. Very often progress is made by first putting a bad answer on the table and then getting an idea of what is wrong with it and how it could be improved upon. Offering a "bad" answer doesn't make you bad at philosophy or mean you are being dumb or dense. Some of the most important works in philosophy were merely conversation starters, and some of the best and smartest philosophers have offered really "bad" answers to certain questions.

Here are some examples of fantastic questions that I've been asked:

"I don't understand what you just said. Would you please explain it again?"

"You just claimed that X, but I don't see why I should believe X. What can you say to convince me?"

"You just drew conclusion Y from premise X, but I don't see how X supports Y. What can you say to convince me?"

"I've lost the forest for the trees. Can you zoom out and tell me how this small point that we've been discussing fits in to the larger issues?"

And here is a list of every stupid question I've ever been asked:

[blank — there are no stupid questions]

## **Attendance Policy**

Your regular attendance is expected. This expectation is reflected in your grade through the quizzes: skip a class in which we have a quiz and you'll receive a 0 on that quiz.

## **Rice Honor Code**

Rice takes its honor code very seriously. All work completed in this course is subject to the Rice Honor Code pledge, which reads:

On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unauthorized aid on this assignment.

So what's authorized?

*Citation* Cite anything you'd like, but be sure to cite any sources that you've consulted; plagiarism is a heinous crime and will not be tolerated.

*Extent of collaboration* I encourage you to discuss relevant materials with anyone you'd like, and in particular I'd encourage you to discuss them with myself and with your colleagues in the course. I encourage you to solicit feedback on your written work and on your presentations from anyone you'd like. Philosophy is a collaborative enterprise, and it's really fun to talk about. But write your own essays and be sure to document any ideas that appear in your written work that aren't yours (i.e. cite appropriately). Collaboration on quizzes is prohibited. Placing quizzes or exams in a test bank for future students to consult (or anything of that sort) is prohibited.

*Multiple submission* The resubmission of any of your own work by that has been used in identical or similar form in fulfillment of any academic requirement at this or another institution is prohibited.

*Notes* Sharing class notes with other students in the class is generous, and I encourage it.

*Sources* All types of sources are permitted in your research. Cite appropriately.

If you're unclear about any of this, please talk to me about it.

## **Plagiarism Policy**

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. Instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Honor Council, and the Honor Council is not forgiving. For information regarding what constitutes plagiarism, see: [honor.rice.edu](http://honor.rice.edu) or talk to me.

## **Students with Disabilities**

1. Any student with a documented disability seeking academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain as confidential as possible. Students with disabilities will need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.

2. Any student with a disability requiring accommodations in this course is encouraged to contact me after class or during office hours. Additionally, students will also need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.
3. If you have a documented disability that will impact your work in this class, please contact me to discuss your needs. Additionally, you will need to register with the Disability Support Services Office in the Allen Center.
4. Just as university policy requires me to accommodate all documented disabilities, it prohibits me from accommodating any undocumented disabilities. It also prohibits me from retroactively imposing accommodations. For example, if your disability is first documented halfway through the semester I will not be able to make grade changes or other accommodations for any work completed earlier in the semester. To avoid these issues please be sure to document your disability with Disability Support Services as early as possible.

### **Syllabus Subject to Change!**

This syllabus is subject to change. Reasonable notice will be given. Any changes will be announced in class and/ or posted to Canvas.

### **Phones and The Laptops**

You are welcome to use your laptop, tablet or phone to take notes or to consult the day's readings. If you must do other things with your devices — text, email, check Facebook — then please sit in back so that you don't distract the more serious students. If your device usage is disruptive then you will be asked to put that device away or to leave. This policy is subject to change if the presence of devices in class leads to problems.

## Course Schedule:

The following schedule will be revised as we go along. Any changes will be announced in class and/or via Canvas. Please complete the readings for the date listed.

Date	Topic	Reading
1/7	Introduction, syllabus	none
1/9	Arguments and fallacies	my notes on arguments and fallacies
1/11	God? The Ontological Argument	Anselm – Proslogion §2,3,4,15; Guanilo’s reply in same .pdf; Pascal – Pensees
1/14	God? Pascal’s Wager	Pascal – Pensees (again); Hajek – Pascal’s Ultimate Wager
1/16	God? Analogical Teleological Argument	Paley – Natural Theology
1/18	God? Fine-tuned Teleological Argument	Manson – The Fine-tuning Argument p. 271-8
1/21	MLK Break	none
1/22	God? Fine-tuned Teleological Argument	Manson – The Fine-tuning Argument p. 271-4 (again), p. 278-end
1/25	God? Problem of Evil	Mackie – Evil and Omnipotence
1/28	Problem of Free Will	Kane Ch. 1 §4-6
1/30	Compatibilism	Kane Ch. 2
2/1	Compatibilism, Incompatibilism	Kane Ch. 3
2/4	Incompatibilism	review Kane Ch. 3
2/6	Libertarianism	Kane Ch. 4
2/8	Spring recess - no class	none
2/11	Free Will and Moral Responsibility	Kane Ch. 8
2/13	Free will catch-up day	TBA
2/15	<b>First Exam</b>	
2/18	External World Skepticism	Descartes – Meditation 1
2/20	External World Skepticism	Descartes – Meditation 1 (again); Hume – Of Scepticism With Regard to the Senses
2/22	External World Skepticism	Hume – Of Scepticism With Regard to the Senses (again)

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Reading</b>
2/25	External World Skepticism	Moore – Proof of an External World; Vogel – Skepticism and IBE
2/27	Non-observational Knowledge	Hume – Enquiry IV, V
3/1	Non-observational Knowledge	Strawson – The ‘Justification’ of Induction
3/4	Non-observational Knowledge	Goodman – The New Riddle of Induction
3/6	Non-observational Knowledge	Harman – Inference to the Best Explanation
3/8	Knowledge of Minds	Russell – Argument from Analogy
3/11	Spring break	none
3/13	Spring break	none
3/15	Spring break	none
3/18	Knowledge of Minds	Kripke – Wittgenstein and Other Minds
3/20	Knowledge of Minds	Paul – John Doe and Richard Doe
3/22	<b>Exam 2</b>	
3/25	God and Morality	Plato – Euthyphro
3/27	God and Morality	SEP – Theological Voluntarism §3
3/29	Relativism and Subjectivism	Rachels – Challenge of Cultural Relativism, Subjectivism in Ethics §1-3
4/1	Utilitarianism	Mill – Utilitarianism (selection)
4/3	Problems for Utilitarianism	Williams – Utilitarianism and Integrity
4/5	Scope of Utilitarianism	Singer – Famine and Affluence
4/8	Kantian Ethics	Velleman – A Brief Introduction to Kantian Ethics
4/10	Problems for Kantian Ethics	Nagel – War and Massacre
4/12	Justice and Politics	Rawls – Theory of Justice
4/15	Justice and Politics	Frankfurt – Equality as a Moral Ideal
4/17	Justice and Politics	Nozick – Justice and Entitlement
4/19	<b>Exam 3</b>	