

# Introduction to Philosophy

Philosophy 100 – Spring 2022  
(Gen Ed designation: AL)

## Basic course information

*Instructor:* Justin Mooney  
*Email:* jmooney@umass.edu  
*Office:* South College E410  
*Office hours:* TBD

*Course dates:* Jan 25 – May 12  
*Days:* Tuesdays & Thursdays  
*Time:* 2:30 - 3:45  
*Room:* Mary Lyon 119

The best way to communicate with me outside of class is via the email address listed above. I will do my best to answer emails within 48 hours.

## Course description and objectives

How do we discern right from wrong? Do we have free will? Is there a God? What does it take to be the same person over a period of time? Is time travel possible? What do we know and how do we know it? What is the meaning of life? These are the kinds of questions that philosophers think about, and this class will give you an opportunity to think through the various answers that philosophers have proposed and defended.

As we think through topics such as these, we will be working to develop and hone philosophical skills such as analyzing concepts, constructing and critiquing arguments, and evaluating philosophical theories.

The objectives for this course are the following:

1. Learn some of the arguments and views that philosophers have defended on various subjects in philosophy, including ethics, free will, God, time travel, and others.
2. Develop the skill of evaluating an argument for validity and soundness.
3. Write and revise a philosophical paper arguing for or against a philosophical thesis on a topic in philosophy.

Philosophy 100 satisfies the gen ed designation AL, because we will be reading some historically significant philosophical literature, and because there will be an emphasis on learning to communicate philosophical ideas clearly in writing.

This is a four-credit course. It will include readings, exercises, and writing assignments to be completed outside of scheduled class hours. You can expect to spend about six hours per week working on these assignments outside of class.

This course is a Residential Academic Program (RAP) course. It is equivalent in content, credit, and workload to the course section taught on the main campus. The advantage of a RAP course is that it is intended to facilitate a smooth transition to college life. This means that we will talk about some of the different campus resources that are available to you (e.g. Writing Center, Learning Resource Center, Five College Libraries and databases). We will also cultivate the skills that will help you in all of our college courses step by step, and we will make connections between this course, other courses, and life experiences. We will check in on these different components regularly throughout the semester because self-reflection is a key step to know how we learn and how we can improve our learning skills, too. As a part of your participation in this RAP course, you are **required** to attend a *RAP Wellbeing Session* once during the semester dates and details will be provided. You will also be required to complete the **RAP Mid-Semester Feedback Survey** in class using your laptop, during week six of the semester.

## Assignments

*Validity and Soundness Exercise:* near the beginning of this course you will be asked to complete a short exercise that gives you an opportunity practice a basic philosophical skill: determining whether an argument is valid and sound.

*Reading Responses:* You will be asked to complete a total of eight reading responses throughout the course. These are short, written reactions to the reading assignments, and they will be posted in a shared forum on our course Moodle page. Some of them may be replies to other student's posts. Aim for about one paragraph for each response. These assignments will give you practice expressing philosophical thoughts in writing.

*Argument evaluations:* You will be asked to complete two argument evaluations: 1-1.5 page critical discussions of the philosophical arguments that I will introduce to you in class lectures. These argument evaluations will help you learn how to critique a philosophical argument. They will also prepare you to write the final paper. More details about these argument evaluations will be provided in class.

*Final paper (and draft):* You will be asked to write a 5-6 page final paper in which you defend a position on a topic in philosophy. You should use one of your argument evaluations as the foundation for the final paper. One class period near the end of the semester will be a peer-review session where you can get feedback on a draft of your paper before turning in the final version. More details about the final paper will be provided in class.

*Participation:* this is a discussion-based class, and participation will be important to your learning experience. In this class, participation has three main components:

- (i) Attending class regularly. Poor attendance may negatively impact your grade. (See below for my attendance policy.)
- (ii) Completing the assigned readings on time. In the course schedule below, each reading is listed next to the date that we will discuss it in class, and should be completed by the start of class on that date.

- (iii) Speaking up regularly during small group discussions and class discussions. Most class sessions will include both a small group discussion time and a full class discussion time. To ensure that you get full points for participation, you should always contribute to small-group discussions, and you should aim to say something during full-class discussions about once a week or more.

## Grades

Your final grade in this class breaks down as follows. The validity & soundness exercise will be worth 4% of your final grade; the eight reading responses will be worth 16% of your final grade (2% each); the two argument evaluations will be worth 30% of the final grade (15% each); the first draft of the final paper will be worth 10% of your final grade; the final paper will be worth 30% of your final grade; and the remaining 10% will be based on class participation, which includes attendance and contribution to class discussion.

This class will use a standard grading scale:

A	93-100%	C	73-76%
A-	90-92%	C-	70-72%
B+	87-89%	D+	67-69%
B	83-86%	D	65-66%
B-	80-82	F	0-65%
C+	77-79%		

## Policies

*Attendance:* Regular attendance is expected. However, students are permitted three unexcused absences with no penalty. More than three unexcused absences may result in a deduction of points from the student's final grade.

*Extensions:* Extensions may be granted in special circumstances. Requests for extensions should be made prior to the due date of the assignment. Otherwise, assignments will be deducted by 1/3 letter grade for each day they are late (e.g. a B+ paper drops to a B paper if it is one day late; it drops to a B- if it is two days late; etc.). Assignments more than one week late will not be accepted.

*Class Discussion:* There will be many opportunities for in-class discussion during this course. Students are expected to be respectful of others. To help ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute during class discussions, we will use "the finger system", which I will explain on the first day of class.

*Academic Honesty:* As always, academic honesty is expected. The University policies regarding academic honesty will be followed in this class. For more information, see: <https://www.umass.edu/honesty/>

*Accessibility:* I intend this class to be accessible to all students. Students who need or would benefit from relevant accommodations should talk to me and also register with disability services. For more information, see: <https://www.umass.edu/disability/>

## Readings

All of the required readings for this course will be articles and extracts provided on the course Moodle page. You do not need to purchase any textbooks.

## Class Schedule

\*This schedule is subject to change.

### *Week 1: Introduction*

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|--------|---------------------------------------|
| Jan 25 | Intro                                 |
| Jan 27 | Midgley, “Trying Out One’s New Sword” |

### *Week 2: Moral Facts and Opinions*

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|-------|---|
| Feb 1 | McBrayer, “Why Our Children Don’t Think there are Moral Facts”<br><b>Reading Response 1 due</b> |
| Feb 3 | Argument basics: soundness and validity   |

### *Week 3: The Source of Morality*

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|--------|---|
| Feb 8  | Argument basics: common fallacies<br><b>Validity &amp; soundness exercise due</b> |
| Feb 10 | Plato, <i>The Euthyphro</i>   |

### *Week 4: Moral Consequences*

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|--------|---|
| Feb 15 | The <i>Mozi</i> , “Universal Love Part I” |
|--------|---|

**Reading Response 2 due**

Feb 17      The *Mozi*, “Condemnation of Music Part I”

*Week 5: Moral Rules*

Feb 22      No class – Monday schedule

Feb 24      Thomson, “The Trolley Problem”, sections 1 & 2  
**Reading Response 3 due**

*Week 6: Death*

Mar 1      Timmerman, “Dissolving Death’s Time-of-Harm Problem”  
**Reading Response 4 due**

Mar 3      van Inwagen, “The Possibility of Resurrection”

*Week 7: Personal Identity*

Mar 8      Locke, “Of Identity and Diversity”  
**Reading Response 5 due**

Mar 10      Writing workshop 1: argument evaluations  
RAP mid-semester feedback survey

*Week 8: Spring Recess*

*Week 9: Free Will*

Mar 22      Griffith, *Free Will: The Basics*, chapter 1  
**Argument Evaluation 1 due**

Mar 24      Griffith, *Free Will: The Basics*, chapter 2

*Week 10: God*

Mar 29      Rasmussen, “Foundation of Matter”  
**Reading Response 6 due**

Mar 31 Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence"

*Week 11: Buddhism*

Apr 5 *The Questions of King Milinda* (excerpt about the chariot)  
**Argument Evaluation 2 due**

Apr 7 *The Questions of King Milinda* (excerpt about rebirth)

*Week 12: Time Travel*

Apr 12 Miller, "Time Travel and the Open Future"  
**Reading Response 7 due**

Apr 14 Writing Workshop 2: how to write a philosophy paper

*Week 13: Knowledge*

Apr 19 Descartes, *First Meditation*  
**Reading Response 8 due**

Apr 21 Markosian, "Do You Know You are Not a Brain in a Vat?", sections 1-3

*Week 14: The Meaning of Life*

Apr 26 Writing Workshop 3: peer review session  
**Draft of final paper due**

Apr 28 Wolf, "Meaningfulness: A Third Dimension of the Good Life"  
Forward Focus course evaluations

*Week 15: Conclusion*

May 3 Blessing, "Atheism and the Meaningfulness of Life"

**Final paper due on May 8<sup>th</sup> at 5:00pm**