

# Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy

Mount Holyoke College

Spring 2015

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Office hours: Tuesday/Thursday, 3:00–4:00 p.m., and by appointment

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## MEETINGS:

Tuesday/Thursday, 1:15 p.m.–2:30 p.m., Reese 302

## DESCRIPTION:

This course will explore topics that philosophers have grappled with for thousands of years, and that still undergird (or sometimes threaten to undermine) our understanding of the world, our knowledge, ourselves, and each other. In historical and contemporary texts of the Western intellectual tradition, we will discuss questions such as: What, if anything, can we know about the world around us? Are any of our actions free, or are they causally determined by things beyond our control? What accounts for our personal identity? And what makes for a happy, flourishing life? In considering these questions, we will learn to do philosophy ourselves, developing our own careful reflections on these issues.

## OBJECTIVES:

The principal aims of this course are to provide you with a “sample platter” of philosophical issues and to help you to begin to develop your capacities for doing philosophy. You will learn to read texts carefully and critically, you will sharpen your skills at analytical writing, and you will start to form your own answers to some tricky philosophical questions. The readings, assignments, and class sessions will all contribute to realizing these aims.

## TEXTS:

All books are available for purchase at the Odyssey Bookshop. I am also working to make reserve copies available at the Mount Holyoke College Library.

- Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Hackett Publishing Company; 3rd edition (October 1, 1993). ISBN-10: 0872201929. Abbreviated as “DM” on the schedule, below.
- Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Eric Steinberg, Hackett Publishing Co.; 2nd edition (November 1, 1993), ISBN-10: 0872202291. Abbreviated as “HE” on the schedule, below.
- John Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. (March 15, 1978). ISBN-10: 0915144530. Abbreviated as “PI” on the schedule, below.

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Lesley Brown, trans. David Ross, Oxford University Press, USA; Revised edition (July 15, 2009), ISBN-10: 0199213615. (Also available as an E-Book through the MHC Library.) Abbreviated as “NE” on the schedule, below.
- I will distribute all other readings electronically through the course Moodle site.

## READINGS:

Readings listed on the schedule below are required unless otherwise noted. You should plan to do the readings in advance of the lecture for which they are listed. Be sure to give yourself ample time to complete the readings. Philosophical writing often makes for—and benefits from—slow reading. In fact, I recommend a three-stage approach:

1. *Skim*  
Give the reading a quick once-over. Try to develop a general sense of what the author is claiming and how he or she is arguing for that claim.
2. *Close reading for comprehension*  
Give the reading a second look. Read slowly and carefully, underline things, scribble things in the margins, and so forth. Your goal is to try to really *understand* the author’s position. Try explaining the chapter/paper/article to a friend (ideally someone who hasn’t also read the chapter/paper/article). This is often a good test of your own comprehension.
3. *Close reading for critical engagement*  
Give the reading a third look. Your goal this time is to try to find all the problems with the chapter/paper/article. For each claim the author makes, consider what evidence or argumentation he or she provides and whether it is adequate. Try to think up counterexamples to the author’s claims. If the chapter/paper/article is itself critical (*e.g.*, it is an argument against some philosophical position), try to think how the person the author is criticizing might respond.

Reading each paper three times may sound absurdly tedious, but I guarantee that doing so will be beneficial.

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

*Note:* any handouts used during lectures will be distributed as hardcopies but will also be available at that time in an electronic format (typically a .pdf available on the Moodle).

## Introduction

- Session 1 (T, 1/20): What is philosophy?  
– *Reading:* none required in advance
- Session 2 (Th, 1/22): An introduction to philosophical reasoning  
– *Reading:* none required in advance

## Unit I: Epistemology

- Session 3 (T, 1/27): snow day!

- *Reading*: none.
- *Recommended*: Millhauser, “Snowmen”
- Session 4 (Th, 1/29): External world skepticism—the problem
  - *Reading*: Descartes, First Meditation [DM pp. 13–17]
- Session 5 (T, 2/3): External world skepticism—the Cartesian solution (classical foundationalism)
  - *Reading*: Descartes, Meditations 2–5 [DM pp. 17–47]. (I will provide directions for what to focus on, as this is a lot to read.)
- Session 6 (Th, 2/5): External world skepticism—“relevant alternatives” solutions
  - *Reading*: Stine, “Skepticism, relevant alternatives, and deductive closure.”
- Session 7 (T, 2/10): Skepticism about induction—Hume’s challenge
  - *Reading*: Hume, *Enquiry*, secs. iv and v (part I) [HE pp. 15–31]
- Session 8 (Th, 2/12): Skepticism about induction—responses
  - *Reading*: Hume, *Enquiry*, sec. v, part I (reread), Salmon, “An Encounter with David Hume,” and Reichenbach, “The pragmatic justification of induction.”
- Session 9 (T, 2/17): Disagreement (with special guest Professor Vavova!)
  - *Reading*: Feldman, “Reasonable Religious Disagreements”; Christensen, “Disagreement as Evidence: The Epistemology of Controversy” (skip sections 4.1 and 4.2); Christensen, “Disagreement, Question-Begging, and Epistemic Self-Criticism” (just the introduction).
- Session 10 (Th, 2/19): Disagreement and Deference
  - *Reading*: review readings for session 9 as needed.

## Unit II: Ethics (part 1)

- Session 11 (T, 2/24): Aristotle’s ethics—virtue theory and the doctrine of the mean
  - *Reading*: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk I.13 and Bk II.1–9 [pp. 19–37] plus the “table of virtues” (.pdf on course website).
  - *Recommended*: skim NE Bk III.6–12 and Bk IV.1–8.
- Session 12 (Th, 2/26): Should ethical theory be a guide to action? (Challenges to virtue ethics)
  - *Readings*: Hursthouse, “Normative Virtue Ethics.”
  - *Recommended*: Louden, “On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics.”
- Session 13 (T, 3/3): Review
  - *Reading*: none

- Session 14 (Th, 3/5): **EXAM #1** (in class)
  - *Reading*: none
- Session 15 (T, 3/10): Aristotle’s ethics, cont.—the good human and the good for humans
  - *Reading*: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I [NE pp. 3–22].
- Session 16 (Th, 3/12): Why think humans are special?
  - *Reading*: Singer, “All animals are equal” and Pollan, “An Animal’s Place.”

SPRING BREAK: 3/14–3/22

### Unit III: Metaphysics

- Session 17 (T, 3/24): Personal identity
  - *Reading*: Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*, “The First Night” [PI pp. 1–18].
- Session 18 (Th, 3/26): Personal identity, cont.
  - *Reading*: Perry, *Dialogue*, “The Second Night” [PI pp. 19–36].
- Session 19 (T, 3/31): Personal identity, cont.
  - *Reading*: Perry, *Dialogue*, “The Third Night” [PI pp. 37–49].
- Session 20 (Th, 4/2): Personal identity, cont.
  - *Reading*: none (review previous readings as needed)
- Session 21 (T, 4/7): Racial identity and gender identity
  - *Reading*: Mills, “But what are you *really*? The metaphysics of race” and Witt, “What is gender essentialism?”
- Session 22 (Th, 4/9): Social structures and personal agency
  - *Reading*: Rorty and Wong, “Aspects of Identity and Agency”
- Session 23 (T, 4/14): Free will/determinism—the problem; hard determinism
  - *Reading*: Holbach, “The Illusion of Free Will,” Hume, *Enquiry* sec. viii (HE pp. 54–62, from “It is universally allowed...” to “...in every step of our behavior”), and “Neuroscience vs. Philosophy” (<http://www.nature.com/news/2011/110831/full/477023a.html>)
- Session 24 (Th, 4/16): Free will/determinism—incompatibilism; libertarianism
  - *Reading*: Chisholm, “Human Freedom and the Self”
  - *Recommended*: Van Inwagen, “The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism”

## Unit IV: Ethics (part 2)

- Session 24 (T, 4/21): Freedom and moral responsibility
  - *Reading*: Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”
  - *Recommended*: Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Freedom”
- Session 26 (Th, 4/23): What makes for a good human life? And what is the value of philosophy?
  - *Reading*: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk X.6–8; Russell, “The Value of Philosophy.”

*Reading period: 4/28–4/30*

*Final exam period 4/30–5/4 (EXAM #2 will be self-scheduled during exam period.)*

## REQUIREMENTS:

*Note*: you must pass each portion of the course in order to pass the course.

- Attendance & Participation: 10%
  - *Note*: this includes an online discussion component; see below.
- Papers: 30% total
  - Paper #1: 10%
  - Paper #2: 20%
- Exams: 60% total
  - Exam #1: 25%
  - Exam #2: 35%

(For details on these items, see below)

## ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION:

- Attendance at lectures is required. (Also: be sure to bring the readings with you to class.) If you cannot attend a lecture, for whatever reason, please contact me *as soon as possible*.
- Participation in lecture is strongly encouraged—even if it is simply to tell me that you have no idea what I just said. (Also: if you’re thinking this, you’re probably not the only one.)
- You should expect to disagree from time to time—with things we read or discuss, with other people in class (including me), and perhaps on occasion even with yourself. These disagreements may be *vigorous* but must always be *reasoned* and *respectful*.
- **Online discussion**: Over the course of the semester, you will be required to *post* twice on the discussion forum and *comment* twice—so four contributions total. (Your comments must be in response to another student’s post or comment.) You should submit one comment and one post before spring break and one comment and one post after spring break (3/14–3/22), but before session 26 (4/23). In your posts and comments, I’d like to see you raising questions, presenting arguments, or simply expressing bewilderment about the material we’ve covered in the readings or in lectures. The online discussion forum is one way in which you will show me your engagement with the course. *Additional posts or comments beyond the required four will count extra toward the participation component of your grade.*

- *A note on gadgets:* laptops, iPads, and so forth are permitted in class as long as you're using them to take notes, to refer to assigned readings, or to run software that assists with either of these functions.<sup>1</sup>

## **PAPERS:**

You will write two short papers, each of which will focus on an element or elements of philosophical writing. The aim of these assignments is to develop your skill at *doing* philosophy. Each paper will be about one to two pages in length (more details forthcoming with each assignment). Papers will be due as .pdfs on Moodle.

## **EXTENSION POLICY**

- Three “no-questions asked” 24-hour extensions per semester. (For use on papers.)
- These may be combined for a three-day extension on one assignment or broken up among multiple assignments. *You must request the extension in advance of the deadline.*
- No other extensions (except for exceptional circumstances)
- Unexcused late papers lose 1/3 grade per day or portion thereof (*e.g.*, an “A” paper turned in during the first 24 hours after a deadline will receive an “A–”).
- No late work accepted after the next paper is due or exam is held.

## **EXAMS:**

There will be a midterm exam (covering the Introduction and Unit I) and a final exam (covering Units II and III). They will primarily test for having learned course content (namely, the material we've read for class and discussed in lecture), but each may include a short “doing philosophy” component, drawing on the skills developed through the papers.

## **IMPORTANT DATES:**

- Wednesday, 2/4: Paper #1 topic/instructions posted on Moodle (by 8 a.m.)
- Wednesday, 2/11: Paper #1 due as .pdf on Moodle (by 8 a.m.)
- Thursday, 3/5: EXAM #1 (in class).
- Monday, 3/30: Paper #2 topic/instructions posted on Moodle (by 8 p.m.)
- Monday, 4/6: Paper #2 due as .pdf on Moodle (by 8 a.m.)
- EXAM #2: self-scheduled during exam period (4/30–5/4).

For other important college-wide dates, consult the Registrar's academic calendar.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See <http://bit.ly/1ihJUxL> for some evidence that suggests multitasking (*e.g.*, looking at Facebook during class) is bad for learning.

<sup>2</sup><http://www.mtholyoke.edu/registrar/calendar>.

## ACADEMIC HONESTY:

As students at Mount Holyoke College, you have each agreed to live by the following code of honor: “I will honor myself, my fellow students, and Mount Holyoke College by acting responsibly, honestly, and respectfully in both my words and deeds.” Pages 55–59 of the Student Handbook<sup>3</sup> describe the application of the Honor Code to academic matters. In particular, note that “It is the responsibility of each student to read *A Guide to the Uses and Acknowledgment of Sources* and the *Student Handbook*, which define the standards adopted by the College; to observe the established procedures in preparing assignments and writing papers and examinations, and to submit as one’s own only that work that she or he has originated” (p. 56). I will expect you to be mindful of these responsibilities when producing work for this course. Additionally, I will expect you to have reviewed *The Proper Use of Sources Tutorial*.<sup>4</sup> Remember: when in doubt, cite—and, of course, you can always check with me. Whatever you do, don’t plagiarize. ***Plagiarism could result in failure on the assignment or in the course as a whole.***

For some additional information about academic responsibility (written for international students in particular, but good for everyone to read) see: [http://www.mtholyoke.edu/sites/default/files/global/docs/academic\\_responsibility\\_pamphlet\\_for\\_intl\\_students.pdf](http://www.mtholyoke.edu/sites/default/files/global/docs/academic_responsibility_pamphlet_for_intl_students.pdf)

## ASSISTANCE:

- You should always feel free to contact me about any questions or concerns you have about the course. Write me an email, visit my office hours, intercept me on campus!
- The SAW (*Speaking, Arguing, Writing*) Center can provide assistance with, well, your speaking, arguing, and writing. You can schedule an appointment or swing by during their drop-in hours.<sup>5</sup>
- The English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program<sup>6</sup> provides support for Mount Holyoke students whose first language is not English. For more information, contact the ESOL Coordinator, Mark Shea ([markshea@mtholyoke.edu](mailto:markshea@mtholyoke.edu)).
- If you have a disability and would like to request accommodations, please contact AccessAbility Services, located in Wilder Hall B4, at (413)-538-2646 or [accessability-services@mtholyoke.edu](mailto:accessability-services@mtholyoke.edu). If you are eligible, they will give you an accommodation letter which you should bring to me as soon as possible. That way we can work together to make sure all of the course content is accessible to you.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup><http://www.mtholyoke.edu/sites/default/files/deanofstudents/docs/mhcstudenthandbook.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup><http://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/ris/Plagiarism/>.

<sup>5</sup>You can find out more here: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/saw/peer/center>.

<sup>6</sup><http://www.mtholyoke.edu/esol>.

<sup>7</sup>More information on AccessAbility Services here: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/accessability>.