

Intro to Philosophy (PHIL-020-130)



Dates: June 4 - July 27, 2018

Location: Online

Faculty: Prof. James C. Olsen

Contact Information: Please email through the Canvas Inbox. If you have issues with the Canvas Inbox, you can use - jco34@georgetown.edu

Virtual Office Hours: I am available 8:30-10am on Friday through Canvas Conference or by appointment. *Contact me by email to set up an appointment.*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Browsing through the course catalogue right now you might be like many others and think to yourself, "What exactly IS philosophy anyway?" While all western academic disciplines descend from philosophy, it's perfectly possible to graduate from college today without knowing that philosophy means something more than one's personal take on life. What is *not* possible for a college graduate or for any other rationally functional human being, however, is to avoid *doing* philosophy. Philosophy pervades your life, your relationships, desires, beliefs, and actions; it's in the food you eat, the books you read, the movies you watch, the sports you play; it lingers about in that new housing development your parents just moved into, wanders with the tourists who have begun pouring into remote parts of Nepal; it accompanied the police officer who either did or

didn't let you off the hook the last time you blew through a pink light; and it almost certainly manifests itself in your choice of whether to take this class.

Or at least, that's my claim. The content of this course will draw on classical and contemporary philosophical texts, books, movies, music, art, and other media in an extended argument intended to accomplish two goals. The first is to convince you that my claim is correct – you already are and always have been doing philosophy. The second is to help you be more skillful at it.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Come to see that you are always already doing philosophy and that philosophical claims are embedded in all forms of media that you consume.
2. Understand to a sufficient degree some of the major animating questions, themes and frameworks that philosophers have been exploring for millennia in such a way that:
 - You can recognize those same questions, themes, and frameworks in your everyday life;
 - You can make use of them to help you intellectually and pragmatically navigate that life; and
 - You can make use of them to participate in a philosophical dialogue several millennia old
3. *Enjoy striving for and realizing goals 1 & 2*
4. Practice and demonstrate your ability to recognize, extrapolate, explicate, and evaluate arguments and assumptions found in our texts and other forms of media.
5. Become converted to the common-sense-turned-complicated-neurological claim that “[effortful] practice makes perfect”—specifically, that this claim applies to your intellectual undertakings.
 - Find concrete evidence for this in your ability to write analytically; and
 - Get better at expressing yourself in an accessible manner

REQUIREMENTS

Textbooks

- Blackburn, Simon. *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy* (Oxford University Press)
- Descartes, Renee. *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, 1996)
- Lear, Jonathan. *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (2008).
- Pippin, Robert. *Hollywood Westerns and American Myth* (Castle Lecture Series)
- Rachels, James. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. (**5th edition, 2006 or newer**)
- Taylor, Charles. *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Harvard University Press)

COURSE RESOURCES

Georgetown Library

Students enrolled in online School of Continuing Studies SCS coursework have access to the University Library System's eResources, including 500+ research databases, 1.5+ million ebooks, and thousands of periodicals and other multimedia files (films, webinars, music, and images). Students can access these resources through the [Library's Homepage](#) by using their University username (NetID) and password (this is the same login information used to access email). The Library does not mail physical items to students.

SCS students may make an appointment with a librarian to discuss a research topic, develop a search strategy, or examine resources for projects and papers. Librarians offer an overview of and in-depth assistance with important resources for senior or master's theses, dissertations, papers and other types of research. Appointments are conducted using Zoom video conferencing software. It is recommended that students request an appointment at least one week in advance of their desired appointment time (appointments are generally accepted between noon and 7PM EST Monday through Thursday). This service is available to currently enrolled students who need assistance with Georgetown-assigned projects and papers. Please review the [Services & Resources Guide for Online Students](#) for additional information.

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

This course consists of 6 modules and an orientation. All modules are open and available to you at the start of the course for your planning purposes. However, the modules and activities must be done sequentially and certain activities and assignments must be completed by certain dates.

You are expected to complete all the course material. Each module includes an "Activities and Navigation" page that gives you a detailed overview of the module and deadlines. Also, please see the course overview below.

TIME EXPECTATIONS

Our online classes are designed to meet the same academic standards as our place-based (face-to-face) courses. Our accelerated modules truncate a 15-week class into 7.5 weeks while requiring the same level of participation, commitment, and academic rigor. Thus students should plan on spending 15-20 hours per week on the work for any online module. Please check regularly to make sure you are aware of upcoming assignments and that you will have adequate time to complete all of your module activities and assignments by the assigned dates. As is always the case in life, please communicate early and clearly if any special issues arise.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Canvas

Georgetown University School of Continuing Studies (SCS) uses Canvas as its Learning Management System. This course will be taught entirely through the Canvas platform. To learn more about Canvas, please go through the [Canvas Guide for Students](#).

Communication with Peers

You will be expected to communicate with your peers via the discussion board.

Email

In this course, we will use Canvas to send email for private messages. You can either check your messages in the Canvas system or set your notifications to your preferred method of contact. Please check your messages at least once per day. When submitting messages, please do the following:

Put a subject in the subject box that describes the email content with your name and module.

Do not send messages asking general information about the class, please post those in the NEED HELP? question forum.

Questions

In online courses, everyone will likely have many questions about things that relate to the course, such as clarification about assignments, course materials, or assessments. Please post these in the NEED HELP? question forum, which you can access by clicking the DISCUSSIONS button in the course navigation links. This is an open forum, and you are encouraged to give answers and help each other.

Turnaround / Feedback

If you have a concern or an issue needing to be addressed, please send me a message. Although human and imperfect, my goal is to always respond within 2 business days. Papers may take up to one week for grading and feedback.

Netiquette Guidelines

To promote the highest degree of education possible, we ask each student to respect the opinions and thoughts of other students and be courteous in the way that you choose to express yourself. The topics in this course are often controversial and promote debate.

Students should be respectful and considerate of all opinions. In order for us to have meaningful discussions, we must learn to genuinely try to understand what others are saying and be open-minded about others' opinions. If you want to persuade someone to see things differently, it is much more effective to do so in a polite, non-threatening way rather than to do so antagonistically. Everyone has insights to offer based on his/her experiences, and we can all learn from each other. Civility is essential.

And finally, what happens in a class discussion stays in a class discussion unless you receive permission from the instructor to share something outside the class.

COURSE ACTIVITIES AND ASSIGNMENTS

Course Goals:

1. Come to see that you are always already doing philosophy and that philosophical claims are embedded in all forms of media that you consume.
2. Understand to a sufficient degree some of the major animating questions, themes and frameworks that philosophers have been exploring for millennia in such a way that:

- You can recognize those same questions, themes, and frameworks in your everyday life;
 - You can make use of them to help you intellectually and pragmatically navigate that life; and
 - You can make use of them to participate in a philosophical dialogue several millennia old
3. *Enjoy striving for and realizing goals 1 & 2*
 4. Practice and demonstrate your ability to recognize, extrapolate, explicate, and evaluate arguments and assumptions found in our texts and other forms of media.
 5. Become converted to the common-sense-turned-complicated-neurological claim that “[effortful] practice makes perfect”—specifically, that this claim applies to your intellectual undertakings.
 - Find concrete evidence for this in your ability to write analytically; and
 - Get better at expressing yourself in an accessible manner

Assignments:

1. Written assignments:
 - **Movie responses** [Goals 1-5]: Write a ≥350 word response to each movie
 - **Reading Analysis (x2)** [Goals 2 & 4-5]: Pull out & articulate an argument from one of the course readings (~300 words);
 - **Media Analysis** [Goals 1-5]: Find some bit of media available online (a commercial, song, scene, news article, piece of artwork, comic, etc.) and analyze it for philosophical claims, assumptions and arguments. (~400 words); *due July 3rd*
 - **Syntheses/evaluations** [Goals 1-5]: Apply a theoretical framework or argument from a reading to a piece of media of your choosing, analyzing and evaluating the claims/situation according to that framework/argument (~600 words);
 - **Philosophical Argument** [Goals 1-5]: Write your own argument(s) about what’s going on or what ought to be done in the movies we watch (~1000 words);
 - **Term paper** [Goals 1-5]: Expand on all of this in order to write a term paper that includes analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and argument (~2000 words);
 - **Reflection papers (x3)** [Goals 1-2 & 5]: Three times during the semester you will reflect on some aspect of your personal life: your identity, a circumstance involving moral agency, and a topic of your choice (≥750 words);
2. Pre-class **summary/questions (x8)** [Goals 2 & 4]:
 - Two parts:
 - Write a one paragraph summary, including thesis sentence/main point + major themes or guiding questions of the reading
 - Include three questions you have
3. **Commenting** on peers’ work [Goals 1-5]:
 - You will comment on two of your peers’ papers for each of the formal writing assignments above, with the exception of the term paper (i.e., the Reading Analysis, Media Analysis, Synthesis/Evaluation, and Philosophical Argument); ~200 words/comment

PERCENTAGE ALLOCATION

The reflection papers, iterative writing assignments, and term papers will receive conventional grades (A, A-, B+, etc.), while the participation assignments will receive completion grades as follows:

21% Participation

- 1% Introduction & Monty Python post
- 8% Pre-class questions (~1 reading per week)
- 5% Commenting on peers' writing (two peers per formal writing assignment, except term paper)
- 7% Watch movies, write responses (~1 movie per unit)

18% Reflection papers (Unit 2, 4, 6)

37% Iterative writing assignments:

- 5% (x2) Reading analyses (Unit 1 & 2)
- 5% Media analysis (Unit 3)
- 10% Synthesis/evaluations (Unit 4)
- 12% Philosophical arguments (Unit 5)

24% Term paper (Unit 6)

Grade scale:

94.0-100 A

90.0-93.9 A-

86.7-89.9 B+

83.3-86.6 B

80.0-83.2 B-

76.7-79.9 C+

73.3-76.6 C

70.0-73.2 C-

66.7-69.9 D+

63.3-66.6 D

60.0-63.2 D-

Below 60.0 F

I welcome conversations about my grading policies and their justification. Please do not hesitate to talk with me. Note, however, that a 93.9 = A- and not an A; I do not round.

COURSE OVERVIEW:

MODULE I: INTRODUCING PHILOSOPHY (June 6-12)

1. *Readings*

- Blackburn *Think*: Introduction
- Plato: *Apology*
- Plato: *Allegory of the Cave*

2. *Movie*
 - Boyhood
3. *Assignments*
 - Post introduction & hello
 - Monty Python arguments post
 - Reading Analysis paper
 - Movie response
 - Comment on 2 peers' Reading Analysis

MODULE II: ETHICS (June 13-24)

1. *Readings*
 - Rachels *Elements of Moral Philosophy*: "What is Morality?" and "Relativism"
 - Optional reading: "Subjectivism"
 - Rachels: "Utilitarian Approach" and "Debate Over Utilitarianism"
 - Optional reading: "Egoism"
 - Rachels: "Are There Absolute Moral Rules?" and "Kant"
 - 1. Optional reading: "The Idea of a Social Contract"
 - Hursthouse: Introduction & Ch 1
2. *Movies*
 - Les Misérables
3. *Assignments*
 - "Pre-class" questions (x2)
 - Reading Analysis paper
 - Comment on 2 peers' Reading Analysis

MODULE III: POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY (June 22-July 3)

1. *Readings*
 - Rawls: selections from *A Theory of Justice* (skip pgs 210-213)
 - Nussbaum: Chapters 1-2, 5
 - Young: Chapters 4-5
 - Pippin *Hollywood Westerns and American Myth*: Introduction & Chapter 3
 - Pippin: Chapter 4 & Conclusion
2. *Movies*
 - The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence
 - The Searchers
3. *Assignments*
 - "Pre-class" questions (x2)
 - Movie response (x2)
 - Media Analysis paper
 - Comment on 2 peers' Media Analysis

MODULE IV: EPISTEMOLOGY (July 4-10)

1. *Readings*
 - Descartes: selections from *Meditations*
 - Optional: Blackburn Chapter 1
 - Blackburn: Chapter 7

- Dreyfus: "The 5 Steps from Novice to Expert"
- 2. *Movies*
 - Inception
- 3. *Assignments*
 - "Pre-class" questions
 - Movie response
 - Synthesis/Evaluation paper
 - Comment on 2 peers' Synthesis/Evaluation

MODULE V: METAPHYSICS (July 11-17)

1. *Readings*
 - Smith: "Time" (Optional: Markosian: "Time")
 - Blackburn: Chapter 2
 - Blackburn: Chapter 3
 - Blackburn: Chapter 4 (Optional: Murphy "Introduction and Overview")
2. *Movie*
 - Predestination
3. *Assignments:*
 - "Pre-class" questions
 - Movie Response
 - Philosophical Argument paper
 - Reflection 2: On Identity
 - Comment on 2 peers' Philosophical Argument

MODULE VI: (Y)OUR LIFE (July 18-30)

1. *Readings*
 - Taylor: *Ethics of Authenticity*
 - Lear: *Radical Hope*
2. *Movie*
 - Being in the World
3. *Assignments*
 - "Pre-class" questions
 - Movie Response
 - Reflection 3: On topic of your choice
 - Term paper

COURSE RUBRICS:

The following are not meant to be an exhaustive set of criteria for evaluating your papers, but rather a tool to let you know how I think about paper evaluations and the specific sorts of things I will look for in evaluating your paper. Both the rubric and the papers themselves are meant to help you improve your ability to write in a sophisticated manner -- not just in this course but in all future writing as well. Your grade on any given paper will reflect a dynamic integration of the variables outlined in multiple rubrics. Each of the relevant rubrics are also included in the assignment instructions.

(Note: the rubric increases in sophistication adequacy from the first to the final bullet points)

1. Writing Mechanics

- Essay is free from distracting grammatical and other typographical errors; standard writing conventions are used
- An organizing thesis is clear and easily identifiable. All necessary citations (and bibliography) are given, including page numbers when relevant
- A strong thesis is articulated, not only identifying the purpose of the essay, but also alluding to the student's reasons or arguments. A version or variation of the thesis is also clear at the end, tying the essay together
- The thesis actually organizes the whole paper—meaning the structure and coherence of the paper is clear throughout and transitions elegantly made; the reader is not left to make abstractions or guess at the relevance of any passage

2. Explicating Arguments (e.g., for Reading Analysis papers)

- A significant passage of text containing an argument is identified; key quotes are highlighted and explanations are attempted
- Additionally, the overall logic or connections are made; premises are identified as premises, and how these work to support the conclusion is made explicit
- Additionally, key assumptions or enthymematic premises are made explicit, and a nuanced reading of the importance and plausibility of the various premises is given
- In a similar manner, the overall relevance of the argument is made clear, including its connection to the author's main thesis and themes; if relevant the argument is contextualized within the overall historical dialogue

3. Media Analysis

- An artifact of public media is identified and conspicuous philosophical assumptions and claims are indicated
- Additionally, less obvious assumptions or claims are identified and shown to be at work in the artifact, leading to an overall interpretation of what's really going on in the artifact
- Additionally, relevant contextual information is given, including a discussion of necessary contextual features and relevant opposing ideas
- Additionally, from these, an argument is (re-)constructed that not only serves as a plausible interpretation of the conceptual work of the artifact but is insightful for evaluating the plausibility of the artifact's overall message

4. Synthesis/Evaluation

- Makes general connections between the media artifact and one or more of the readings
- Makes connections between specific passages of one or more of the readings and the artifact in question
- Accurately interprets specific passages, clearly laying out a conceptual framework that makes sense of and reveals insights concerning the media artifact; in doing so, manifests a clear grasp of the complexities involved in both framework and artifact
- Additionally, makes use of that conceptual framework to insightfully evaluate the media artifact, revealing its overall strengths and criticizing its overall weaknesses or inadequacies

5. Writing a philosophical argument

- Not only urges a reader to accept a given position or claim but offers substantive reasons for doing so; position and reasons remain basic or simplistic
 - Additionally, offers reasons as premises, laying them out in a manner that highlights the logical connections between reasons in a manner that clearly supports the conclusion
 - Additionally, makes assumptions explicit, recognizes weak or controversial premises or ambiguities, and works to support these; likewise considers and responds to objections
 - In doing so, manifests a nuanced grasp of what's at stake in the argument; the argument is polished and compelling; complexity and limits of position are acknowledged; considers substantive and direct objections and offers plausible responses that further develop the argument
6. Reflection assignments
- Reflects on a specific, concrete aspect of the student's life, relating it to themes addressed in the course
 - Draws on specific texts and themes from the class in order to illuminate substantive aspects of the student's life; additionally indicates things such as similarities, differences, and alternative perspectives/possibilities
 - Integrates multiple aspects of one's life with relevant course concepts or themes in a coherent manner; uses this reflection as an opportunity to explore substantive or difficult questions, uncertainties, complexities, etc.
 - Additionally, offers an insightful, two-way reflection, so that the concrete elements of life directly inform the student's philosophical thinking on the concepts in question, revealing a meaningful, two-way synthesis
7. Commenting
- Offers suggestions for improvement in a general way
 - Offers specific suggestions, pointing out specific sections and how those sections could be improved
 - Discusses both specific sections and the overall strengths or challenges of the paper, offering both suggestions for improvement and overall feedback
 - Additionally, grapples with the philosophical content and claims, evaluating its adequacy; in general, the comment develops the philosophical work of the paper

ABSENCES

There are no absences in an online course. Students are expected to complete all work by the due date. If a student fails to submit and/or complete any of the assignments due in a module, including participating in discussion postings, writing and research assignments, quizzes, and/or peer review activities, the student will receive a zero on the assignment.

MAKE-UP POLICY

In order to be excused from any assignment or activity in a module, you must have a doctor's excuse and permission from your Dean, and/or have secured my permission well in advance.

ACCOMMODATION

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, individuals with disabilities are provided reasonable accommodations to ensure equity and access to programs and facilities. Students are responsible for communicating their needs to the Academic Resource Center, the office that oversees disability support services, (202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; <http://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/disability>) before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations.

The University is not responsible for making special accommodations for students who have not declared their disabilities and have not requested an accommodation in a timely manner. Also, the University need not modify course or degree requirements considered to be an essential requirement of the program of instruction. For the most current and up-to-date policy information, please refer to the Georgetown University Academic Resource Center website. Students are highly encouraged to discuss the documentation and accommodation process with an Academic Resource Center administrator.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic and personal integrity in pursuit of their education at Georgetown. Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense, and students found in violation are subject to academic penalties that include, but are not limited to, failure of the course, termination from the program, and revocation of degrees already conferred. All students are held to the Honor Code.

The Honor Code pledge follows:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

Plagiarism

Stealing someone else's work is a terminal offense in the workplace, and it will wreck your career in academia, too. Students are expected to work with integrity and honesty in all their assignments. The Georgetown University Honor System defines plagiarism as "the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another." More guidance is available through the Gervase Programs at <http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html>. If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing, and the need to credit, check out <http://www.plagiarism.org>.

COMPUTER REQUIREMENTS

Students need to have sufficient technology and Internet access to complete this course. Here are the requirements listed by Canvas:

Operating Systems

- Windows XP SP3 and newer
- Mac OSX 10.6 and newer

- Linux - chromeOS

Mobile Operating System Native App Support

- iOS 7 and newer
- Android 2.3 and newer

Computer Speed and Processor

- Use a computer 5 years old or newer when possible
- 1GB of RAM
- 2GHz processor

Internet Speed

- Along with compatibility and web standards, Canvas has been carefully crafted to accommodate low bandwidth environments.
- Minimum of 512kbps

Audio and Video Capability

- You will need an internal or external microphone. Most computers now come with them built in.
- You will need an internal or external camera. Most computers now come with them built in.

TECHNICAL SKILLS REQUIREMENTS

As an online student your "classroom" experience will be very different than a traditional student. As part of your online experience, you can expect to utilize a variety of technologies, such as:

1. Communicate via email including sending attachments
2. Navigate the internet using a Web browser
3. Use office applications such as Microsoft Office or Google Docs to create documents
4. Learn how to communicate using a discussion board and upload assignments to a classroom Web site
5. Upload and download saved files
6. Have easy access to the Internet
7. Navigate Canvas, including using the email component within Canvas
8. Use a microphone to record audio through your computer
9. Use an internal or external camera to record video through your computer

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

- **Canvas**
 - Click on the Help link (on lower-left of page in Canvas) to reach Canvas Support, including the Canvas Student Guide and 24 hour Canvas Support Hotline at 855-338-2770.

- **Google Apps**
 - Use of Georgetown University-issued accounts for Google Mail, Calendar, Groups, Talk, Docs, Sites, Video, and Contacts is governed by the contract between Georgetown University and Google. For help please visit: <https://uis.georgetown.edu/google-apps>.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Learning Resources

SCS offers a host of learning resources to its students. Two that you might find particularly helpful in this course are the Writing Center and Refworks.

- The [Writing Center](#) offers professional writing support through its online peer tutoring service.
- [RefWorks](#) is an online research management tool that aids in organizing, storing, and presenting citation sources for papers and projects.

Support Services

SCS offers a variety of support systems for students that can be accessed online, at the School of Continuing Studies downtown location, and on the main Georgetown campus:

- Academic Resource Center 202-687-8354
| arc@georgetown.edu | <http://academicsupport.georgetown.edu>
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services 202-687-6985 | <http://caps.georgetown.edu/>
- Institutional Diversity, Equity & Affirmative Action (IDEAA) 202-687-4798
| <https://ideaa.georgetown.edu/>