

Philosophical Inquiries

PHIL 110, Spring 2025

Basic course information

Instructor: Dr. Justin Mooney
Email: jmooney@holycross.edu
Office: Smith 517
Office hours: 1pm - 2pm, MWF

Course dates: Jan 22nd - May 5th
Days: Mondays, Wednesdays, & Fridays
Time: 3:00pm - 3:50pm
Room: Stein 215 (in-person)

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 at most, and usually sooner.

Course description and objectives

Philosophers are in the business of asking difficult questions. What does morality require us to do in difficult situations, and are its requirements absolute or relative? What is a person, and what does it take for a person to persist through time and change? Is there a God, and what might that God be like? What do we really know and how do we know it? This class will give you an opportunity to think through these questions and some of the most influential answers that philosophers have debated.

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 about some of the most influential philosophers and their views and arguments concerning topics such as ethics, personal identity, God, and others.
2. Begin (or continue) to develop philosophical skills, such as the ability to properly evaluate an argument.
3. Begin (or continue) to develop philosophical virtues, such as open-mindedness.
4. Learn to express philosophical ideas clearly in written work.

To meet these objectives, you will be asked to read and engage with work representing a variety of influential philosophical traditions and topics.

Assignments

Exams: There will be two exams in this class: a midterm (to be administered in class on March 14th) and a non-cumulative final (to be administered in class on the date set by the university). Each exam is worth 25% of your final grade. These will be bluebook exams with both fill-in-the-blank questions and short essay questions, based on the material that we discuss in class. I will provide the bluebooks. More details about the exams will be provided in class.

Autobiographical essay: You will be asked to write a 5-6 page autobiographical essay in which you pick a philosophical issue that you changed your mind about during this course and explain why you changed your mind. More details about the final paper are available on Canvas. The essay is due on April 16th, our final class meeting before Thanksgiving break, and it is worth 25% of your final grade. I will not read drafts of this essay, but if you would like to discuss your essay with me while it is in progress, you may do so during my office hours.

Participation: this is a discussion-based class, and participation will be important to your learning experience. It will also count for 25% of your final grade. In this class, participation includes the following components.

1. Attending class regularly. Unexcused absences may negatively impact your grade. Persistent tardiness may also negatively impact your grade.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. Completing in-class assignments. Throughout the course, there will occasionally be small assignments to be completed during class time. Failure to complete these assignments due to absence or for other reasons can negatively impact your grade.

You are not required to visit me during my office hours, but doing so a few times throughout the semester, for the purpose of discussing anything related to the course, can boost your participation grade.

Readings

There are no textbooks in this class. All required readings for this course will be available in digital form on the course's Canvas page. You are expected to complete each reading assignment before class on the day that we are scheduled to discuss it. (In the course schedule below, each reading is listed next to the date that we will discuss it in class.) Some of the assigned readings will be challenging. Please know that you are not expected to understand everything you read. I will explain the main ideas in class, and you will have opportunities to ask questions.

Sometimes I may ask the class for feedback about a particular reading assignment, especially how easy or challenging it was, and I will take this feedback into account for planning and instructional purposes.

Grades

Your final grade in this class breaks down as follows. The midterm exam is worth 25% of your final grade; the final exam is worth 25%; the autobiographical essay is worth 25%; and participation is worth 25%. 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%		

Policies¹

Attendance: Students are expected to attend class regularly and to fulfill all obligations of the course as outlined on this syllabus and discussed during class. If you need to miss a class session, you should communicate with me about this in advance. Whether an absence is excused is at the discretion of the instructor. Poor attendance counts against your participation grade. Students should also read and abide by [the College's class attendance policy](#).

Extensions: Extensions on homework assignments may be granted in special circumstances such as family and medical emergencies. Whether the relevant circumstances qualify the student for an extension is at the instructor's discretion. Whenever possible, students who need an extension on an assignment should communicate with the instructor about their situation prior to the official deadline. In cases where an extension is NOT granted, 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.

¹ Many of the following policy statements are taken or adapted from the Curriculum Committee Course Guide.

Make-up exams: Students who miss an exam due to special circumstances such as a family or medical emergency may be permitted to make up that exam at a later date. Whether the relevant circumstances qualify the student for the opportunity to take a make-up exam is at the instructor's discretion. Whenever possible, students who need to miss an exam for any reason should communicate with me about this ahead of time. Students who miss an exam and do not qualify to take a make-up exam will receive a failing grade on that exam.

Technology: use of electronic devices such as laptops is not permitted in class. There are two exceptions to this rule. First, some students have accommodations through Accessibility Services which permit them to use a laptop or similar device in class. Second, I will sometimes permit the use of laptops or similar devices to complete in-class group assignments.

Recording: PLEASE NOTE that, consistent with applicable federal and state law, this course may be video/audio recorded as an accommodation only with permission from the Office of Accessibility Services. Students are not permitted to record the contents of this class under any other circumstances.

Class Discussion: There will be many opportunities for in-class discussion during this course, including both small-group and whole-class discussion. Students are expected to be respectful of others at all times.

Academic Integrity: All education is a cooperative enterprise between faculty and students. This cooperation requires trust and mutual respect, which are only possible in an environment governed by the principles of academic integrity. As an institution devoted to teaching, learning, and intellectual inquiry, Holy Cross expects all members of the College community to abide by the highest standards of academic integrity. Any violation of academic integrity undermines the student-faculty relationship, thereby wounding the whole community. Students in this class are required to read the full text of [the College's Academic Integrity Policy](#) and to abide by its standards.

Artificial Intelligence: artificial intelligence may be used for the purposes of minor editing, such as correcting spelling and grammar, but not to compose sentences and paragraphs from scratch. If you do choose to use artificial intelligence to edit your work, you must indicate in a footnote or at the end of your document which AI tools you have used, and how you have used them. Failure to comply with this policy may result in a failing grade on the relevant assignment.

Accessibility: The College of the Holy Cross is committed "[to providing students with disabilities equal access to the educational opportunities and programs available at Holy Cross in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as amended, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Massachusetts laws.](#)" Any student who feels the need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the [Office of Accessibility Services](#) to discuss support services available. Once the office receives documentation supporting the request for accommodation, the student would meet privately with Accessibility Services to discuss reasonable and appropriate accommodations. The office can be reached by calling 508-793-3693. If you are

already registered with Accessibility Services, please be sure to get your accommodation letters and deliver them to your instructors in a timely fashion. Instructors need at least 4-5 days advance notice to be able to facilitate the process of receiving testing accommodations.

Schedule

*This schedule is subject to change.

Jan 22	Intro: what is philosophy?
Jan 24	Intro: course overview
Unit 1	Where Does Morality Come From?
Jan 27	Midgley, "Trying Out One's New Sword"
Jan 29	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i>
Jan 31	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> (continued)
Unit 2	Which Actions are Morally Right?
Feb 3	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 1
Feb 5	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 2
Feb 7	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 2 (continued)
Feb 10	Confucius, <i>Analects</i> , Book 3
Feb 12	Mencius, <i>Mengzi</i> 2A6
Feb 14	Xunzi, "Human Nature is Bad"
Feb 17	Mozi, "Inclusive Care"

Feb 19	Mozi, "Condemning Music"
Feb 21	Mill, "Utilitarianism" (selections)
Feb 24	Kant, <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Section 1
Feb 26	Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy"
Feb 28	Ross, <i>The Right and the Good</i> , Chapter 2

Spring break!

Mar 10	Foot, "The Doctrine of Double Effect"
Mar 12	Thomson, "The Trolley Problem," sections 1-2, 5
Mar 14	Midterm Exam

Unit 3 What Is A Human Person?

Mar 17	Intro to Buddhism (no reading)
Mar 19	<i>The Questions of King Milinda</i> 2.1.1
Mar 21	<i>The Questions of King Milinda</i> 2.2.6
Mar 24	Gautama, <i>Nyāya-sūtra</i> (selections)
Mar 26	Gautama, <i>Nyāya-sūtra</i> (selections)
Mar 28	Activity: define 'person' (no reading)
Mar 31	Locke, "Of Identity and Diversity"

Apr 2 Reid, "Of Mr. Locke's Account of Our Personal Identity"

Apr 4 Parfit, "Personal Identity"

Apr 7 Lewis, "Survival and Identity"

Apr 9 Thomson, "People and Their Bodies."

Apr 11 Spillover day (no new reading)

Unit 4 Do We Know Anything?

Apr 14 Descartes, "First Meditation"

Apr 16 Descartes, "Second Meditation"

Apr 18 Easter break!
Autobiographical essay due

Apr 21 Easter break!

Apr 23 No classes

Apr 25 Descartes, "Second Meditation" (continued)

Unit 5 Does God Exist?

Apr 28 Hume, *Dialogues*, Part 2

Apr 30 Hume, *Dialogues*, Part 5

May 2 Hume, *Dialogues*, Part 11

May 5 Review Day

TBD

Final Exam