

PHIL 202: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

CONTACT INFO	Elise Woodard ✉: ewoodard@umich.edu 🌐: elisewoodard.org
COURSE INFO	Spring Semester: May 5–June 18 Course Times: Tu/Th 2–4PM Section: 2–3PM Office Hours: 3–4PM All course materials will be posted on Canvas 📄
DESCRIPTION	This course introduces students to central philosophical problems and methods of philosophical analysis. Students will learn both how to critically engage with philosophical texts and how to craft philosophical arguments. To cultivate these skills, we'll read some classic philosophical texts as well as contemporary articles. We'll discuss timeless issues—such as whether we can know that we're not brains in vats (or in the Matrix)—as well as distinctively contemporary issues, such as how to deal with the problem of fake news. Additional questions we'll consider include: Does morality require impartiality? Why should we trust experts? Is lying ever permissible? What's the difference between lying and bullshitting? and more!
NARRATIVE	Although we cover a lot of ground, this class has a narrative arc. We start with the problem of global skepticism and whether we can know anything about the external world. We end with a more contemporary version of skepticism: given that many of us are in 'epistemic bubbles,' how can we know that we're ever getting at the truth as opposed to believing in merely partisan, ideological ways? How can we escape our bubbles? Each topic is connected to the one before it, and we'll draw out the connections along the way!
SKILLS LEARNED	Read philosophy * Charitably reconstruct arguments * Make arguments * Evaluate arguments * Offer objections & responses * Debate & discuss difficult topics respectfully * Apply philosophical tools to contemporary problems
ACCOMMODATIONS	If you need any accommodations—either due to disability or as a result of the move to online instruction—please let me know within the first 10 days of the course and provide any relevant documentation.

Last Updated: June 13, 2020

PLAGIARISM

Please review the [Academic Integrity Policy](#). Any time you submit work, make sure that it is your own and that you give appropriate credit to works and individuals you consult. If you collaborate with someone on the project, work must be equally distributed and you must note who you collaborated with on any submitted work.

GRADING

6% Attendance & Participation¹

6% Canvas Discussion Boards

24% Quizzes (6% each; 5 quizzes available, drop 1)

30% ‘Philosophical Journal’ (3 × 10% each)

6% Paper Prep & Peer Review Worksheet (Worksheet due 6/15; Peer Review due 6/18)

28% Philosophy Paper (due 6/22)

GRADING SCHEME

A+: [99–100]	B+: [87, 90]	C+: [77, 80]	D+: [67, 70]	F: [0, 60]
A: [94, 99]	B: [83, 87]	C: [73, 77]	D: [63, 67]	
A- [90, 94]	B-: [80, 83]	C-: [70, 77]	D-: [60, 63]	

ASSIGNMENTS

Participation Philosophy is best learned by *doing* philosophy. You are expected to participate in at least *one* discussion section a week. If you cannot attend either option, there will be alternative ways to engage (such as having a recorded or written conversation with a small group of students in a similar boat).

Canvas Discussion Boards You’ll be required to post to the discussion board at least two times per week. You’ll be expected to *both* (a) ask a question, which can be either substantive or clarificatory, *and* (b) respond to a question.² You are expected to write your question by Wednesday at 11:59PM and reply to someone else’s question by Friday at 11:59PM. (This is the minimum, you are very welcome/encouraged to post more than this!) You can ask a question about the lecture content, class discussion, or the readings. A guide to asking questions is posted on Canvas. You can take *one* week off of your choosing.

Quizzes There will be five quizzes in Canvas—one for weeks 2–6. You can drop one. Quizzes will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions. In addition to covering content from lectures and readings, they will also ask you to exercise some skills you’ve learned. Quizzes will be due on Thursday by 11:59PM.

Philosophical Journal In philosophy, it’s very easy to lose the forest for the trees. To encourage practices of good reading (and to help prepare you for your final project), I want you to submit 3 philosophical ‘journal’ entries throughout the course answering the following questions regarding **one** reading (per entry):

¹There will be options for both synchronous discussion and asynchronous discussion.

²Exception for Week 1: (a) Write in Introduction thread, (b) Write a question or reply to a question about the readings of lectures.

- (a) In 4–6 sentences and in your own words, summarize the author’s main thesis & any other key parts of the paper. [4 pts]³
- (b) In 4–6 sentences, either: (i) concisely develop your own objection to part of the author’s view, or (ii) state and evaluate an author’s response to an objection [4 pts]
- (c) What part of the paper did you find most compelling and why? (2–3 sentences) [1 pt]
- (d) What part of the paper was the ‘muddiest’? *Alternatively*: what part of *this assignment* was most difficult to complete? What could’ve helped? (e.g. more background, greater clarity from the author, etc..) (2–4 sentences) [1 pt]

(a)–(b) will help you hone in on the skill of picking out the most important parts of the reading. They will also help cultivate some important writing skills, such as precision, and knowing which details to focus on.

(c)–(d) will help with *metacognition*, or thinking about thinking. It’s good practice (philosophically and pedagogically!) to reflect both on what you find most persuasive and what you’re confused about. These will be graded on the basis of thoughtfulness.

Your journal entry should be submitted, via Canvas by the day before the relevant reading is scheduled. For example, if you choose to write an entry about Nozick’s “The Experience Machine” (scheduled for 5/14), you should submit that by 5/13 11:59PM.

That said, so that you don’t leave these until the last minute, here are a few benchmarks.

- 1st: Monday, 5/18⁴
- 2nd: Wednesday, 5/27⁵
- 3rd: Wednesday, 6/10⁶

I strongly encourage you to write your journal entry before watching the relevant lecture so that you can cultivate the relevant skills on your own. Also, note that it doesn’t make sense to write an entry on any of the optional readings or 1KP readings.

Paper Prep & Peer Review Worksheet You’ll be expected to fill out a paper prep worksheet and participate in peer review. This will help you articulate your thesis and start a preliminary outline of your paper. Details distributed in class. Worksheet due 6/15, Peer Review due 6/18.

Philosophy Paper 1500–1700 words. The paper will be due by Monday, 6/22 at 11:59PM (via Canvas). There will be a paper workshop, and I’ll supply ample resources, including a rubric.

³Suggestion: Imagine someone asks you what you just read. What are the key points you would tell them? You can use the lectures for guidance, but the key thing is being able to put things in your own words.

⁴Entry submitted *on* this day should be about a reading no sooner than Keller’s ‘Friendship and Belief’

⁵Entries submitted *on* this day should be about a reading no sooner than Kant’s “On A Supposed Right...”! Hopefully you’re seeing a pattern.

⁶Entries submitted *on* this day should be about a reading no sooner than Anderson’s paper. Writing on Nguyen’s piece is thus also obviously an option; you’d just need to read a bit ahead!

LATE POLICY

Late assignments typically will lose 3.5% per day late (unless otherwise stated).

Papers: Papers more than 4 days late cannot be accepted (due to the grading timeline). If you need an extension, please email me at least 24 hours in advance of the deadline.

Journal Entries: Late journal entries cannot be accepted after the relevant class begins.⁷

Quizzes: Quizzes cannot be submitted after Sunday at 12PM. Answers will be released by Sunday evening.

Discussion Board: Late discussion posts will lose .1 points per day late. Discussion board closes Saturday at 12PM.

COMMUNICATION

You can address me as 'Elise' in communications: e.g. 'Hi Elise,' or 'Dear Elise,'

I will respond to all emails within 24 hours. In some cases, I may answer any FAQ's via the Announcements section on Canvas instead of replying directly.

Please include 'PHIL 202' somewhere in your subject line.

READINGS & TOPICS

What is Philosophy? How do you do it?

Tu 5/5 Jennifer Morton, "[An Antidote to Injustice](#)"

Global Skepticism

Th 5/7 Descartes, Meditations 1–2 from *Meditations on First Philosophy* [11 pp]

Week 2

How to Solve Skepticism & Get Out of the Vat

Tu 5/12 G.E. Moore, "Proof of an External World"⁸ [3 pp]

David Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge" (Selections)⁹ [≈ 8 pp]

YouTube, Wi-Phi: "[Epistemology: Contextualism](#)" [8:45]

What You Don't Know Can't Hurt You(?)

Th 5/14 Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine"¹⁰ [3 pp]

Fred Feldman, "The Good Life: A Defense of Attitudinal Hedonism" (pp. 614–6) [3 pp]

Optional: NYT, "[Do your friends actually like you?](#)"

⁷As noted in rubric: I expect that some mistakes will be made, so I reserve the right to take off up to two points for this; OR you may have the opportunity to submit a different journal entry for a reading that hasn't yet been covered in section.

⁸Republished in [Epistemology: An Anthology](#)

⁹From pp. 549–561; pp. 566–567

¹⁰Excerpted from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*

Week 3

What Should We Believe About Our Friends?

Tu 5/19 Simon Keller, "Friendship and Belief" [23 pp]

📌 **First Journal Entry due by 5/18** 📌

Ethics & Partiality: Friendship & Virtue

Th 5/21 Simon Keller, *Partiality*, pp. 1–21

Week 4

Ethics & Impartiality: Utilitarianism & Aid

Tu 5/26 Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" [17 pp]

YouTube, Crash Course Philosophy: [Utilitarianism](#)

Ethics & Impartiality: Kantianism & Lying

Th 5/28 Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns" [5 pp]

Andrew Chapman, "[Deontology: Kant Ethics](#)" (1KP)

Optional: Rae Langton, "Duty & Desolation" [25 pp] (CW: *Suicide*)

📌 **Second Journal Entry due by 5/27** 📌

Week 5

Lying & Bullshit

Tu 6/2 Harry Frankfurt, "On Bullshit" [16 pp]

Bullshit & Fake News

Th 6/4 Regina Rini, "[Fake News & Partisan Epistemology](#)" [16 pp]

Week 6

Free Speech & Fake News

Tu 6/9 John Stuart Mill, Selections from [On Liberty](#) [≈ 6pp]

YouTube: "[The Limitations of Free Speech](#)" (≈ 6 min)

Daniela C. Manzi, "[Managing the Misinformation Marketplace](#)" (pp. 2624–p. 2632) [9pp]

Trust & Democracy

Th 6/11 Elizabeth Anderson, "Democracy, Public Policy, and Lay Assessments of Scientific Testimony" [16 pp]

1000 Word Philosophy on [Testimony](#)

📌 **Third Journal Entry due by 6/10** 📌

📌 **Paper Worksheet due 6/15** 📌

Week 7

Epistemic Bubbles & Brains in Vats

Tu 6/16 C. Thi Nguyen, "[Escape the Echo Chamber](#)" (Aeon)

Wrap Up

Th 6/18 *Wrap Up*

📌 **Peer Review due by 6/18** 📌

📌 **Paper due by 6/22** 📌

Progress Checklist

Weekly Discussion Board Posts (Drop 1 week):

- ☐ Discussion Board Posts Week 1
 - ☐ Post in the Introductions Thread by Fri
 - ☐ One Additional Post: either question or response by Sun
- ☐ Discussion Board Posts Week 2
 - ☐ Question by Wed
 - ☐ Response by Fri
- ☐ Discussion Board Posts Week 3
 - ☐ Question by Wed
 - ☐ Response by Fri
- ☐ Discussion Board Posts Week 4
 - ☐ Question by Wed
 - ☐ Response by Fri
- ☐ Discussion Board Posts Week 5
 - ☐ Question by Wed
 - ☐ Response by Fri
- ☐ Discussion Board Posts Week 6
 - ☐ Question by Wed
 - ☐ Response by Fri
- ☐ Discussion Board Posts Week 7
 - ☐ Question by Wed
 - ☐ Response by Fri

Mostly Weekly Quizzes (1 dropped):

- ☐ Quiz Week 2 by Thurs
- ☐ Quiz Week 3 by Thurs
- ☐ Quiz Week 4 by Thurs
- ☐ Quiz Week 5 by Thurs
- ☐ Quiz Week 6 by Thurs

Journals:

- ☐ Submit Journal 1 by Mon, 5/18
- ☐ Submit Journal 2 by Wed, 5/27
- ☐ Submit Journal 3 by Wed, 6/10

Paper:

- ☐ Paper Worksheet due 6/15
- ☐ Peer Review due 6/18
- ☐ Paper due 6/22