

# INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

## RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

### SPRING 2021

#### INSTRUCTOR

Wes Skolits, PhD (Wes.Skolits@Rutgers.edu)

#### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides a broadly historical and thematic introduction to academic philosophy. This discipline is notoriously hard to define; however, we can say that philosophy—which etymologically derives from two greek words meaning “love of wisdom”—concerns thinking hard about life’s most important questions. Moreover, we will learn the tools by which philosophers answer these questions.

This online course is *asynchronous*, which means that we do not meet “live” at any specific time. Asynchronous courses place a more significant burden on students, which should be noted. (Please email me if you have a major concern.) All the assignments, readings, and lectures—along with their deadlines—will be provided for you on Canvas.

#### OFFICE HOURS

Office hours are optional, and will take place via Skype, Zoom, or Webex. Please feel free to email me anytime to book an appointment or discuss anything of concern. Please do allow 48 (weekday) hours for a response to emails.

#### COURSE TEXTS

There is no course textbook. PDF copies of the readings are uploaded to Canvas.

#### COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the main areas of philosophy—particularly, epistemology, philosophy of religion, and ethics.
2. To evaluate the arguments for the main positions which we will consider in the above subdisciplines.
3. To understand the basic development of the history of philosophy.
4. To write a substantial, argumentative paper in philosophy.

#### EVALUATION

Exams: Midterm: 15%, Final (25%) = 40% total

Paper =15%

Weekly Discussion Board posts: 15 = 20 % total

Weekly Quizzes: 15 = 25 % total

Exams: there will be a midterm and a final exam, the latter of which will be cumulative.

These will be multiple choice and true/false.

Papers: there will be only one paper. The information on how to prepare and complete it will be uploaded to Canvas early in the semester.

Discussion Posts: You will be required to write 14 posts in the Discussions section on Canvas. (There is one “freebie”.)

Weekly Quizzes: There will be weekly, comprehension based quizzes on the readings on Canvas. These will be due by Sunday. (There is one “freebie”.)

Lectures with handouts will be uploaded weekly and are mandatory.

Important Dates:

Quizzes: (one each week by Sunday)

Discussion Posts: (one each week by Sunday)

**Midterm: March 9**

**Paper: April 2**

**Final: May 6 (Time to be noted on Canvas)**

Note: You’ll notice that the readings in this course are short. This is intentional; philosophy is hard, and you should read every assigned article (slowly) twice. Please take the time to follow this requirement.

Finally, this syllabus is not comprehensive, and you are responsible for paying attention to further information that is provided on Canvas and via email. Please be advised!

## GRADING SCALE

> 90.00 A

88.00 - 89.00 B+

83.00 - 87.99 B

80.00 - 82.99 C+

70.00 - 79.99 C

60.00 - 69.99 D

<= 59.99 F

## SCHEDULE OF READINGS

### I. PHILOSOPHICAL PRELIMINARIES<sup>1</sup>

E.J. Coffman, “Finding, Clarifying, and Evaluating Arguments”

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<sup>1</sup> This schedule is not a contract and is subject to change as per the instructor’s judgment.

Jim Pryor, "Philosophical Terms & Methods"  
Jim Pryor, "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy"

## II. APPEARANCE VS REALITY

Short selections from each:

### ANCIENT:

Presocratics

Plato

Aristotle

### MODERN:

Descartes

Locke

Hume

Berkeley

Kant

### PERCEPTION:

Appearance vs reality in contemporary theorists of perception

## III. RATIONALITY OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

Readings:

W.K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief"

William James, "The Will to Believe"

Kelly James Clark, "Without Evidence or Argument"

## IV. ETHICS

Conee, "The Metaphysics of Ethics" in *Riddles of Existence* (OUP)

LaFollete "Theorizing About Ethics"

([http://www.normanrschultz.com/ethics/LaFollette\\_intro.pdf?i=1](http://www.normanrschultz.com/ethics/LaFollette_intro.pdf?i=1))

Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck"

<https://www.iep.utm.edu/ethics/>

## STUDENT WELLNESS

Just In Case Web App

<http://codu.co/cee05e> Access helpful mental health information and resources for yourself or a friend in a mental health crisis on your smartphone or tablet and easily contact CAPS or RUPD.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)

(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901/

[www.rhscaps.rutgers.edu/](http://www.rhscaps.rutgers.edu/) CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

#### Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA)

(848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 /

[www.vpva.rutgers.edu/](http://www.vpva.rutgers.edu/) The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 848-932-1181. Disability Services

(848) 445-6800 / Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854 / <https://ods.rutgers.edu/> The Office of Disability Services works with students with a documented disability to determine the eligibility of reasonable accommodations, facilitates and coordinates those accommodations when applicable, and lastly engages with the Rutgers community at large to provide and connect students to appropriate resources.

#### Scarlet Listeners

(732) 247-5555 / <http://www.scarletlisteners.com/> Free and confidential peer counseling and referral hotline, providing a comforting and supportive safe space.

#### HELPFUL PHILOSOPHY RESOURCES

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu>

Dictionary of Philosophy of Mind: <http://philosophy.uwaterloo.ca/MindDict/>

David Chalmers' bibliography of Philosophy of Mind: <http://consc.net/biblio.html>