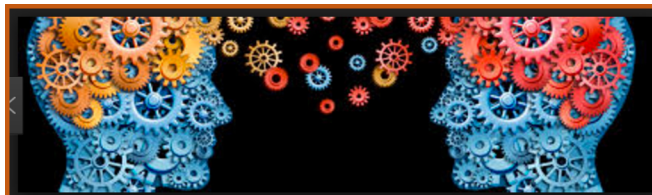


Philosophy 103: Introduction to Philosophy

Fall 2017

T/R 2-3:15pm Swan Hall



General Education Outcomes

Humanities (A3)
Writing (B1)

WELCOME!!

Philosophy comes from the ancient Greek words for wisdom (*Sophia*) and devotion (*philo*), so traditionally the term meant something like a love of wisdom. Today we tend to view philosophy as a way of seeking to understand the nature of reality itself, where reality *includes* our very way of thinking about it.

Does this sound confusing? It should, because once we call our own perspectives, or ways of thinking, into question, we get into thorny territory with what we can claim to know about the world beyond our personal experience. **WARNING!!!** Philosophers tend to question common sense and other things that most people take for granted. In fact, some of you might genuinely be surprised and perhaps unsettled by the extent to which a little philosophy can undermine much of what we assume to be normal. Try to keep your mind open as we upend many of the ideas that underpin everyday life. And remember: common sense once told us that the earth was flat, that the sun revolved around the earth, and that slavery was an acceptable means by which to operate a plantation. Common sense, while necessary, is overrated. Philosophy will show you why.

WHO'S RUNNING THIS CLASS?

Instructor

Dr. Cheryl Foster cherylf@uri.edu 401-874-4022
Office Hours: Chafee 225 Wednesday 10:30-noon

Class Teaching Assistants

Angie Bedigian angela_bedigian@my.uri.edu 774-280-4294
Office Hours: Carothers Library Commons Tuesday 3:30-4:30pm

Mike Grenier mgrenier94@my.uri.edu 401-529-5649
Office Hours: 401 Café (100 Fortin Road) Thursday 12:30pm-1:30pm

Harry Miller harry_miller@my.uri.edu 401-829-7619
Office Hours: 193 Degrees (Memorial Union) Tuesday 10-11am

📖 Required Book: Stephen Law, *The Philosophy Gym*
This is an unusual but accessible introduction to the subject of philosophy, broken down in 25 themed "cases." **Buy the book and bring it to every class; we use it every day!**

📄 SAKAI You must also work through an accompanying slide lecture on each topic before class – we look at lecture notes online so we can be active in doing philosophy during class. This is called a "flipped" classroom.

What's in this syllabus?

What is philosophy? Why study it?	2
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Course Goals and Gen Ed Outcomes	5
Resources, Philosophical and Otherwise	6
Course Schedule	7-8

WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

Traditionally philosophical problems fall into one of four broad categories, all of which we'll cover in some form.

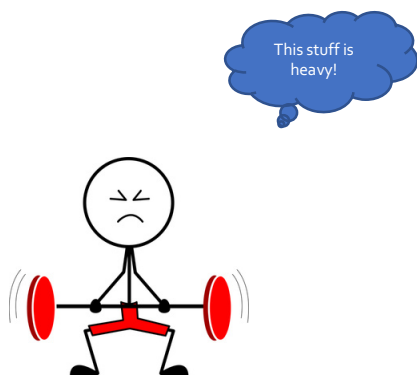
LOGIC: the study of argument structures and reasoning

EPSTEMOLOGY: the study of knowledge and what we can claim to know

METAPHYSICS: the study of what is real as opposed to what is an illusion

AXIOLOGY: the study of values as reflected in human behavior and practice

These questions can be heavy lifting, intellectually speaking, but along the way you will learn a little logic to think clearly about them.



Some sample questions:

☹ Reliable reasoning? If it's raining, the streets are wet. The streets are wet. Therefore, it is raining. (**Logic**)
(This is logically invalid by the way: a fallacy known as Affirming the Consequent)

☹ If a computer generated the world you are now experiencing, could you realize that fact? (**Epistemology**)

☹ Are claims about the existence of ghosts plausible? (**Metaphysics**)

☹ Can the very same thing be morally right for you but morally wrong for me? (**Axiology – Moral Theory**)

☹ You are in the end stages of cancer but your heart is good. Another patient needs a heart to survive and yours is a match. Is it morally acceptable for your doctor to kill you right now in order to harvest your heart, since you are going to die soon anyway and the other person will die without a new heart? (**Applied Ethics – part of Axiology**)

WHY SHOULD WE STUDY IT?

While philosophy is an old discipline, its topics and methods still form the foundation of other subjects.

Epistemology grounds the sciences, concerned with issues like whether our perceptions are reliable, whether other people have minds like ours, what constitutes acceptable evidence, and whether past patterns of data provide sufficient support for future predictions. Drug trials, for example, rely on good models of testing before approval; controversies about Artificial Intelligence involve whether machines can “think.”

Metaphysics questions the foundational truths of existence, such as the origin of the universe, evidence for supernatural phenomena, and whether God exists. Cultures have gone to war over disagreements about what they take to be religious truths; some people spend a lot of money to have psychic readings done, or communicate with dead relatives. What do *you* take to be “real” and, conversely, how might your beliefs be inconsistent, ungrounded, naïve, or gullible?

Moral Theory reflects on what we value as right/wrong, or good/bad, and asks whether morality can exist without God, if all morality is relative to culture, and whether we see moral issues through a social lens of bias. Controversies such as female genital mutilation or whether assisted suicide is permissible demonstrate how complex moral thinking is once we think our way through different perspectives on the same problem.

Applied Ethics investigates how to use moral thinking in real-world situations. Should we separate conjoined twins knowing that one will die, when failure to separate means both will die? Should we eat meat? Should we use technology to design better babies? Very recently, for example, the gene manipulation mechanism known as CRISPR has made it possible to correct defects such as the inherited blood disorder beta-thalassemia in human embryos. This has ethicists sitting up and taking notice: should such “corrected” embryos be implanted in the womb? What happens to human society when only the rich can afford to manipulate embryos before implanting? Worse still, what if CRISPR is used commercially to create embryos with things like higher intelligence, better athleticism, and artistic ability? How we identify moral values and regulate institutional – and individual – practices in relation to them are very urgent and ongoing challenges for humanity.

By the end of our course you will you have practiced the philosophical method, see its pervasive relevance to most issues in the world even today, and figure out how to apply philosophical techniques to other areas of your studies and your life!

WHAT DO WE DO IN PHL 103?

We read. We think. We read some more, then we write. We talk, we give feedback, we edit, we think, we write.

Sometimes we take exams. The key things are to develop knowledge of the humanistic practice known as philosophy and to refine our writing skills to empower thinking all through college...and life.

☺ Ex nihilo nihil fit.

Out of nothing comes nothing. There is no such thing as a free lunch. Cliché city! In other words: the work you put in = the value you derive here in PHL 103. We don't use class time to repeat exactly what the book says, or to walk you through the slides. Instead, when together, we analyze the issues through many writing exercises, the creation of "concept maps" for the reading, and lots of discussion and questioning. *Come unprepared at your peril!!* We grade anonymously so will be starkly honest about the quality of your WORK. Not you, but the work you hand in – just like jobs in the so-called real world.

👥 Strength in Numbers

We are going to subdivide the class into small groups, which we refer to as PODS. Your POD will be based on information you provide to us at the beginning of the course. Peer workshops on written quizzes, as well as debates and arguments about issues we study, will take place in PODS – PODS are like your mini-cohort inside the class, and can be useful for group study beyond class. In class, PODS can get noisy. But they are often fun!

🌀 I Think, Therefore I Am

The capacity to formulate and express ideas well is the sign of a good education. To aid you in this goal, we will offer an opportunity to attend a September 28 workshop on *metacognition* with renowned expert Dr. Sondra Maguire. Metacognition: understanding how you think (and work, and produce things). Not only will this workshop empower you to conceptualize and structure your college experience in a productive way; we'll award 2 Exit Tickets to anyone who attends! More details to follow!

Final Grade Scales

A: 93-100

A-: 90-92

B+: 87-89

B: 83-86

B-: 80-82

C+: 77-79

C: 73-75

C-: 70-72

D+: 67-69

D: 63-66

F: 62 and below

Quiz Scale (out of 4)

4 = excellent

3.5 = very good

3 = good

2.5 = quite good

2 = adequate mastery

1.5 = getting there

1 = poor but something ok

.5 = glimmer of hope

0 = out and out fail

HOW AND ON WHAT ARE WE GRADED?

Your grade will be based on three types of work: the scaled average of quizzes undertaken in class; four multiple choice examinations of increasing weight, also taken in class; and points for accumulated, written "exit tickets" that your TA collects from you at the end of many classes.

📄 Exit Tickets

At the end of many sessions we will ask you to write a few sentences in response to a specific prompt provided in class. Each ticket is worth 1 point, and your grade for tickets will be based on a ratio of your adequately completed tickets to a ticket baseline determined by us. For example: let's say we assign 15 total ticket prompts over the term. We might then set the baseline for ticket points at 13 (to allow for a missed class or two). If you hand in 12 tickets, your grade would be a 12/13 or 92. Of course, if you completed 13, 14 or all 15 tickets you'd have a 100! We reserve the right to award a nonsense response zero points, but otherwise all tickets with a good faith effort to write about the prompt will gain a point.

15% of final average.

📝 Pop Essay Quizzes

These are unannounced, very short, timed essays that you write in a small box on less than one side of a page. They are always on the reading for that day but will cover material we have not yet gone over in class. The quizzes will sometimes be the basis for rubric-guided, small group workshops; students will have the chance to comment on and correct their initial responses following these workshops. Quizzes are graded on a 1-4 scale, with the occasional opportunity of an extra point for strong self-critique based on peer feedback. We scale the total quiz points generously at the end, in expectation of less strong performance at the start of term, so don't be discouraged! The key is to respond to feedback and strive for improvements over the course of the term.

35% of final average.

📖 Multiple Choice Exams

It takes a while to master philosophical thinking, so we weight the exams differently along the course of the semester. Each exam has 10 complex multiple choice questions, often with a long passage, then four options to choose among as the correct one in response. Of the four responses, one is the most thorough and accurate, one is correct but not as thorough or detailed, and two are out and out wrong. You get half points for selecting the correct but less thorough response, and full points for correct ones.

Exam 1: 5% of final grade

Exam 2: 10% of final grade

Exam 3: 20% of final grade

Exam 4: 15% of final grade

📍 Get Ye to Class

If on a rare occasion you miss class for reason of genuine illness or serious problems, please contact your TA ahead of time if possible or as soon possible after if you miss unexpectedly. A pattern of absence will impact your grade negatively. Three misses = a pattern. If you miss an exam you need a medical note or equivalent documentation for a make-up. Pop quizzes are not made up right after but we administer a “universal make-up” at the end of term to replace one missed pop quiz.

📖 Thou Shalt Do the Reading on Time

You expect your teachers to say “do the reading,” right? Well, we mean it. Do all reading (book chapters AND slides) BY the date for which it is listed on the schedule. Philosophy is a more deliberate and inquiring way of approaching the world than are ordinary reading and writing. You have to engage actively with the process of thinking through the material. We will teach you how to do this.

📱 Fightin’ the Fragmentation

Most often this class is a no-tech experience: when we are together we do a lot of thinking, discussing, and writing without screen barriers. On some occasions, we may ask you to consult the internet during class – we will make that VERY clear. Otherwise: unless you are required to do so for reasons pertaining to a documented physical or learning related disability, you may not consult laptops, tablets, smart phones, Kindles or any other electronica during class unless we explicitly instruct you to do so. One violation = singing and apology to the class while holding the Hand of Shame (you’ll see), preferably with accompanying dance moves. Second violation = formal report of your violation of class policy to Student Affairs.

☐ We Be Flippin’ the Class

And yet, we embrace technology in its rightful sphere! We will use our SAKAI site to store lecture slides (supplementary learning material) on each topic we study. In addition to your reading you should view these slideshows at your own pace **prior to coming to the classes that cover the topic.** These are meant to lessen our dependence on in-class lectures and free up face time for the aforementioned discussion, skill practice, writing and deeper exploration. Plus your singing and dancing when penalties accrue.

🔒 Plagiarism (Academic Honesty)

No electronic sending or reception of messages during exams. No cribbing the work of your neighbor. No consulting notes. I fail and submit the names of cheaters for prosecution, even for first offenses, and I do not succumb to the logical fallacy of *ad misericordiam*: appeal to pity. In short: don’t cheat. It’s boring, unimaginative, stupidly executed, and can cost you your education. In this class you can do poorly at first and still get a strong final grade. Many assessments = many chances to improve. So don’t cheat!

<http://www.uri.edu/judicial/Student%20Handbook/ch1.html>

🕒 Tardiness Policy

If you arrive seven or more minutes late you must sing, dance, recite a poem, tell a good (brief) story, or perform a dramatic monologue in front of the entire class. **I am not kidding.** If you interrupt our flow, you compensate us with some entertainment. We are also subject to this penalty. Exception: Performance addicts caught coming late on purpose, with monologue or sheet music or guitar in hand, must publicly do a logic problem instead.

Need Some Help Adjusting to College??

Communicate with us: If life intervenes and you are overwhelmed, please consider letting us know. We help you to avoid making bad choices (missed deadlines, missed exams, etc.) when life gets hectic. We understand that challenges occur. Reach out!

Consult the Counseling Center: The Counseling Center in Roosevelt Hall offers expert services for students who struggle with myriad life issues. It is perfectly natural to find college life deeply unsettling, especially at the beginning or at moments of change. <http://web.uri.edu/counseling/>

Need Accommodation?

If you have special needs such as those involving a learning disability, physical accommodation, or health-related concerns of any kind, please reach out to Cheryl during the first week so that we can arrange appropriate measures for you to flourish in this class. Same goes for athletes, musicians, artists, and others who function as ambassadors for the university - please provide your excused absence dates and forms ASAP in the term.

GEN ED OUTCOMES

As an introductory level class aimed at first year students exclusively, this course is designed explicitly to help you develop those skills you need to succeed in college. As such, it meets General Education outcomes in Humanities and Writing. This means, among other things, that you will master technical approaches to topics in the subject of philosophy, but also that you will demonstrate that mastery in writing and for different audiences/purposes. Thus, here are the takeaways from our time together this term.

- Identify and apply foundational concepts in epistemology (the study of how we know things), metaphysics (the study of theories concerning what is real), and moral theory (the study of right and wrong actions and values)
- Interpret complex texts containing philosophical lines of reasoning with accuracy and convey mastery of such reasoning verbally and in writing
- Recognize and use basic informal and formal logic techniques in response to epistemological, metaphysical and moral questions
- Recognize and use appropriate conventions of grammar, usage, and syntax in both short and long form writing contexts
- Dissect, evaluate and provide feedback about written and verbal arguments made by others
- Create cohesive and valid arguments of your own verbally and in writing
- Direct philosophical arguments in writing toward a specific audience within the context of a particular, concrete situation
- Analyze substantial philosophical issues and dilemmas using multiple frameworks and from more than one perspective
- Conduct a comparative synthesis of different issues and arguments within a larger topic area
- Produce written work that incorporates instructor and peer feedback through sustained philosophical reflection in writing and self-assessment of previous written work

COURSE GOALS

Beyond the formal aspects of educational attainment captured by things like exams or essays, this class is designed to move you in the direction of intellectual autonomy – of thinking for yourself. This is harder than it sounds, for independent thinking requires that you first identify those filters through which you view the world. Philosophy is the name we give to moving beyond those filters in order to live a life of deliberate, informed intentionality. Thus, my goals for you.

- *Curiosity* about the world and enough mental power to sustain it, even if you get stuck at a bus station for 14 hours when your bus gets snowed in and you need to keep sane.
- *Incisiveness* of mind in your capacity to recognize, analyze, judge, and act upon problems you encounter in the world. This is called critical thinking. Philosophers invented it.
- *Eloquence* of both the written and spoken varieties. The ability to express oneself clearly, succinctly, and well is not only the mark of a good mind but also a transportable job skill. This course is designed in part to promote effective communication.
- *Mastery* of some basic and enduring philosophical issues, such that you can see their relevance to contemporary debates in society and place them within a more general framework of cultural history and development.
- *Tolerance* for ambiguity. Life can be difficult, confusing, complex. I want to strengthen your ability to face that head on without putting your brain into hibernation. You don't get to pick what's coming at you along the way, and how you cope with those challenges can be aided by the development of a philosophical temperament.
- *Freedom* to shape a life according to your perceptions, values, and commitments. Philosophy can help to lessen the white noise of mass culture, 24/7 media, and consumer institutions, allowing you to create headspace for reflection and deliberately chosen actions.

<http://web.uri.edu/aec/>

ACADEMIC ENHANCEMENT CENTER
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AT THE AEC, OUR GOAL IS YOUR SUCCESS.

At the Academic Enhancement Center, we support academic success for all URI students. Our well-trained staff of tutors and academic coaches combine subject knowledge with an understanding of what students need to do to be successful.

To learn more about our programs, click a link below. Or, stop by one of our reception areas in Roosevelt Hall - in room 009B, or room 411. You can also call us at (401) 874-2367. We look forward to helping you!

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WHY, US!

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In addition, Harry will host informal philosophy hangouts at the 193 Degrees Coffee House on some Fridays, Mike will be generating philosophical playlists for your listening pleasure, and Angie will post some helpful hints on thriving in college (Angie's List!)

PHILOSOPHY SITES

VIDEOS

Short animations in many things we'll study:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/4FYLVwSKzJ5vwNvgZgmwbSD/a-history-of-ideas>

Euro vids on several topics we cover:
<https://www.youtube.com/user/Kurzgesagt>

Stephen Law animation on Evil God challenge:
<https://vimeo.com/186237056>

Actor James Franco takes a stab at philosophy:
<http://dailynous.com/2017/07/25/philosophy-time-james-franco-quest-post-eliot-michaelson/>

PHILOSOPHY SITES AND PODCASTS

Interviews with philosophers:
<http://www.philosophybites.com/> and
<http://www.whatisitliketobeaphilosopher.com/>

Contemporary philosophy:
<http://dailynous.com/>

Comics:
<http://existentialcomics.com/>

UNIT ONE: EPISTEMOLOGY

DATE	TOPIC	READING AND EXAMS
R Sep 7	Welcome! Introduction to the course	
T Sep 12	How do I know the world is real?	Read: Brain Snatched – Chapter 3 View: Brain Snatched Slides on SAKAI
R Sep 14	How do I know the world is real?	Review: Brain Snatched chapter/slides
T Sep 19	How do I know others have minds?	Read: Strange Case of Rational Dentist – Chapter 8 View: Rational Dentist Slides on SAKAI
R Sep 21	How do I know others have minds?	Review: Rational Dentist chapter/slides
T Sep 26	How do I know the future will resemble the past?	Read: Why Expect Sun to Rise Tomorrow – Chapter 14 View: Sunrise slides on SAKAI
R Sep 28	How do I know the future will resemble the past?	Review: Sunrise chapter/slides Sondra Maguire Metacognition Workshop 7-8:30pm Edwards Auditorium (worth 2 Exit Tix!)
T Oct 3		EXAM: Epistemology

UNIT TWO: METAPHYSICS

DATE	TOPIC	READING AND EXAMS
R Oct 5	Where did it all come from?	Read: Where Universe Come From? – Chapter 1 View: Origin of Universe Slides on SAKAI
T Oct 10	Where did it all come from?	Review: Universe chapter/slides
R Oct 12	ESP, ghosts, and miracles: rational?	Read: Miracles and the Supernatural -Chapter 23 View: Miracles Slides on SAKAI
T Oct 17	ESP, ghosts, and miracles: rational?	Review: Miracles chapter/slides
R Oct 19	Should we believe in God?	Read: Does God Exist? – Chapter 7 View: Does God Exist slides on SAKAI
T Oct 24	Should we believe in God?	Review: Does God Exist chapter/slides
R Oct 26		EXAM: Metaphysics

UNIT THREE: MORAL THEORY

DATE	TOPIC	READINGS AND EXAMS
T Oct 31	Does morality come from God?	Read: Morality Without God/Religion? -Chapter 10 View: Morality Without God Slides on SAKAI
R Nov 2	Does morality come from God?	Review: Morality Without God chapter/slides
T Nov 7	Is it wrong for me but right for you?	Read: Into the Lair of the Relativist – Chapter 5 View: Lair of the Relativist Slides on SAKAI
R Nov 9	Is it wrong for me but right for you?	Review: Lair of the Relativist chapter/slides
T Nov 14	Are moral claims just statements about or reflections of culture?	Read: Is Morality Like Spectacles? – Chapter 20 View: Moral Spectacles Slides on SAKAI
R Nov 16	Are moral claims just statements about or reflections of culture?	Review: Moral Spectacles chapter/slides
T Nov 21		EXAM: Moral Theory

UNIT FOUR: APPLIED ETHICS

DATE	TOPIC	READINGS AND EXAMS
T Nov 28	When – if ever – is killing morally permissible?	Read: Killing Mary to Save Jodie – Chapter 17 View: Killing Mary to Save Jodie Slides
R Nov 30	Is meat-eating morally justifiable?	Read: Should You Be Eating That? – Chapter 21 View: Should You Be Eating That Slides on SAKAI
T Dec 5	Should we manipulate human embryos?	Read: Designer Babies – Chapter 12 View: Designer Baby Slides on SAKAI
R Dec 7	Prize Day!! (first 45 minutes) Universal Make Up Quiz! (last 30 minutes)	Universal Make Up Quiz (optional)
T Dec 19	Exam: Applied Ethics (mandatory) Time: 3pm – 4:30 pm Place: Swan Hall Auditorium	Exam: Applied Ethics