

01:730:103

Introduction to Philosophy

**Spring
2021**

Carolina Flores

Office Hours: Thursdays 1:30-2:30 pm; or by appointment.

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Required Texts

All readings, handouts, assignments, and announcements will be posted on Canvas. Links to online resources are also on the syllabus.

Course Description

This class will introduce students to a wide range of philosophical problems. We will typically take contemporary, real-world issues as our starting point; as it happens, such issues often lead to traditional philosophical problems. Questions we will consider include: Am I the same person I was last year? What do our social identities—our genders, ethnicities, and so on—mean? Are we living in a computer simulation? What exactly do we mean when we accuse someone of bullshitting? When is work meaningful? Should we be giving all our money away? Should we abolish prisons?

Through thinking about these problems, you will develop a number of skills that matter in philosophy and life in general: reading and critically engaging with difficult texts; challenging basic assumptions; and analyzing concepts, drawing distinctions, and forming and assessing arguments. The class is reading and writing intensive. Even though most of the readings and writing assignments are short, you will be called upon to practice extremely careful and precise reading and writing.

This class is asynchronous, which means that there are no (online or in-person) classes. All the work for the class is to be done in your own time. There will be Zoom office hours and a few review sessions over the semester.

Course Goals

In this class, you will learn to:

- Read and critically engage with difficult texts
- Charitably reconstruct and assess arguments
- Construct clear and persuasive arguments
- Challenge your basic assumptions, beliefs, and values
- Develop and respond to objections to philosophical views
- Analyze concepts and draw helpful distinctions
- Apply philosophical tools to contemporary problems
- Effectively and concisely communicate complex ideas in writing

You will also acquire some basic concepts in philosophy and become familiar with the main sub-fields of philosophy. I hope, also, that you acquire a taste for philosophical questioning, feel compelled by the questions we will be discussing, and choose to take further philosophy classes.

Finally, the structure of the course gives you a large degree of autonomy. You can choose what to focus on and prioritize according to your interests. Correspondingly, learning to do autonomy well—in a way that helps you live in accordance with your values—is an important general goal of this class.

Weekly Workflow

Here is what the weekly structure of the class will be:

- Tuesday at noon:
 - o Deadline to read and collectively annotate the reading using Perusall
 - o Instructor posts weekly video (with embedded quiz)
- Thursday at 1:30 pm: office hours on Zoom.
 - o There will also be an active Q&A forum throughout the week, where you can post questions or thoughts you have about the material for the week. Points will be awarded for thoughtful questions or for answering your peers' questions. The instructor will moderate and respond to questions as well.
- Friday at noon:
 - o Deadline to submit (1) the video quiz, and (2) the weekly short writing assignment.
- Friday afternoon:
 - o Instructor posts announcement introducing the next topic, questions to guide your reading on Perusall, and the short writing assignment for the week.
 - o Recommended: make a plan for when you will do the weekly tasks the following week.
 - I recommend getting started early on all of the tasks and breaking them into small chunks. For example, there are typically 2-3 readings each week; I recommend taking a break between them, instead of giving yourself an uninterrupted chunk of 3 hours to do it all.

This may seem like a lot, but remember that we have no in-person class meetings (other than 3 fully optional review/discussion sessions). Further, the assignment structure is built with flexibility in mind. Roughly, you need to complete 10/14 weeks of this class for a shot at full credit.

I expect you to spend about:

- 2-4 hours on active reading,
- 30-45 minutes on the videos and video quiz,
- 1-1h30 on the short writing assignment, and
- 30 minutes-1 hour on additional tasks (such as organizing your weekly workflow, reflecting on feedback, or asking further questions during office hours or in the Q&A forum).

You should be spending around 4-6 hours a week on work for class, with additional work for the midterm and final.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Readings in italics are guides to different key philosophical skills.

Week	Topic	Readings/Videos/Podcasts
Module 0. What are we doing in this class?		
Jan 17-23	What is philosophy and	Syllabus Jen Morton, An Antidote to Injustice <i>Wi-Phi, Introduction to Critical Thinking video</i>

	how do I do it well?	
Module 1. Who Am I?		
Jan 24–30	Am I the same person I was last year?	Dennett, Where am I? Brison, Outliving Oneself: Trauma, memory, and personal identity <i>Guide to reading philosophy</i>
Jan 31– Feb 6	What do my social identities mean?	Hacking, Making Up People Dembroff, Why Be Non-Binary <i>Guide to argument reconstruction</i> OPTIONAL REVIEW SESSION 1 (Feb 5, 4pm)
Module 2. How do I know anything in the first place?		
Feb 7–13	Do I have access to the world out there?	Bostrom, Are We Living in a Computer Simulation? Nguyen, “Escape the Echo Chamber” <i>Guide to constructing objections</i>
Feb 14–20	What is bullshit and how do I avoid it?	Frankfurt, On Bullshit Zeynep Tufekci, It’s the (Democracy-Poisoning) Golden-Age of Free Speech <i>Wi-Phi Philosophy, Necessary and Sufficient Conditions I and II videos</i>
Feb 21–27	Who knows best?	Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment (chapter 11) Olufemi Taiwo, Being-in-the-Room Privilege: Elite capture and epistemic deference <i>Jim Pryor, Guidelines on writing a philosophy paper</i>
Module 3. Why am I here anyway?		
Feb 28– March 6	Does life have any meaning?	Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus Nozick, The Experience Machine <i>Guide to writing an outline</i> OPTIONAL REVIEW SESSION 2 (March 4, 3pm)
March 7– 13	Is all work just drudgery?	David Graeber, On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs Andrea Veltman, What Makes Work Meaningful? MIDTERM OUTLINE DUE (March 12)
March 14– 20	SPRING BREAK	
Module 4. Is it time for a revolution?		

March 21-27	Should I give all my money away?	Singer, <i>Famine, Affluence, and Morality</i> Larissa MacFarquar, <i>Strangers Drowning</i> , chapters 3 and 4 MIDTERM DUE (March 23)
March 28-April 3	Should I be angry?	Martha Nussbaum, <i>Beyond Anger</i> bell hooks, <i>Killing Rage</i> Agnes Callard, <i>The Philosophy of Anger</i>
April 4-10	Should we abolish the family?	Judy Brady, <i>I Want a Wife</i> Silvia Federici, <i>Wages Against Housework</i> Sophie Lewis, <i>Covid-19 is Straining the Concept of Family. Let's Break It.</i>
April 11-17	Should we abolish prisons?	Angela Davis, <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i> (Chapters 1 and 6) Ava DuVernay, <i>13th</i> (film) OUTLINE DUE (April 13)
April 18-24	Should we burn it all down?	Martin Luther King, <i>Letter from a Birmingham Jail</i> Malcolm X, <i>The Ballot or the Bullet</i> <i>Guide to peer review</i> OPTIONAL REVIEW SESSION 3 (April 21, 5pm) DRAFT PAPER DUE (April 23)
April 25-May 1	Writing activities + What next?	No reading! Key tasks: self-assessment, peer review. <i>Guide to philosophy sub-fields and what classes to take next.</i> PEER REVIEW DUE (April 30)
May 12		FINAL PAPER DUE

Course Requirements

Use the Introduction to Philosophy Progress Checklist (available on Canvas in Module 0) to help you keep track of your progress toward meeting the course requirements.

- Reading and annotating 20 readings using Perusall, 0.5 per reading. Total points available: 10.
- Video quizzes, 1 per video. Total points available: 10.
- 10 short writing assignments (300 words each), worth 4 points each. Total points available: 40.
- Midterm short paper, 15 points available.
 - o Outline: 5 points, graded.
 - o Paper: 10 points, graded.
- Final paper, 25 points available.
 - o Outline: 3 points for handing in, ungraded.
 - o Peer review: 7 points, graded.
 - o Final paper: 15 points, graded.

- Extra credit, 3 points available. 1 point for each of:
 - o Attending office hours, having sent 3 substantive questions about the course material in advance,
 - o Attending and participating in 1 optional review session,
 - o Participating in the Q&A discussion board, with 5 substantive comments over the course of the semester (either posting a substantive question or answering others' questions).
 - o Meeting up with other students in the class to discuss the course material for at least 30 minutes and sending the instructor a Zoom recording of the meeting.

All assignments are to be submitted by the due date on Canvas. Here are some more details about the course requirements.

Weekly work

These assignments will be available every week, but you only need to complete approximately 10 weeks (out of 14) for full credit. Specifically, you need to complete 10 short writing assignments, 20 reading annotations, and 20 video quizzes. You can, of course, complete more of these, in which case your best scores will count toward your final grade. **I will not accept these assignments late.**

- **Reading (10 points available, 0.5 per article):** Each week, you are expected to do the reading. For credit, I expect you to annotate the texts using Perusall, a program for collective study. This lets you view others' annotations, upvote your favorites, and comment on others' annotations. These annotations are automatically graded. For full credit, you should aim to write about 4 substantive annotations per text (i.e. points that include paraphrasing and reflecting on the points made, and not just 'Great!' or 'I disagree!'). These are due on Tuesday at noon.
- **Video quizzes (10 points available, 0.5 per quiz):** Each week, the instructor will post at least 2 short videos (5-10 minutes each) about the main themes in the reading. 2 of these will include 2-4 embedded questions. Answers are to be automatically graded for correctness. Each quiz is worth 0.5 points in total. These are due on Friday at noon.
- **Short writing assignments (40 points available, 4 per assignment):** Each week, the instructor will post a short writing assignment (around 300 words, which would be 1 page double-spaced). The format of these will vary: you might be asked to reconstruct an argument, object to a point in the reading, apply the material discussed in a real-world setting, put forward your own view, and so on. These will be graded based on the rubric below. These are due on Friday at noon.

Midterm and Final

Papers (and other paper-related material) should be submitted with no identifying information through Canvas by the due date (midnight of the day listed). Except in extreme conditions, extensions must be granted well before the due date; late papers will be downgraded 1/3 grade per day.

- **Midterm (15 points available: 5 points for the outline, 10 points for paper):** For the midterm, you will be expected to send me:
 - o An outline of your paper by March 12.
 - o The paper by March 23.

- **Final (25 points available: 3 points for the outline, 7 points for the peer review, 15 points for the paper):** For the final paper, you will be expected to send me:
 - o An outline of your paper by April 13
 - o A paper draft by April 22
 - o A review of a peer's draft by April 30
 - o The final paper by May 12.

This may seem like a lot of work, but the goal here is to help you produce the best paper possible and practice a range of important writing-relevant skills. We will spend time in class talking about all the relevant steps.

Note: though the instructor will not grade the paper draft, you will receive a paper to review only if you hand in your paper draft. If you don't submit it, you will automatically lose 5 points in your total grade.

Communication and "in-person" contact

You can address me as 'Carolina' in communications. I will respond to all emails within 24 hours, except on weekends. In some cases, I may answer any FAQs via the Announcements section on Canvas instead of replying directly. I do not respond to e-mails outside working hours (9-6 on weekdays).

Office hours: I will host Zoom office hours every Thursday, at 1:30 pm, unless otherwise stated. You can also schedule office hour appointments for other times by e-mailing me. All such appointments must be scheduled at least 24 hours in advance (e.g. if you would like to meet on Friday at 2 pm, you should e-mail me with this request by Thursday at 2 pm). Your e-mail should specify what you would like to discuss during office hours. Office hour appointments will typically be 15 minutes long. To receive extra credit for attendance, you must e-mail me 3 substantive questions you would like to discuss in advance.

Examples of substantive questions are: "I didn't understand this argument /concept in the reading. Can you explain?"; "What are the applications of view X for real-world issue Y?"; "Here is my objection to the view in paper X."; or questions about your own work, e.g. "How can I improve the structure of my papers?", or "I need help with time management because... What would you recommend that I do?".

Q&A forum: There will be a Q&A forum on Canvas, where you are welcome to post questions or observations about the course material and to respond to others' questions. Sustained participation (at least 5 instances over the semester) will earn you extra credit. I will respond to questions that have not been addressed within 3 days of posting.

Optional review sessions: There will be 3 optional review/discussion sections, with extra credit awarded for attending. In these sessions, we will collectively draw central lessons from the material covered in the preceding weeks and address remaining points of confusion. These sessions are also an opportunity for you to practice doing philosophy with your peers. The schedule is:

- Friday, Feb 5, 4 pm
- Thursday, March 4, 3 pm
- Wednesday, April 21, 5 pm.

If you are planning to attend, you must e-mail me to confirm at least 24 hours in advance.

Other Expectations

I expect you to be familiar with and to abide by RU's policy on academic and intellectual integrity: academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy. Violations of this policy include cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity.

I also expect you to abide by the department's norms for discourse (philosophy.rutgers.edu/about-us/discourse). In particular, I expect all participants to observe basic norms of civility and respect. This means stating your own views directly and substantively: focusing on reasons, assumptions, and consequences rather than on who is offering them, or how. And it means engaging other's views in the same terms. No topic or claim is too obvious or controversial to be discussed; but claims and opinions have a place in the discussion only when they are presented in a respectful, collegial, and constructive way.

If you need special accommodations because of a learning disability or any other reason, please have the Office of Disability Services (ods.rutgers.edu) get in touch with me.

Grading Rubric for Writing Assignments

Below is roughly what each letter grade means. Note that '+' grades will be assigned for fine-tuning.

A

Papers: Fully answers the question in a concise and convincing manner. Provides a strong argument, with a clearly stated, relevant thesis, a transparent argument structure, and compelling premises. Considers objections and makes a persuasive effort to address them. Writes clearly, in plain language, and uses terminology in a precise manner. Shows insight by going beyond examples, views, or objections discussed in class.

Short writing assignments: Relevant to the topic, concise, clearly written, and specific. Articulates a question or objection which reveals engagement with the text, and which contributes to class discussion.

B

Papers: Answers most of the question. Provides a solid argument, with a clear thesis, mostly transparent argument structure, and relevant premises, though the argument may have some significant gaps. Displays understanding of the topic by considering other views, though perhaps without articulating points independently or while showing confusion about some significant point. Writes mostly in a clear manner, though there might be inaccuracies that compromise the points made.

Short writing assignments: Mostly relevant to the topic, but some points may be poorly articulated or insufficiently articulated.

C

Papers: More-or-less off-topic and unclear. Fails to provide an argument and shows significant confusion about major points.

Short writing assignments: More-or-less off-topic and unclear. Fails to provide an argument and shows significant confusion about major points.

D and below: scarce evidence of effort or understanding along all dimensions.

F: dishonest work.

Student-Wellness Services

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/

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/

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/>

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation:

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

Scarlet Listeners, (732) 247-5555 / <http://www.scarletlisteners.com/>

Free and confidential peer counseling and referral hotline, providing a comforting and supportive safe space.