



Department of Philosophy
University of Notre Dame

Introductory Philosophy: PHIL 20101

Spring 2026

Instructor: John William Waldrop

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Meeting Days: Tues & Thurs

Room: 246 DeBartolo Hall

20101-05 Time: 11:00am-12:15pm

20101-04 Time: 2:00pm-3:15pm

Course description: This course offers an introduction to philosophy through selective encounters with key thinkers throughout history, exploring fundamental questions such as: What is the nature of reality? Is there a God? How should I conduct myself in the world? We will address these questions by examining how significant philosophers have approached them, critiquing their positions, and considering how their views influence contemporary thought.

The course is structured around thematic modules that approach classic and contemporary texts with a unifying focus on particular, enduring philosophical questions. Through close reading, discussion, and critical analysis, students will develop the necessary skills to think philosophically and translate philosophical principles into concrete actions.

Learning Outcomes:

1) A student taking this course will be able to identify and understand significant features of and developments in philosophical traditions on key questions concerning the nature of philosophy, God and religion, and living a good life. 2) A student taking this course will be able to

analyze, compare, and evaluate philosophical views. 3) A student taking this course will be able to think philosophically about her interactions in the world. 4) A student taking this course will raise questions on philosophical issues pertaining to the development of her own worldview.

Student Responsibilities: To be successful in this philosophy course, students should attend all lectures prepared to actively participate in discussions; meticulously complete readings before class to enable productive dialogue; thoroughly review material in preparation for exams; and submit assignments on time while following provided format guidelines:

- Carry out the one practice exercise and bring the resulting work to class on the listed due date.
- Email short papers to me by 11:59pm on the listed due date.
- Complete the group presentation project, following all relevant instructions as given; details to follow.
- Arrive at the appointed times and take midterm and final exams (dates below).

Adhering to these expectations and procedures will lead to an enriching semester.

Course Materials: Most of the readings for the course will be from three required textbooks:

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*
2. St. Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*
3. William MacAskill, *Doing Good Better*
4. Plato, *Five Dialogues*
5. Plato, *Gorgias*

The remaining readings for the course will be available under “files” in the page for this course on Canvas.

Course Requirements: Course Requirements:

1. Participation and Attendance (5%)
2. One practice exercise for completion (5%)
3. One mid-term exam (20%)
4. Two short papers (15% each)
5. One group presentation (15%)

6. One final exam (25%)

Important Deadlines: See the course schedule below.

Late submission policy: Paper assignments should be submitted by or prior to the listed due date. I will not typically punish reasonable delays, and please feel free to email me with good-faith requests for extensions. If this lenient policy is abused or if I conclude that it is leading to poor learning outcomes, a more inflexible policy will be instituted.

Attendance and Participation: Students should arrive on time to all lectures and should participate in discussions. Please feel free to email me informing me of reasonable reasons for your absence. For now, no particular penalties will attach to repeated absences, though if this lenient policy is abused or if I conclude that it is leading to poor learning outcomes, a more inflexible policy will be instituted.

Technology Policy: To facilitate engaged dialogue, laptops, phones and other electronic devices should be closed during class. Students should possess hard copies of all textbooks. Those requiring technology access due to learning needs or disability accommodations should provide appropriate notice through the Sara Bea Accessibility Services in the Center for Student Support and Care.

Outside of class, assignments should be completed without the assistance of LLM chatbots like ChatGPT or Claude.

For such timely concerns, please see the University's **Generative AI Policy for Students** (<https://honorcode.nd.edu/generative-ai-policy-for-students-august-2023/>), and particularly the following statement:

Representing work that you did not produce as your own, including work generated or materially modified by AI, constitutes academic dishonesty. Use of generative AI in a way that violates an instructor's articulated policy, or using it to complete coursework in a way not expressly permitted by the faculty member, will be considered a violation of the Honor Code.

See also the **Fall 2024 Update** (<https://honorcode.nd.edu/policy-update-ai-editing-tools-fall-2024/>), which clarifies the application of University policy to AI editing tools like Grammarly.

Other Notes on Classroom Etiquette: Be respectful, kind, encouraging, and patient with others.

Office hours: By appointment.

Course Schedule:

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
Week 1: 1/13, 1/15	1/13: First day of class (syllabus)	1/15
Week 2: 1/20, 1/22	1/20	1/22
Week 3: 1/27, 1/29	1/27	1/29
Week 4: 2/3, 2/5	2/3	2/5
Week 5: 2/10, 2/12	2/10	2/12
Week 6: 2/17, 2/19	2/17	2/19
Week 7: 2/24, 2/26	2/24	2/26
Week 8: 3/3, 3/5	3/3:	3/5: Exam
Week 9: 3/10, 3/12	No class: Mid-Term Break	No class: Mid-Term Break
Week 10: 3/17, 3/19	3/17	No class: Traveling
Week 11: 3/24, 3/26	3/24	3/26
Week 12: 3/31, 4/2	3/31	4/2
Week 13: 4/7, 4/9	4/7	4/9
Week 14: 4/14, 4/16	4/14	4/16
Week 15: 4/21, 4/23	4/21	4/23
Week 16: 4/28, 4/30	4/28: Last day of class	No class: Reading Days

Reading Schedule:

1. 1/13, *First day of class*: No reading (syllabus / course intro)
2. 1/15, *The trial of Socrates*: Plato, *Apology*; *Crito*
3. 1/20, *Plato on rhetoric and justice*: Plato, *Gorgias* (pp. 1-26)
4. 1/22, *Plato on rhetoric and the good*: Plato, *Gorgias* (pp. 26-52)
5. 1/27, *Plato and the turn to virtue*: Plato, *Gorgias* (pp. 52 and following (skim))

- **Practice assignment due in class**

6. 1/29, *Aristotle on the good life*: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book I)
7. 2/3, *Aristotle on virtue*: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book II)
8. 2/5, *Aristotle on magnanimity*: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book IV, especially 2-3)
9. 2/10, *Aristotle on friendship*: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book VIII)
10. 2/12, *Aristotle on happiness*: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (X.7–9)
11. 2/17, *Socrates on piety*: Plato, *Euthyphro*
12. 2/19, *Augustine on freedom and evil I*: Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will* (Book I)
13. 2/24, *Augustine on freedom and evil II*: Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will* pp. 64-80 of Bk. II, and pp. 70-83 of Bk. III in *On Free Choice of the Will*
14. 2/26, *Augustine on freedom and evil III*: Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will* pp. 87-123 of Bk. III in *On Free Choice of the Will*
15. 3/3, *Freedom and Evil*: **Reading TBD**
16. 3/5, **Exam (in class)**: No new reading

- **Paper #1 due Friday**

17. 3/10, **No class: Mid-Term Break**
18. 3/12, **No class: Mid-Term Break**
19. 3/17, *Plato on death and the soul*: Plato, *Phaedo*
20. 3/19, **No class: Travel day**
21. 3/24, *Personal identity I*: Parfit, "Personal Identity"

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- Supplementary reading: Huemer, "Personal Identity", Chapter 12 in *Knowledge, Reality, and Value: A Mostly Common Sense Guide to Philosophy*
22. 3/26, *Personal identity II*: Olson, "I am an Animal"
- Supplementary reading: Huemer, "Personal Identity", Chapter 12 in *Knowledge, Reality, and Value: A Mostly Common Sense Guide to Philosophy*
23. 3/31, *Consciousness I*: Smart, "Sensations and Brain Processes"; Papineau, "The Case for Physicalism"
24. 4/2, *Consciousness II*: Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia"; Chalmers, §§1-6 in "Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness"
25. 4/7, *Ethics in the real world I*: Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality", MacAskill, *Doing Good Better* (Introduction & Chapter 1)
26. 4/9, *Ethics in the real world II*: MacAskill, *Doing Good Better* (Ch. 2); Timmerman, "Sometimes There is Nothing Wrong With Letting a Child Drown"
27. 4/14, *Ethics in the real world III*: Wolf, "Moral Saints"; MacAskill, *Doing Good Better* (Ch. 3)
28. 4/16, *Ethics in the real world IV*: MacAskill, *Doing Good Better* (Chs. 5-6; skim Ch. 4)
29. 4/21, **Student presentations (1)**: Reading: MacAskill, *Doing Good Better* (Ch. 7)
30. 4/23, **Student presentations (2)**: Reading: MacAskill, *Doing Good Better* (Ch. 10)
31. 4/28, *Last lecture day (course synthesis / wrap-up)*: MacAskill, *Doing Good Better* (Chapters 8–9)
- **Paper #2 due Friday**