

Phil 0080: Introduction to Philosophical Problems

Lecture Time: MW 12:00-12:50

Lecture Location: G24 Cathedral of Learning

Primary Instructor: Adam Zweber (he/him)

Email: adam.zweber@pitt.edu

Office: 1029-A Cathedral of Learning

Office Hours: MW 3:00-4:00 and by appointment.

I understand that not everyone can meet during the allocated time. *If that's you, I'm more than happy to find an alternative time to meet.*

Teaching Assistants:

Leela Cañuelas, lsc65@pitt.edu

Yiran Chen, yiranchen@pitt.edu

Marco Maggiani, mam773@pitt.edu

Course Description:

This course is a survey of major philosophical problems. We will ask both theoretical questions (What do we know? Does God exist? Do we have free-will?) and practical ones (What do we owe those with much less than us? Should we love everyone? Should we fear death?) The common theme among the questions we ask will be *meaning*. That is, for each topic we discuss, we will examine how it bears on living a meaningful life: Is life without God, free-will, or immortality meaningless? Is a life meaningful in virtue of its impact on others? Is a meaningful life just one that you *feel* is meaningful?

You have probably thought about some of these questions before and you will surely continue to think about and discuss these questions after the course ends. This leads us to the other main purpose of the course, which is to teach students how to discuss important issues on which there is much disagreement more effectively. In service of this, by taking this course you will improve your ability to interpret, evaluate, and present arguments in both written and oral forms. Along the way, you'll also find out just how pervasive philosophical assumptions are in your life.

Content Warning:

As you might guess from the above description, this class will involve open discussion of heavy and sensitive topics. Students will participate in class discussion, which means that neither I nor anyone else can anticipate what specific topics might come up in any given session. But topics like death, ethics, religion, love and meaning are liable to lead to highly sensitive issues being raised, such as suicide, violence, addiction, sexuality, race and many others. I expect students to discuss these issues respectfully (see below). But if, for any reason, these issues are not something you are able to engage with this semester, you should make an appointment with me and/or your TA to discuss how to move forward in the class.

Student Learning Outcomes:

If we've all done our jobs, by the end of the term students will:

In order of importance:

- 1) Love philosophy (or at least think it's important)

- 2) Develop an ability to reap the benefits of disagreement. This will involve:
 - a. Interpreting others (both their written and spoken words) charitably
 - b. Identifying the reasoning of those you disagree with
 - c. Providing arguments for your views
 - d. Developing an awareness of your and others' assumptions
 - e. Communicating effectively, both orally and in writing
 - f. Being motivated to pursue the truth
- 3) Develop a familiarity with some major positions, terms, and figures in philosophy

Required Texts:

None. College is expensive enough already. All course materials will be available on Canvas or through the library.

In-Class Expectations:

During lecture, students will respectfully discuss ideas. Often this will be done in small groups in which students will actively participate. We will discuss the value of openly sharing our thoughts with one another in more detail throughout the term. But as a first pass, we will all benefit if students display in class both a willingness to listen to and understand one another and the courage to share their own ideas, even when they aren't certain whether they are right. Importantly, the class will be most successful if we all do this civilly, respectfully, and collegially.

Other policies:

- Light, quiet, non-odorous snacks are acceptable. But if they appear to be distracting others, I will ask you to put them away.

The in-class expectations for recitation sections will be determined at the discretion of your TA.

Assessments:

Here is the breakdown of how your grade will be determined:

5%: TopHat Questions

During lectures I will assign questions from TopHat starting in Week 2. These will be graded based on completion, but you must be present in lecture in order to complete them.

10%: Recitation Section Attendance/Participation

Recitation section is *mandatory*. In fact, it is one of the most important parts of the class—it is where you will learn more deeply how to discuss philosophy. Attendance and participation in it will thus be part of your grade. *Missing more than 4 recitations will constitute grounds for failing the class.*

15%: Paper 1 (Due: End of Week 4)

This paper will be highly structured and done partially as a group of four, but each student is responsible for writing their own paper. The topic of the paper will be

skepticism and I will provide a rough template for how to structure the paper. Students will meet to discuss the topic and video-record a philosophical discussion lasting 10-15 minutes.

- Step 1: Form a group of four.
- Step 2: Choose a position to argue for: each member of the group must choose a different position. (I will provide sample positions.)
- Step 2: Meet with your group to discuss, *record your meeting*.
- Step 3: Generate a transcript of your recording. (There are free AI tools available online to do this easily.)
- Step 4: Create a hand-written argument map for your paper.
- Step 5: Write your paper *and cite your sources*
 - o Allowed sources for the paper include: your conversation, the lectures/powerpoints, and the readings on the syllabus. The purpose of this assignment is for you to think through an argument, *not* for you to practice gathering sources.

Students will turn in:

- 1) Their video recording
- 2) Their transcript
- 3) Their argument map (Bring to Section in Week 3)
- 4) Their paper

20%: Midterm Exam (Week 6)

This will be a traditional, in-person exam designed to ensure that students understand basic concepts and have the knowledge base needed for the more involved assessments later in the term. *Given this purpose of the midterm, students must pass the midterm in order to start the subsequent assignments and therefore to pass the class. Students who fail the midterm will be given the option to retake it. If they pass their retake, their score will be the minimum passing grade, 60.*

25%: Paper 2 (Due: End of Week 12)

This paper will be completed in a comparable format to the previous one. However, I will provide slightly less “structure”: students will be given more autonomy to decide their paper topics/formats. Unlike Paper 1, this paper will also involve a first draft, which students will bring to section in Week 11 and then revise in light of peer-feedback.

25%: Final Exam: **Thursday, Dec. 11 4:00-5:50**

This exam is cumulative and in-person. Students will demonstrate the knowledge and skills we’ve worked on throughout the term. *It will also ask questions about your second paper.*

The grading scale is determined according to Pitt’s grading scheme on Canvas, Pitt LG:

Letter Grade	Range
A+	100% to 97%
A	< 97% to 94%
A-	< 94% to 90%
B+	< 90% to 87%

B	< 87% to 84%
B-	< 84% to 80%
C+	< 80% to 77%
C	< 77% to 74%
C-	< 74% to 70%
D+	< 70% to 67%
D	< 67% to 64%
D-	< 64% to 60%
F	< 60% to 0%

Extra Credit: I don't offer extra-credit!

Assessment-Relevant Policies:

Late work: Extensions must be requested 48 hours in advance of the relevant due date. (Sometimes serious emergencies happen less than 48 hours before deadlines. If that happens, let your TA and I know and we'll work out a resolution.) There is no formula for what constitutes a good reason for an extension, but typically unforeseeable tragedy or severe illnesses are good reasons, while ordinary busy-ness or foreseeable conflicts (e.g. athletics, performances, etc.) are not. Borderline cases will be left to the discretion of your TA (with my guidance).

Any late work that wasn't granted an extension will be penalized at a rate of 10% per 24 hours.

Academic Integrity

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the [University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity](#). Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

To learn more about Academic Integrity, visit the [Academic Integrity Guide](#) for an overview of the topic. For hands- on practice, complete the [Academic Integrity Modules](#).

Additionally, the papers for this class ask that you use only a restricted range of materials. Any uncited use sources outside of those indicated is a serious violation of academic integrity. Any cited use of such sources is a violation of the assignment requirements and will count as not completing the assignment, but it is not an instance of dishonesty.

AI Policy:

Studies of AI use in education currently have mixed and controversial results. But one emerging trend is that some *structured, guided* uses of AI have potential learning benefits, while *unstructured* use of it tends to be detrimental. I will thus indicate on each assignment how and whether AI use is appropriate. *Any use that is in violation of the directions given on the*

assignment will be considered an instance of academic dishonesty. This includes programs like Grammarly: some assignments may ask you to write by hand, some will allow some use of software. Again, I will indicate on each assignment what kind of AI-use is appropriate given the learning goals of that assignment.

If your TA or I suspect you've violated the academic integrity or AI policy, we will meet to discuss what happened. If we still suspect a violation after meeting, we will report the incident to the philosophy department. If the issue still isn't resolvable at the department level, we will proceed to the Dean.

The consequences for plagiarism at the department level depend on whether the case is considered *severe* or *light*. Severe plagiarism results in failure of the course while the penalty for light plagiarism is determined at the discretion of the instructor. Please consult me or the Director of Undergraduate Studies, Tom Berry, for more information on departmental plagiarism procedures.

Disability Services

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and [Disability Resources and Services](#) (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu, (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

Civil Rights and Title IX:

The University of Pittsburgh does not tolerate any form of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation based on disability, race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, genetic information, marital status, familial status, sex, age, sexual orientation, veteran status or gender identity or other factors as stated in the University's Title IX policy. The University is committed to taking prompt action to end a hostile environment that interferes with the University's mission. For more information about policies, procedures, and practices, visit the [Civil Rights & Title IX Compliance web page](#).

I ask that everyone in the class strive to help ensure that other members of this class can learn in a supportive and respectful environment. If there are instances of the aforementioned issues, please contact the Title IX Coordinator, by calling 412-648-7860, or e-mailing titleixcoordinator@pitt.edu. Reports can also be [filed online](#). You may also choose to report this to a faculty/staff member; they are required to communicate this to the University's Office of Institutional Engagement and Wellbeing. If you wish to maintain complete confidentiality, you may also contact the University Counseling Center (412-648-7930).

Schedule of Topics

Unit	Lecture #	Content	Skills
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Introduction	Lecture 1	Why take this class? What's the point of education in general? <i>Required:</i> Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> , Ch. 6 <i>Optional:</i> Brighthouse <i>On Education</i> Ch. 1	Asking deeper questions
Unit 1: Knowledge	Lecture 2	Skepticism, Intro to Arguments <i>Required:</i> Descartes, "Meditation 1" <i>Optional:</i> Al-Ghazali <i>Deliverance from Error</i> §§1-17	Basics of Arguments
	Lecture 3	Responses to Skepticism <i>Required:</i> Chalmers <i>Reality+</i> Ch. 4 <i>Optional:</i> Moore "Proof of an External World"	Begging the Question
	Lecture 4	Skepticism and Meaning <i>Required:</i> Nozick, "The Experience Machine," Zhuangzi "On the Equality of Things" <i>Optional:</i> Sextus Empiricus <i>Outlines of Pyrrhonism</i> (excerpt)	Valuing Truth
	Lecture 5	The Problem of Induction <i>Required:</i> Greco "Hume's Skepticism and Induction" <i>Optional:</i> Hume <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> (excerpt)	Inductive Reasoning
	Lecture 6	Peer Disagreement <i>Required:</i> Matheson "The Epistemology of Disagreement" <i>Optional:</i> Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreements"	Arguments from Analogy, Intellectual Humility
	Lecture 7	Benefits of Disagreement <i>Required:</i> Mill <i>On Liberty</i> Ch. 2 <i>Optional:</i> Longino "Values and Objectivity"	Intellectual Humility and Courage
	Lecture 8	The Design Argument <i>Required:</i> Parfit "Why Anything? Why This?" <i>Optional:</i> Carroll "Debunking the Fine-Tuning Argument"	Inference to the Best Explanation
	Lecture 9	The Problem of Evil	<i>Reductio Ad Absurdum</i>

		<i>Required:</i> Sinnott-Armstrong and Craig “Do Suffering and Evil Disprove God?” (debate) <i>Optional:</i> Dostoyevsky “Rebellion,” “The Grand Inquisitor”	
	Lecture 10	God and Meaning	Pragmatic Arguments
		<i>Required:</i> Donaldson “Epistemology: The Will to Believe” <i>Optional:</i> James “The Will to Believe,” Craig “The Absurdity of Life Without God”	
	Lecture 11	<i>Midterm</i>	
Unit 3: Death	Lecture 12	Dualism	
		<i>Required:</i> Jackson “What Mary Didn’t Know” <i>Optional:</i> Lewis “What Experience Teaches”	
	Lecture 13	Physicalism	
		<i>Required:</i> Elizabeth of Bohemia “Letter to Descartes” <i>Optional:</i> Kim “Lonely Souls: Causality and Substance Dualism”	
	Lecture 14	The Badness of Death	
		<i>Required:</i> Epicurus “Letter to Menoeceus” <i>Optional:</i> Nagel “Death	
	Lecture 15	Death and Meaning	
		<i>Required:</i> Lewis “On Living in an Atomic Age” <i>Optional:</i> Tolstoy “My Confession,” Williams “The Makropolis Case”	
Unit 4: Free Will	Lecture 16	Free Will: Incompatibilism	
		<i>Required:</i> Beebe “Free Will: The Basics” <i>Optional:</i> Chisholm “Human Freedom and the Self”	
	Lecture 17	Free Will: Compatibilism	
		<i>Required:</i> Hume “Of Liberty and Necessity” <i>Optional:</i> Frankfurt “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person”	
	Lecture 18	Free Will Interlude: Kantian Ethics	
		<i>Required:</i> O’neill “A Simplified Account of Kant’s Ethics”	

		<i>Optional: Kant Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals Ch. 1</i>
	Lecture 19	Free Will and Meaning
		<i>No required reading</i>
		<i>Optional: Pereboom Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life Ch. 9, Strawson "Freedom and Resentment"</i>
Unit 5: Morals and Meaning	Lecture 20	Moral Relativism
		<i>Required: Midgley "On Sharpening One's Sword"</i>
		<i>Optional: Enoch "Why I am an Objectivist about Ethics"</i>
	Lecture 21	Meaning Subjectivism
		<i>Required: Taylor "The Meaning of Life"</i>
		<i>Optional: Hare "Nothing Matters"</i>
	Lecture 22	Objective Values
		<i>Required: Plato "Euthyphro"</i>
		<i>Optional: Mackie Inventing Right and Wrong Ch. 1</i>
	Lecture 23	Duties to Strangers
		<i>Required: Singer "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"</i>
		<i>Optional: Todd "Career Guide", Singer "Living to Some Purpose"</i>
	Lecture 24	Utilitarianism
		<i>Required: MacAskill, Meissner, and Chappell "Introduction to Utilitarianism"</i>
		<i>Optional: Bentham An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, Mozi The Mozi</i>
	Lecture 25	Who Deserves Love?
		<i>Required: MLK Jr. "Loving Your Enemies"</i>
		<i>Optional: Shantideva The Way of the Bodhisattva Ch. 6, Cherry "Love, Anger, and Racial Justice"</i>
	Lecture 26	Love and Meaning
		<i>Required: Wolf Meaning in Life and Why it Matters Ch. 1</i>
		<i>Optional: Wolf Meaning in Life and Why it Matters Ch. 2</i>
	Lecture 27	Is Life Meaningless?

	<i>Required:</i> Benatar <i>The Human Predicament</i> Ch. 3
	<i>Optional:</i> Kahane “If Nothing Matters...”
Lecture 28	Review, Philosophy and Meaning
	<i>Required:</i> Plato “The Allegory of the Cave”
	<i>Optional:</i> Re-visit Douglass, Plato <i>Apology</i> , Callard <i>Open Socrates</i> Ch. 1

Notes on the Course Schedule:

Readings:

For each class there are both required and optional readings (or videos). You are responsible for doing the required reading/viewing: the assignments and exams will contain questions about them.

All of you will find your interest piqued by some of the topics and some of you will find your interest piqued by all of the topics. When that happens, you are encouraged to explore the optional readings, but you will not be assessed on the basis of anything in them. These readings either 1) inform the material covered in class 2) go slightly beyond the material covered in class 3) provide an alternative perspective from another philosophical tradition than the one which class focused on 4) provide insight into the history of the topic from class or 5) were simply too difficult for me to require for an intro class in good conscience. If you would like help with any of these readings, feel free to ask me or your TA.

Skills/Virtues:

Each lecture will, in addition to covering content, seek to develop the critical thinking skills and/or intellectual virtues we practice in philosophy. Prior to the midterm, this will be done very deliberately (you will be asked to demonstrate your progress on these skills on the midterm). After the midterm, we will still work on skills/virtues of course, but this aspect of the course will be different in character as it will often involve applying the styles of reasoning we developed earlier to new problems.