



PHIL 151 Introduction to Philosophy

Winter 20/21

December 28, 2020 - January 22, 2021

Dr. William J. Devlin

Location: Online

Course Credits: 3

E-mail: WDevlin@BRIDGEW.EDU



The Thinker (Auguste Rodin, 1903)

Who are we? What makes me, *me*? What can we know? Do we really know the things we assume we know? What is the nature of the world and of reality? Does God exist? What is the good life? What is the right thing to do in certain moral situations? These questions, and many others, are addressed in the study of philosophy. This course introduces the study of philosophy through the examination of specific questions, issues, and ideas regarding the human being, the world, and the relation between them. We will cover such philosophical topics as epistemology (What can we know? How do we come to know things? How do I justify my beliefs?), metaphysics (What is reality? Who is God? Who am I?), and ethics (Are morals relative or universal? What makes a certain act moral and another act immoral?) through readings from

various philosophers throughout the history of philosophy, and through films that demonstrate philosophical positions, arguments, and attitudes (Meets: Core Humanities Requirement)

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will be able to:

1. Identify and differentiate three major branches of philosophy: Ethics, Epistemology, and Metaphysics
2. Identify, describe, and recall major thinkers, schools, core philosophical questions, terms, concepts and positions in the three major branches of philosophy specified above.
3. Read and comprehend philosophical texts, both classical and contemporary.
4. Discuss core philosophical questions and problems, such as: How do we justify an action as morally good?; Is knowledge entirely dependent upon experience?; Are persons completely defined as complex physical systems or do they have properties not reducible to anything physical?
5. Explain, analyze, critically evaluate and defend positions on central philosophical problems.
6. Compose clear and concise explanations and arguments concerning central philosophical problems.

TEXTBOOK

In *lieu* of a textbook, web links to the readings will be posted on our Blackboard course-site. Students then have the opportunity to either do the readings online or print out hard copies. Each reading will be posted in the appropriate topic folder (e.g., virtue ethics; deontology; etc.) that is assigned for the lecture of that topic. Required readings are drawn from The Internet Classics Archive (classics.mit.edu) and Early Modern Philosophy (earlymoderntexts.com).

For those interested, when available, you will find supplemental resources for a given topic posted on our Blackboard course-site. These resources range from secondary essays concerning a given topic (e.g., links to entries from *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*) to philosophical thought experiments (e.g., the personal identity game of staying alive) to brief videos offering light-hearted presentations of complex philosophical arguments and ideas (e.g., selections from 8-Bit philosophy, Monty Python, and Orson Welles narrating Plato).

SUCCESS IN THIS COURSE

Success in this course is dependent upon satisfying the following conditions: 1. Meet the technology requirements outlined below; 2. Complete the exams on time; 3. Complete the readings on time; 4. Follow *and take notes on* the lectures; 5. Ask and answer many questions on the discussion board on time and *throughout the entire semester*.

COURSE FORMAT

This course is designed to be a simulation of a face-to-face introductory course to philosophy. Each topic covered in the course (and each exam) appears as a separate topic on Blackboard. Each topic will include audio/power point lectures. Each exam is its own separate topic with due dates (due dates are also listed in the course schedule below). Make sure to pay close attention to those dates—after the date has passed, the exams/quiz become unavailable. The discussion board is organized by the daily/weekly topics and can be located in the Discussion Forums. The discussion questions are presented at the end of each lecture. Students have until the deadline of the corresponding exam for that set to contribute to the discussion topic.

REQUIREMENTS

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

All students, in order to take this course, must have the following:

- A functional BSU email address, checked regularly
- A functional BSU Blackboard account
- Enrollment in the appropriate Blackboard section of the course (PHIL151)
- Regular and reliable internet and computer access

With any technology questions or issues call 508-531-2555, the IT Help desk at BSU. They can help you with any technical questions you have, either about Blackboard or any other relevant technological issues. I do not provide any technical assistance.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Because this is an online course, it will be crucial for you to listen to audio/power point lectures, follow the power point lectures accordingly, complete the readings in a timely manner, prepare and complete the exams. In addition, all students will be required to post regularly in our Blackboard discussion forums. This is the optimal way for us to simulate class discussion, and is essential for succeeding in this course.

LECTURES

Lectures will be offered for each topic. The lectures help to simulate the classroom setting to introduce you to the material in the course. Lectures can be found in the corresponding Topic folders on our Blackboard course site.

Students are required to listen to and follow the lectures that are presented. Blackboard records access to these lectures. Blackboard Course Evaluation reports provide objective, time-stamped, data to help verify who followed the lectures, which version of the lecture was used, whether or not students accessed the readings, etc.

Students who have taken this class in the past recommend that you treat the lectures as a classroom simulation so that you take your own notes when listening to the audio lecture and following the power point presentation. Creating your own notes will help you understand the readings, post insightful and higher-quality discussion points, and perform well on the exams.

To further help simulate the classroom setting, lectures are posted three days per week—Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays—by 7am (see **Course Schedule** below for exact dates). By doing so, we can follow a scheduled routine for when we can expect lectures.

READINGS

Readings are assigned throughout the semester. A link to each reading set will be posted in the corresponding Topic on our Blackboard course site. The reading assignments are also listed in the **Course Schedule** below. Reading is essential to understand the lectures, follow and contribute to discussion, *and perform well on the exams*. Students who fail to complete the readings often perform poorly on all of those aspects of the course. Please read carefully, and ask any questions about the readings in the appropriate Discussion forum.

GRADING

The graded elements of the course are as follows:

1. Exam 1: 25%
2. Exam 2: 25%
3. Exam 3: 25%
4. Discussion posts 25%

EXAMS

Students are expected to take 3 topical exams. Dates for these exams are below. **After these dates pass, the exams will be taken offline. There are no extensions for the exams.** Students can review their exams—including their correct and incorrect answers—after the deadline passes.

- Exam 1: available online by 7am Friday, _____ until 11:30pm Monday, _____
- Exam 2: available online by 7am Friday, _____ until 11:30pm Monday, _____
- Exam 3: available online by 7am Friday, _____ until 11:30pm Monday, _____

Each exam will consist of multiple choice questions (30 questions per exam). Questions will cover material from (a) the readings; (b) the audio/power point lectures; and (c) discussion posts. It is imperative that you keep up with all aspects of the course for the purposes of the exams.

Three important points about these exams:

- 1) Each exam can only be taken **once** and only in one two-hour sitting. You cannot take an exam multiple times or over several sittings. Please make sure that you reserve a time of two hours for yourself to take each exam when they are posted.
- 2) The dates and times are **not** changeable; you must be available to take them during these periods in order to take this course. After these times, the exam will no longer be accessible to you—no late attempts are possible. Do not request extensions. Students who do not complete the exam in the available timeframe automatically get a zero for the exam. No extra credit for the exams is offered.
- 3) You must make sure to take the exams on a computer that works, using a reliable internet connection. It is your responsibility to make sure the grade was recorded. If there is a technical problem, you must report it to me immediately so I can try and fix it from my end (this happens, but only rarely). If the deadline passes and you have no recorded grade for the exam, you will get a zero for that work.

Each exam will be posted on a given Friday with a corresponding study guide to help you with your review and preparation for the exams. Among other things, students in the past have found that it is helpful to prepare answers to the study guide questions ahead of time (including flash cards for definitions), as this will help elevate one's performance on the exams.

DISCUSSION BOARDS (*PHILOSOPHICAL FORUMS*)

I expect you will have lots of questions, lots of answers, and lots of reflections about the material! Those questions, answers, and reflections will be dealt with in the discussion board forums. I have set up many forums, and you should look at them regularly, ideally several times a week.

For general course questions, use the **Admin/Logistics Forum**; this forum is for logistical questions regarding course schedule, content release, etc. Most answers will be found in this syllabus, but in case they are not, use this forum.

For general technical problems you can post in the *student-only* **Technical Forum**. This forum is used for the purpose of students communicating with one another to resolve any technical issues. It is likely that I will not be able to assist you with such issues, as they are often rooted in browser issues, computer issues, etc. If you are looking for a formal/professional solution, contact BSU's IT Help Desk at 508-531-2555.

Together, the remaining forums constitute the *Philosophical Forums*. These are the graded forums as these will be used to discuss the philosophical questions and issues to be examined and analyzed this semester. These *Philosophical Forums* include:

Introduction Forum

Ethics Exam Set

Topic 1: Introduction to Ethics
Topic 2: Virtue Ethics
Topic 3: Deontology
Topic 4: Consequential.
Topic 5: Existentialism

Epistemology Exam Set

Topic 6: Introduction to Epistemology
Topic 7: Plato's Cave
Topic 8: Rationalism
Topic 9: Empiricism
Topic 10: Skepticism

Metaphysics Exam Set

Topic 11: Introduction to Metaphysics
Topic 12: Ontological Arg
Topic 13: Teleological Arg.
Topic 14: Selfhood

Here, you will ask questions, help answer other students' questions, follow up on other comments in the respective category. Each of these forums corresponds to a Topic in the course and an appropriate lecture(s) (and will be available when that Topic arises—see **Course Schedule** below). At the end of each lecture, I offer "Discussion questions". Students are to address and answer these questions in the corresponding forum in the Discussion board. While you are encouraged to address the discussion questions I've posted, you are not obligated to specifically answer those questions. Instead, you are also welcome to post your own questions, thoughts, and reflections on the readings and lectures.

Important points about the *Philosophical Forums*:

GRADING

1) Excluding the forum, “Introduction” (where posting is optional), each student is required to participate in *at least eight* of the *Philosophical Forums* (Topics 1-13) listed above. I encourage you to post many times in each of the forums you choose. Students who participate in less than eight discussion topic forums will automatically fail the discussion portion of their final grade. Eight forums (one post per each forum) is the bare *minimum* to form a basis for discussion points. However, students who seek to excel in their discussion grade will post *more* than eight times throughout the semester.

2) The quantity of posts is important. But *quality* of posts are just as (if not more) important. While I encourage politeness and proper etiquette on the discussion forums, posts that simply consist of “thank you”, “you’re welcome”, “I agree”, or “yes”, “no”, etc. will not be counted towards the calculation of final grade discussion points. Likewise, discussion posts that clearly indicate a failure to do the readings, listen to the audio lecture, and follow the power point presentation will not be counted. Please make sure your posts demonstrate (a) that you have completed the readings; (b) that they are informed by the lectures; and (c) a proper amount of time and consideration to thoughtful reflection and critical evaluation.

3) For those students who have submitted quality posts in at least eight forums, final grade discussion points are calculated in the following way: at the end of the course I check how many posts each qualifying student made (Blackboard keeps track of this). I take the average number, and then create a grading scale based on that average. Students who post more than the average amount get a better discussion grade, and those who post less get a worse discussion grade.

POSTING

4) At the end of each lecture, I offer discussion questions (located on the last slide of each lecture). *There should only be one thread per discussion question.* This entails two important points:

First, if you would like to post on a discussion question that has not been posted yet, then please feel free to create a new thread with some reference to the discussion question title. For example, if you’re addressing a discussion question on Aristotle’s account of happiness, title the thread “Aristotle and Happiness” and compose a response. When you do, please make sure that you only address *one discussion question per thread*. If you want to address two different discussion questions, do not post both of your answers in one thread. Instead, create two separate threads. For example, if you would like to discuss a question on Aristotle’s account of happiness and a further question on Aristotle’s virtues, then create two different threads—one on happiness question one on virtue. If you address multiple discussion questions in a single thread, your thread will be deleted and you will receive zero credit.

Second, if a classmate has already created a thread on that discussion question, **do not create a new thread**. Instead, post in that student’s thread. Consolidating the number of threads is in your best interest as it not only allows you to hone in on one thread when you want to say something about that discussion question, but it is also helpful for you when reviewing discussion forums

for the exams. Please note that I will delete multiple threads on the same discussion topic, and only keep the original thread. So, you will neither be graded on, nor receive any credit for, a redundant thread/post. Likewise, if you notice that there are two threads on the same discussion question and you wish to contribute to that topic, *please post in the thread that was created first*. Your post will be deleted if it is in the second, redundant thread.

5) When posting on an already existing thread, *please be sure to address the conversation already taking place in the thread*. This will help to ensure a real discussion is taking place in the discussion forums. A post that does not address the content of the discussion that has already taken place will *not* count towards your discussion grade.

6) Each discussion forum will open when its corresponding lecture(s) opens. Posting options for a discussion forum will close when its corresponding exam closes.

7) The Introduction forum will remain open for the duration of the semester. The purpose of this forum is to initiate opening conversations about philosophy as we begin the course and to give engaged students a platform to continue discussions about any philosophical topic they may be interested in, even when the other relevant forums have closed. Any threads created or posts submitted in this forum will *not* count towards your discussion grade.

A reminder about email: Please do not email me with course content questions, technical problems or general questions. *I will not answer them*. Instead, please use the discussion forums. The reason for this is simple: if you have a question about some aspect of the material, I know others may have that same question. You can help by posting it, and I will help by answering it so that everyone can benefit from the answer. However, if you have a specific question of some other type (e.g. personal emergency), please feel free to email me.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

One of the foundational strengths of the University is its emphasis on academic and personal integrity. Academic dishonesty is an affront to our integrity and is considered a violation of our Academic Integrity Policy (see <http://catalog.bridgew.edu/content.php?catoid=10&navoid=970>). As such, academic dishonesty is *not* tolerated in my course or at the University in general.

The University defines *academic dishonesty* as “an attempt to misrepresent one’s efforts on any academic assignment or exercise submitted for evaluation.” Such attempts include, but are not limited to, plagiarism and cheating. *Plagiarism* is defined as “intentionally or knowingly presenting the work of another as one’s own.” This includes, but is not limited to, plagiarizing discussion posts, exams, essays, journal reflections, etc. *Cheating* is defined as “intentionally using or attempting to use prohibited materials or information in any academic exercise.” This includes, but is not limited to, cheating on exams, quizzes, and tests (definitions retrieved from “What is Academic Honesty?” *Bridgewater State University*. Accessed 11 November 2017. <https://www.bridgew.edu/academic-integrity/academic-dishonesty>).

There are at least three reasons why you should not commit academic dishonesty of any kind (especially plagiarism and cheating):

1. The most significant consequence to academic dishonesty is the detriment to your intellectual, academic, and moral development: you will fail to learn anything, your academic development will become hindered, and your ethical integrity will become corrupted.
2. Instead of being dishonest, honestly giving credit to a secondary source in writing assignments (such as essays, online discussion posts, etc.) to help develop your own independent reflection and critical thinking will often help to *elevate* your work and your grade. In academia, proper citations will help to demonstrate that you have done research to assist your goal of understanding. As such, you will often receive a higher credit for giving credit to a source through citation.
3. Bridgewater State University severely (but justifiably) sanctions (i.e., penalizes or punishes) academic dishonesty. Students guilty of academic dishonesty immediately *fail my entire course*, regardless of your grade in any other assignment in my course. Furthermore, per rules of the University and per my duties as a professor, I am obligated to report you and the violation to the appropriate figures of the administration at the University. Sanctions from the University range from academic suspension, dismissal from the degree program, and permanent dismissal from the University. Having served as a committee member on academic review panels for student violations of the Academic Integrity Policy, I implore you to not commit academic dishonesty of any kind in my course or at the University in general.

For details concerning the violation of the Academic Integrity Policy (reporting, sanctions, etc.), please see here: <http://catalog.bridgew.edu/content.php?catoid=10&navoid=970#sanctions>

Finally, if you have questions or are unsure of the definitions of academic dishonesty, plagiarism, or cheating, or if you are uncertain about the rules of citation or what it means to give credit to secondary sources, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am always eager to help clarify and promote academic integrity.

ENGAGING IN PHILOSOPHY

If you have completed reading through the syllabus, understood the demands of the course, and found that you are willing and able to continue (and succeed) in this course, then welcome to PHIL 151! Above all, philosophy is a *fun* and *exciting* topic for those students putting in the heavy amount of reflection and abstract reasoning that is involved. The Ancient Greek philosophers maintain that philosophy begins with a sense of wonder and awe with the world around us. I hope you have that sense of wonder and are ready to begin to pursue what that sense means and what it entails!

COURSE SCHEDULE

PART I: ETHICS

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION & VIRTUE ETHICS

Monday

Topic 1: Introductions

Lecture: “Introduction: Philosophy: The What and the Why”

Lecture: “Introduction to Ethics”

Tuesday

Topic 2: Virtue Ethics

Lecture: “Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* I”

Lecture: “Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* II”

Readings

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I-II

Wednesday

Topic 3: Deontology

Lecture: “Kant’s *Grounding* I”

Lecture: “Kant’s *Grounding* II”

Readings:

Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Chapters 1-2

Thursday

Topic 4: Consequentialism

Lecture: “Mill’s *Utilitarianism*”

Readings:

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapters 1-2

Friday

Topic 5: Existentialism

Lecture: “Introduction to Existentialism”

Lecture: “Sartre: ‘Existentialism as a Humanism’”

Readings

Jean-Paul Sartre, “Existentialism as a Humanism”

Exam 1

Study Guide posted

Exam 1 posted

Due Date: Monday, Week 2

PART II: EPISTEMOLOGY

WEEK 2: EPISTEMOLOGY

Monday

Exam 1 due by 11:30pm

Topic 6: Introduction to Epistemology

Lecture: "Introduction to Epistemology I"

Tuesday

Topic 6: Introduction to Epistemology

Lecture: "Introduction to Epistemology II"

Wednesday

Topic 7: Plato's Cave

Lecture: "Plato's Allegory of the Cave"

Readings:

Plato, *Republic* (pp.21-43)

Thursday

Topic 8: Rationalism

Lecture: "Descartes' *Meditations* I"

Readings:

Rene Descartes, *Meditations*, Book 1

Friday

Topic 8: Rationalism

Lecture: "Descartes' *Meditations* II"

Readings:

Rene Descartes, *Meditations*, Book 2

WEEK 3: EPISTEMOLOGY II

Monday

Topic 9: Empiricism

Lecture: "Locke's Empiricism"

Readings:

John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, (pp.53-61)

Tuesday

Topic 10: Skepticism

Lecture: "Hume's Empiricism"

Readings:

David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section 4

Wednesday

Topic 10: Skepticism (part 2)

Lecture: “Hume’s Skepticism”

Readings:

David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section 4

Thursday

Exam 2 Study Guide posted

Friday, June 19th

Exam 2

Exam 2 posted

Due Monday, Week 4

PART III: METAPHYSICS

WEEK 4: METAPHYSICS

Monday

Exam 2 due by 11:30pm

Topic 11: Introduction to Metaphysics

Lecture: “Introduction to Metaphysics I”

Lecture: “Introduction to Metaphysics II”

No Readings

Tuesday

Topic 12: The Ontological Argument

Lecture: “The Ontological Argument for the Existence of God”

Readings:

Rene Descartes, *Meditations*, Chapter 5

“Gaunilo’s Reply”

Wednesday

Topic 13: The Teleological Argument

Lecture: “The Teleological Argument for the Existence of God: David Hume”

Readings:

David Hume, *Dialogues*, Part II

Thursday

Topic 14: Selfhood

Lecture: “Personal Identity”

Friday

Exam 3

Study Guide posted

Exam 3 posted, Due Monday