

**PHIL 100: Introduction to Philosophy
Syllabus, Spring 2021**

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Class time: MWF, 12:30-1:20
Location: Zoom
Office hours: Th, 2:30-4:30pm,
or by appointment

1. Course description

Philosophy, in its most basic form, involves stopping to reflect on what one is doing: Why am I doing it? Should I be doing it? Could I be doing it better? Philosophical reflection is frequently occasioned when something we normally take for granted breaks down – at this point, we can no longer take it for granted, but must *reflect* on it. In this sense, everyone does philosophy *sometimes*, but not everyone does it *consciously, regularly, or rigorously*. This class, as in introduction to philosophy, aims to help you recognize the philosophical issues that will inevitably arise in your lives, and to equip you to address them. To this end, we will spend the quarter considering two concepts that we all rely on in our lives, but which are more complex than we often realize: ‘freedom’ and ‘love’. We will consider these complexities by reading and discussing primary texts from various of the world’s philosophical traditions.

2. Course texts

There are three required texts for this course:

- Plato (tr. Grube), *Meno* ([Hackett Publishing](#), \$7)
- Plato (tr. Woodruff, Nehemas), *Symposium* ([Hackett Publishing](#), \$11)
- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* ([Hackett Publishing](#), \$8)

You are expected to acquire your own copies of these texts; the price listed is for the paperbacks, if you buy them directly from Hackett. For the two Plato texts, note that there are many different translations of them available. ***Please be sure to acquire the translation listed.***

All other required readings will be posted to the course Canvas page. I have listed one book as an optional text:

- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* ([Open Road Media](#), \$13.39)

We will be reading one chapter of this book for the course, which I will upload. However, in case you are interested in reading the rest of it, I have made it available through the UW bookstore.

3. Course structure

This course will meet five times per week, three times with Professor Novick (MWF) and twice with your assigned TA (TTh). Most weeks, the Monday and Wednesday meetings will be devoted to lectures on the assigned readings, while the Tuesday and Thursday meetings will give you an opportunity to discuss the readings. Friday meetings will be a mix of lecture and discussion.

4. How to read philosophy

Course readings must be completed by the start of your discussion sections. My *recommendation* is that you complete the readings before the associated lectures on Monday and Wednesday, then re-read them for Tuesday/Thursday. That is the best way to get the most out of them. If you do not have time to read them twice, I recommend reading them *after* the associated lectures; these texts are difficult without some background information to ground you.

Reading philosophy is different from the kinds of reading you will be used to, and skill in reading philosophy can only be acquired with repeated practice. This course will help you develop that skill. However, I can give you some pointers at the outset:

- *Look for the central question first.* Each of the texts that we will read addresses some question, and everything they say will be in some way relevant to answering this question. If you understand what question the author is trying to answer, it will make everything else easier to understand.
- *Look for the thesis second.* Once you have identified the question, try to determine the author's *answer* to that question – that is their *thesis*. Generally, the author will try to *convince* you to accept their thesis by providing *arguments*; understanding what the thesis is will make these arguments easier to identify.
- *Look for the argument third.* Once you have identified the author's thesis, ask what *reasons* the author gives you to accept their thesis. Together, these reasons constitute the author's *argument*. This argument will be *structured* (it will not be a series of disconnected thoughts), so think about how the reasons given relate.
- *Evaluate the argument fourth.* Only *after* identifying the author's thesis and argument should you ask whether (a) you agree with the thesis and (b) whether the author's argument is persuasive (*note: these are different questions!*). **Understand first; judge second.** One core philosophical skill is the ability to carefully consider the merits of views that you do not agree with; this is *impossible* if you rush to judge them before you have understood them.

5. Grading system

Each assignment for this course will be worth a set number of points. The sum total of possible points will be 100. The total number of points you receive will be converted to a grade between 0 and 4.0 according to the following scale:

A-range:	4.0: 95+	3.5: 90
B-range:	3.0: 85	2.5: 80
C-range:	2.0: 75	1.5: 70
D-range:	1.0: 65	0.7: 60-62

Basically, for each point you gain (above 62), your final course grade will go up by 0.1 points (starting from 0.7). You must gain at least 60 points total to pass the class.

6. Assignments

Attendance and participation (20 points). Attendance at the MWF lectures is not required; they will be recorded, captioned, and uploaded, so you can watch them on your own time. Attendance at the TTh discussion sections is required. You will be required to come to class having done the reading and completed a brief, completion-based assignment that will serve as the basis for course participation. Your TA will provide you with more details.

Short responses (24 points total; 4 x 6 points each). For short response assignments, you will be asked to write a brief (150-250 words) response to a prompt based on the reading for a given week. There will be seven short response assignments over the course of the quarter; you must complete four of them. The first is required; the remainder are optional, but you must complete *at least* one from each unit of the course. Do *not* complete more than four.

Short papers (30 points total; 2 x 15 points each). At the end of each unit of the course, you will write a short paper (500-600 words) answering the question “what is ___?” (freedom or love, depending on the unit). Your answer will be expected to make use of multiple of the course readings; more details will be provided when the assignments are given.

Final paper (26 points). Your final paper will be a *revision* and *expansion* (900-1000 words) of one of your short papers, based on feedback you received on the first, shorter version. There will be further additional requirements, provided on the assignment itself.

7. Resources

- The [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) (less thorough, easier) and the [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) (more thorough, more difficult) contain useful background information about many of the people and topics we will discuss.
- The [Philosophy Writing Center](#) @ UW can offer you guidance tailored specifically to improving your *philosophical* writing. I *strongly* recommend you visit them *at least once* during the term.

8. Course policies

Disability and accommodation policy. It is my intention that this course be accessible to all students. This means, minimally, that I will grant any accommodations required by the Disability Resources Center. However, some of you may need accommodations not formally certified by that office. If any aspect of the class poses a hardship for you, please talk to me, and we can work together to develop a plan for you to fulfill the course requirements.

Late assignment policy. If you need an extension on an assignment, please ask Professor Novick (*not* your TA) ***BEFORE*** the assignment is due. Please do not be scared to request an extension if you need one. Late assignments for which an extension has not been granted will lose half a point for each day they are late. Late assignments will not be accepted more than a week after the due date.

In-class etiquette. Philosophy is a social endeavor. People engaged in philosophy do not simply think in solitude, but rather engage in discussion with others. That will be true in this class as well: you will be encouraged to discuss the topics we cover with your fellow students. You are even encouraged to disagree with them. It is therefore imperative that you understand how to do so respectfully. Here are some ground rules:

- Think of those with whom you disagree not as opponents but as fellow seekers of the truth. Even if you disagree, you are *collaborating*.
- Acknowledge the person you are responding to, by name if possible.
- Address your comments to the arguments that have been offered. Never attack the intelligence or character of the person who argued for them.
- On some issues, you may have strongly held opinions. That is ok, but it is important to recognize that people who disagree with you are doing so in *good faith*. Before getting angry with or dismissive of another person, try to understand why they think the way they do.

Group work. Group work is permitted for all assignments in this course, so long as *the final product you turn in is your own work*. In other words, you may discuss assignments with your peers, you may compare your work and give each other feedback, and so forth. However, you must write up the final assignment yourself; failure to do so is one form of plagiarism (see below).

Plagiarism. In this course, you are expected to turn in work reflective of your own effort. I encourage you to discuss assignments with other students, but what you turn in must ultimately be your own work. You must also cite any sources that inform your work (including the encyclopedias mentioned on the previous page). We will talk more about expectations for this in class, and I will work with students to correct minor violations. Major violations (such as purchasing essays online) will trigger formal proceedings for academic misconduct.

9. Reading Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Reading (due Tuesday/Thursday)	Assignments (due on date listed)
<i>COURSE INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY</i>				
1	Mar 29	Course introduction	Syllabus	<i>no assignments</i>
	Mar 31	Learning philosophy (1)	Plato, <i>Meno</i>	<i>no assignments</i>
	Apr 02	Learning philosophy (2)	Plato, <i>Meno</i> (re-read)	Short response #1 (required)
<i>UNIT 1: FREEDOM</i>				
2	Apr 05	Mental freedom: Stoicism	Epictetus, "On Freedom"	<i>no assignments</i>
	Apr 07	Freedom and slavery	Douglass, "The last flogging"	<i>no assignments</i>
	Apr 09	Discussion: Epictetus and Douglass	<i>no reading</i>	Short response #2 (optional)
3	Apr 12	Political liberty	Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> , ch. 2	<i>no assignments</i>
	Apr 14	Political liberty	Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> , ch. 3	<i>no assignments</i>
	Apr 16	Discussion: Mill	<i>no reading</i>	<i>no assignments</i>
4	Apr 19	Political liberty	Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> , ch. 4	<i>no assignments</i>
	Apr 21	Political liberty	Davis, <i>Are Prisons Obsolete</i>	<i>no assignments</i>
	Apr 23	Discussion: Mill and Davis	<i>no reading</i>	Short response #3 (optional)

Week	Date	Topic	Reading (due Tuesday/Thursday)	Assignments (due on date listed)
5	Apr 26	Existentialism	De Beauvoir, "Personal Freedom and Others"	<i>no assignments</i>
	Apr 28	Mental freedom: Daoism	Zhuangzi, "Free and Easy Wandering"	<i>no assignments</i>
	Apr 30	Discussion: Zhuangzi and de Beauvoir	<i>no reading</i>	Short response #4 (optional)
UNIT 2: LOVE				
6	May 03	Love and the Good	Plato, <i>Symposium</i> , pp. 1-39	Short paper #1: What is freedom?
	May 05	Love and the Good	Plato, <i>Symposium</i> , pp. 40-77	<i>no assignments</i>
	May 07	Discussion: Plato	<i>no reading</i>	Short response #5 (optional)
7	May 10	Universal Love	Mozi, "Universal Love"	<i>no assignments</i>
	May 12	Universal Love	Śāntideva, "The Perfection of Meditative Absorption"	<i>no assignments</i>
	May 14	Discussion: Mozi and Śāntideva	<i>no reading</i>	Short response #6 (optional)
8	May 17	Marriage and Friendship	Montaigne, "Of Friendship"	<i>no assignments</i>
	May 19	Marriage and Friendship	Wollstonecraft, <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Women</i> , ch. 2	<i>no assignments</i>
	May 21	Discussion: Montaigne and Wollstonecraft	<i>no reading</i>	Short response #7 (optional)

9	May 24	Grief	Plutarch, "A Consolation to his Wife"	<i>no assignments</i>
	May 26	Grief	Moller, "Love and Death"	<i>no assignments</i>
	May 28	Discussion: Plutarch and Moller	<i>no reading</i>	Short paper #2: What is love?
10	May 31	NO CLASS - MEMORIAL DAY		
	Jun 02	Final papers	<i>no reading</i>	<i>no assignments</i>
	Jun 04	Final reflections	<i>no reading</i>	<i>no assignments</i>
Exam Week		No final exam	FINAL PAPER DUE ON JUNE 09	