

Phil 101: Introduction to Philosophy

Fall 2025

Online Asynchronous

Instructor: Nathaniel Greely Email: ngreely@compton.edu

Office Hours on Zoom by appointment

Course Description:

Philosophers ask and try to answer the most fundamental questions about the world. Some of the questions we will explore include: What can we know, and what does it mean to know something? What should we do, both in a practical and a moral sense? Is your mind identical to your brain? Are you the same person you were ten years ago, and if so, what makes that the case? This course is an introductory survey of topics in contemporary analytic philosophy. These include epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, reasoning, philosophy of science, and ethics. The course is divided into seven two-week units. No previous knowledge of philosophy, logic, or science is required or assumed, though contributions from students with training in various disciplines are welcome.

Learning Outcomes:

Students should be able to demonstrate their understanding of various philosophical topics by engaging in discussions, completing written exams, and writing and revising an original essay that argues for a specific thesis related to specific philosophical problem.

Assessments:

The assessments in this course are largely designed to keep you engaged with the lectures, readings, and other students in the course. Your grades for attendance and discussion, reading reflections, research proposal, and essay draft comprise 60% of your grade. It should be easy to do well on these components if you stay engaged. The midterm and final essay will be graded on quality - to get top marks on these components you will be required to demonstrate understanding of the material (for the midterm and final exam) and some original philosophical insight (for the final essay). Your final grade in the course will be composed of the following:

Discussion Participation – 15%

You are required to read the assigned texts and watch the posted lectures. Students will demonstrate that they have done so by posting weekly to a discussion board on Canvas. The post will consist of a question regarding the text or lecture, an original response or objection to some claim in the text or reading, or an extension of some claim in the text or reading. Avoid simply summarizing the course material. Part of the point of the discussion is to help spark original ideas that you might develop into a term paper. Discussion posts will be due each Friday at 11:59 pm.

Reading Reflections – 15%

At the end of each two-week unit, students will turn in a one-page essay summarizing what they have learned from one of the readings in the unit. The goal of the reading reflections is to assess whether students are keeping up with reading and lectures. So long as the essay reflects an honest attempt to engage with the material the student will receive full points.

Midterm – 15%

The midterm will consist of two short essays (1-2 pages each). Students will be provided four essay prompts ahead of time and may choose to write on any two of them. The essay prompts will be on topics from units 1-3. The short essays should demonstrate understanding of the claims and arguments from the readings and lectures on the given topic. The essay prompts will be provided 10/1 and students will have a week to craft a response to the two they choose. The midterm will be due 10/5, submitted to Canvas.

Research Proposal – 10%

Students will submit a one-page document that presents their plan for a research paper. This plan may change over the course of composing the draft and revising it into a final paper. This assignment is designed to get you thinking about your essay early-on and receive feedback on how it may be improved. Students are free to choose any topic that interests them. Specific prompts will also be provided as models for the appropriate scope of the essay, and students may choose to write on those prompts if they wish. Prompts will be provided 10/5 after the midterm. The proposals will be submitted through Canvas, due 10/19.

Essay draft – 15%

One of the most important parts of writing an essay is revision. Students will be required to turn in a rough draft of their essay, due 11/9, submitted through Canvas. The essay should develop the idea in the proposal into a full essay format. The essay should be narrowly focused on a very specific claim, likely a single premise in an argument presented in a lecture or reading. Provide an original argument for your view about that claim and consider objections to your argument. The essay should be 5 pages (1250 words), give or take a page. It should be easy to get full points for your draft so long as it reflects an honest effort to make a cogent argument.

Final Essay – 15%

Students will revise their essay, taking into account the comments they receive. I will also schedule a brief Zoom conference with each student to discuss the essay the week of May 13. You are almost certainly expected to make significant changes to your essay in order to get top marks. The final draft will be graded on quality, not merely on effort. The final essay will be due 12/7, submitted through Canvas.

Final Exam – 15%

The final exam will be similar in format to the midterm exam. It will consist of two short essays (1-2 pages each). Students will be provided four essay prompts ahead of time and may choose to write on any two of them. The essay prompts will be on topics from units 4-7. The short essays should demonstrate understanding of the claims and arguments from the readings and lectures on the given topic. The essay prompts will be provided 12/7. The final exam will be submitted to Canvas, due 12/10.

Course Schedule

Unit 1: Intro to intro

In this unit we will read some philosophical short fiction and prime our minds to begin thinking philosophically.

8/25 – Course Introduction

8/27 - Terry Bisson – “They’re Made Out of Meat”; Ursula K. LeGuin – “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”

8/29 – Discussion posts due 11:59pm

9/1 – Holiday, No Class

9/3 - Daniel Dennett – “Where am I?”; Jorge Luis Borges – “The Circular Ruins”

9/5 – Discussion Posts due 11:59pm

9/7 – Reading Response due 11:59pm

Unit 2: Epistemology

This unit covers the topic of knowledge. We will discuss what constitutes knowledge, what sort of knowledge it is possible to attain, different types of knowledge, and forms of injustice related to knowledge.

9/8 – Descartes – *Meditations* 1, 2

9/10 – Descartes – *Meditations* 3

9/12 – Discussion Posts Due 11:59pm

9/15 - Edmund Gettier – “Is Justified, True Belief Knowledge?”

9/17 - Rachel McKinnon – “Epistemic Injustice”

9/19 – Discussion Posts Due 11:59pm

9/21 – Reading Response Due 11:59pm

Unit 3: Mind

This unit covers the nature of the human mind. Is the mind a brain, a soul, a function, or something else? We will then cover one influential naturalistic account of mental content.

9/22 – Rene Descartes – *Meditations* 6; Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia – *Letters*

9/24 - Paul Churchland – “Arguments against Dualism”

9/26 – Discussion Posts Due 11:59pm

9/29 - Hilary Putnam – “The Nature of Mental States”

10/1 - Fred Dretske “If You Can’t Make One, You Don’t Know How It Works”; Midterm Prompts Posted

10/3 – Discussion Posts Due 11:59pm

10/5 – Midterm Due 11:59pm

Unit 4: Ethics

This unit explores some contemporary problems in applied ethics. Who is responsible for climate change and how should we address it? What is cultural appropriation and is it always unethical?

10/6 – Intro to Ethical Theory

10/8 - Artworld Roundtable – “Is Cultural Appropriation Ever Okay?”; Taylor – “Does Hip Hop Belong to Me?”;

10/10 – Discussion posts due 11:59pm

10/13 – Sinnott-Armstrong – “It’s not *My* Fault: Global Warming and Individual Obligations”

10/15 - Banks – “Individual Responsibility for Climate Change”

10/17 – Discussion posts due 11:59pm

10/19 - Reading Response Due 11:59pm; Research Proposal Due 11:59pm

Unit 5: Metaphysics

In this unit we will consider the nature of personal identity over time. Are you the same person you were ten years ago, yesterday, or even five minutes ago? If so, what is the basis of that identity?

10/20 – John Locke – *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II-27: Identity and Diversity;

10/22 - Derek Parfit – “Personal Identity”

10/24 – Discussion posts due 11:59pm

10/27 - David Hume – *A Treatise of Human Nature* I-4-5: Of Personal Identity; *Pancavaggi Sutta*: Five Brethren; *Chachakka Sutra*: The Six Sextets;

10/29 - Eric Olsen – “Argument for Animalism”

10/31 – Discussion posts due 11:59pm

11/2 - Reading Response Due 11:59pm

Unit 6: Reasoning

Reasoning is an essential tool for making our way through the world. We make inferences and predictions on the basis of current perception, past knowledge, general principles, and probabilities. Good reasoning leads to good lives. But humans are often notoriously fallacious in their reasoning. This unit explores these fallacies and considers whether there are more reliable reasoning practices.

11/3 – Grush – Informal Fallacies

11/5 - Giere Ch. 9 - Decision Theory

11/7 – Discussion Posts Due 11:59 pm

11/9 - Essay Draft Due 11:59pm

11/10 – Giere Ch. 10 – Decision Theory

11/12 – Grush – Cognitive Biases

11/14 – Discussion post due 11:59pm

11/16 - Reading Response Due 11:59pm

11/17 – Essay Discussion

11/19 – Essay Discussion

11/21 – No Discussion post due

Unit 7: Philosophy of Science

11/24 – Hume - The Problem of Induction

11/26 – Popper - Falsification

12/1 – Swartz - Regularity Accounts of Laws of Nature

12/3 – Dretske - Necessitarian Accounts of Laws of Nature

12/7 – Final Paper Draft Due; Final Exam prompts posted

12/8 – Review for Final Exam

12/10 – Final Exam Due

Diversity and Inclusion:

Individuals of all ages, backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, genders (and identities & expressions thereof), national origins, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, ability - and other visible and non-visible differences are welcome in this course. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming and inclusive environment for every other member of the class. We will be discussing controversial topics in this class and students may confront views that they find wrong or even reprehensible. Where possible I would like to confront those views with reasoned arguments. If you find that a particular reading or assignment is so emotionally charged that it interferes with your ability to complete it, send me an email and we'll see if there is a solution that we can all be happy with.

Academic Accommodation:

If you require any form of accommodation on the grounds of disability, please visit this link: <https://www.compton.edu/studentservices/supportservices/specialresourcecenter/> well in advance so that you can submit the necessary documents.

Contact information is apham@compton.edu, Phone: (310) 900-1600, Ext. 2402, Special Resource Center, First floor of the Vocational Technology Building, Room 109

Religious Accommodation:

If you require any accommodation on religious grounds, please alert me in writing as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity:

All instances of academic offences including plagiarism, cheating on exams, and multiple submission of work, will be handled in accordance with official Compton College policy.

Integrity Statement:

“Compton College is dedicated to maintaining an optimal learning environment and insists upon academic honesty and adherence to standards of student conduct. To uphold the academic integrity, all members of the academic community shall assume responsibility for providing an educational environment of the highest standard characterized by academic honesty. It is the responsibility of all members of the academic community to encourage learning, promote honesty, and act with fairness. Student conduct at Compton College must conform to federal and state laws and District policies and procedures. Compton College personnel are dedicated to maintaining a positive learning environment. Optimal standards of conduct are essential to the maintenance of a quality college environment.

Compton College will develop and maintain Standards of Student Conduct. The procedures shall be made widely available to student through the College catalog, and other means including electronic communications.

Applicable Administrative Regulation:

AR 5500 Standards of Student Conduct

AR 5520 Student Discipline Procedures

AR 5530 Student Rights and Grievances (Source: **COMPTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES POLICIES, 2018**)