

# Problems of Philosophy (PHI 111-F)

Wake Forest University, Fall 2022,

M/W – 11am-12:15pm.

Tribble A301

**Professor:** Prof. Dixon (he/him/his)

**Office Hours:** My office, Tribble Hall B303, Mon and Wed, 2pm-3pm, and by appointment.

**Email:** [dixonj@wfu.edu](mailto:dixonj@wfu.edu)

## Course Description:

This course provides a general introduction to philosophy by having students grapple with some of the most profound and quintessential philosophical questions, problems, and paradoxes. Specifically, we will examine some of the core issues within philosophy's three main branches: Ethics, Epistemology, and Metaphysics. In Ethics, we will discuss such questions as: What is the nature of morality? Are we obligated to follow the law? What are our duties to help others in need? What are our duties to non-human animals? In Epistemology, we will discuss such questions as: Do we have knowledge of the external world? Is learning impossible? Is science rationally justified? Can we give an adequate account of knowledge? And in Metaphysics, we will discuss such questions as: Are there non-physical objects? What makes me the same person over time? Do we have free will? In addressing these questions, students will not only learn about philosophy but also gain the ability to think more philosophically and further develop their critical thinking skills.

## Course Materials:

There are no required textbooks for this course. All materials will be posted as PDFs in Canvas.

## Course Requirements:

1. Attendance/Participation = 10%
2. Reading Question Assignments (5 due throughout semester, each worth 8%) = 40%
3. Essay Exams and/or Short Papers (2 total – each worth 25%) = 50%

Percentage	Letter Grade
93-100	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
67-69	D+
63-66	D
60-62	D-
59 and below	F

**Attendance and Participation:** Attendance and participation on class days is an important aspect of your grade and of the course. I will take attendance every day. Students learn better when they ask questions and actively participate, and everyone enjoys the class more when there is discussion. Though quality is better than quantity, speak up if you have a question to ask or a comment to add!

One's grade on this portion of the course will be determined largely by whether and how many times one attends and participates in class over the course of the term. More than 4 unexcused absences will result in a reduction of one's participation grade.

**Reading Questions:** For nearly every assigned reading for this course, I will provide some reading questions (maximum 6 questions per reading) that are designed to help students who are new to philosophy better comprehend our course readings and, consequently, help promote better class discussions. Specifically, these questions are designed to help students focus on what is important in the assigned readings for understanding an author’s central argument(s).

Each reading question assignment will determine the number of the reading questions (up to 6) that students should complete per assignment for full-credit. In total, you are required to complete at least 5 of these reading question assignments throughout the course. However, you must complete at least 1 of these assignments before (or on) each of the 5 reading question deadlines throughout the class (see the Reading Schedule below for the dates of these deadlines), i.e., you cannot do all of these reading question assignments back-to-back; they must be spread out through the semester. However, students may submit as many reading question assignments, throughout this course, as they want to earn the grades they desire on these assignments. Reading question assignments are submitted through Canvas and are due any time *before* the start of class on the day we cover that article. Late reading assignments will not be accepted.

It is the student’s responsibility to keep track of the number and frequency of reading question assignments that they complete. **No resources outside of material for the course** may be used for your answers to the reading assignments. Quote class texts sparingly, but if you do quote be sure to always give page number citations. An example of a good reading question assignment will be provided on Canvas.

These assignments will be graded on an 8-point scale.

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
8	Thoroughly addresses all the required reading questions, clearly written, correct understanding and well-reasoned explanation of the reading and its purpose. Demonstrates a great understanding of the material.
7	Almost thoroughly addresses all the required reading questions, clearly written, correct understanding and good explanation of the reading and its purpose. Demonstrates a good understanding of the material.
6	Addresses only some of the required reading questions or more explanation is needed, less clearly written, correct understanding of the reading and its purpose. Demonstrates an adequate understanding of the material
5-4	Does not address all the required reading questions, not clearly written throughout, misunderstanding of details of the reading. Demonstrates an inadequate understanding of the material.
3-2	Does not address many of the required reading questions, many spelling or grammatical errors that make reading the paper difficult, misunderstands the reading. Demonstrates little understanding of the material.
1-0	Does not address most if any of the required reading questions, many spelling or grammatical errors that make reading the paper difficult, basic misunderstandings prevalent. Or not turned in on time to Turnitin.com.

### **Learning Objectives:**

By the end of this course students should be able to:

- Identify and analyze arguments for and against philosophical views;
- Construct original philosophical arguments;
- Identify implicit assumptions and defend/criticize them;
- Identify problems and counterexamples to philosophical theories;
- Understand basic philosophical arguments and positions regarding topics covered

**Exams OR Short Papers:** For the midterm and final, students have the option to either take an in-class exam or to turn in a short paper. If a student elects to take the midterm exam, they are not obligated to take a final exam rather than write a short paper. And if a student elects to write a short paper for the midterm, they are not obligated to write a short final paper rather than take the final exam. The option to take either an exam or write a short paper for either the midterm or final should allow students the flexibility to pursue their preferences on the kind of work they want to be graded on and their preferences on the kind of work they are most comfortable doing.

**Regarding the Exams:** Both exams will be in-class and students will have the entire class period to take them. A week before the exam, I will provide 4 (or 5) possible essay exam questions for you to study. On the exam day I will select 2 questions from those 4 (or 5) for you to answer. You will not know which 2 questions will be chosen until exam day. You will be required to write a short essay of around 300-600 words per question (the equivalent of about 1-2 page typed, double-spaced). On the day of each exam, I will distribute Blue Books (small booklets that contain blank pages of paper) to students to write their answers in (please use pens with black or blue ink to write your answer). You are allowed to study with classmates in preparation for the exam, but you are not allowed to use any outside sources to study (internet, books, etc.). Outside sources will likely make things more confusing, and increases the risk of unintentional plagiarism. Books and notes may NOT be used during either exam. In cases of illness, university sponsored club or athletic events out of town, or genuine emergencies, you may make a request, prior to the regularly scheduled exam, for a makeup exam. Requests received during or after the exam time will not usually be considered. More information will be given as the exam approaches.

- The final is non-cumulative and only contains the material covered since the midterm.

**Regarding the Short Papers:** Both papers will be 4-5 pages in length (Double Spaced, Times New Roman, 12-point font, 1-inch margins) and, when completed, *should be uploaded to Canvas before class on that day that it is due*. Students choose between 4 (or 5) different essay prompts that relate to the class material. These prompts will be the same as the exam prompts but will require an additional reading and critical thinking components. Students will read one additional article (provided by me) that has not been covered in this class for any of these prompts. Students are required to both answer their chosen prompt, to briefly summarize the main argument(s) from this additional article, and then critically evaluate the author(s) claims. You are not allowed to use any outside sources to write these short papers (internet, books, etc.). Outside sources will likely make things more confusing, and increases the risk of unintentional plagiarism. In cases of illness, university sponsored club or athletic events out of town, or genuine emergencies, you may make

a request, prior to the short paper due date, for an extension. Requests received a day or two before, on, or after the exam time will not usually be considered. **LATENESS:** For each day that the paper is late I will take off a full letter grade (e.g., if you turn a paper in two days late, a paper that would have been an A is now at best a C paper). Each paper that is turned in on the due date but after the time deadline will be reduced a letter grade. No exceptions. More information will be given as the exam approaches.

**Professor's Prerogative:** I, Prof. Dixon, reserve the right to change any of the assignments, readings, requirements, due dates, etc., on the syllabus if needed to improve or to adapt to events that happen throughout the semester. I will email all students when significant changes are made.

**The Writing Center @ Wake Forest University** offers students a relaxed and welcoming place to discuss writing and the writing process with trained peer tutors. The Center is staffed by friendly and knowledgeable Wake Forest undergraduate and graduate students who act as an audience for students' writing; they work by asking questions to help students discover what they want to say and determine whether they have effectively communicated what they intended to say. Because everyone writes differently, we tailor our help to meet each student's needs.

Tutors do not evaluate, correct, proofread, or edit student assignments; our main goal is to help students become confident critical readers of their own writing. We provide consultation during every stage of the writing process, including:

- Generating ideas and settling on a topic
- Organizing ideas in a paper
- Developing support for arguments
- Composing more effectively
- Learning to revise drafts
- Learning to identify and correct errors in grammar and punctuation

Generally speaking, the earlier in the writing process that a student visits us, the more useful and productive his or her tutorial session(s) will be. Many students find they have the most success working with us when they come to the Writing Center as soon as they have received a writing assignment. Students may make appointments [online](#), by phone, or by visiting us in Z. Smith Reynolds Library Room 426 during our hours of operation.

### **Honor Code**

In this course, you will be held to the standards of the Wake Forest Honor Code, a code that you pledged to honor when you signed your application for admission to the institution. If you are unfamiliar with the details of this code and how it is administered, you should consult the [Honor System Handbook](#). This handbook outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of your academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process.

*I will not tolerate any type of plagiarism in this course (including patchwriting), and I reserve the right to use Turnitin.com to check your writing. All in-class exams are independent and closed-*

book, and all sources in your papers must be cited fully. Any case of suspected (intentional or unintentional) plagiarism will be submitted to the University Honor Court.

### **Class Guidelines – Preparedness and Electronics Policies**

Please come to class prepared. This means you have done the reading and are ready to discuss it critically. When you are in class make sure that your cell phone is silenced and put away. *Do not keep cell phones on your desk, in your lap, etc.* Also, you may **NOT use laptops in this class** unless you have a documented accommodation, or you personally ask me to use a laptop in class. I will grant any request for using a laptop in class but you should know that there is a ton of empirical research that shows using laptops in class, even for note taking purposes, diminish students' academic performance (e.g. see the [NYT](#) and [Scientific American](#)). Failure to follow these guidelines will result in a reduction in one's participation grade.

### **Accommodations**

Wake Forest University provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. If you are in need of an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact me privately as early in the term as possible. Retroactive accommodations will not be provided. Students requiring accommodations must also consult the Learning Assistance Center & Disability Services (118 Reynolda Hall, 336-758-5929, [lac.wfu.edu](http://lac.wfu.edu)).

### **Mental Health**

Students experiencing psychological/emotional distress may avail themselves of support through the University Counseling Center Monday-Friday, 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM in Reynolda 117 (336.758.5273 or [counselingcenter.wfu.edu](http://counselingcenter.wfu.edu)). Crisis support is also available after-hours by calling 336.758.5273 and pressing 1 to speak to a crisis counselor. Support outside of the University Counseling Center may also include the Chaplain's Office (336.758.5210 or [chaplain.wfu.edu](http://chaplain.wfu.edu)) and the Student Health Service (336.758.5218 or [shs.wfu.edu](http://shs.wfu.edu)).

### **Confidentiality and Mandatory Reporting**

As Wake Forest faculty member, it is my goal that you feel able to share information related to your life experiences in classroom discussions, in your written work, and in our one-on-one meetings. I will seek to keep the information you share private to the greatest extent possible.

However, I am not a confidential resource. One of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment on our campus. I have a mandatory reporting responsibility related to my role as a professor. I am required to share information regarding alleged sexual misconduct or information about alleged criminal conduct that may have occurred on campus with certain University administrators. Please note that students may speak with a confidential advocate by contacting the University's Safe Office's 24/7 Help Line at (336)758-5285.

### **Diversity & Inclusion**

Wake Forest University is committed to fostering an inclusive learning and living environment. We welcome and respect all students, faculty, and staff of all races, ethnicities, religions, genders, sexual orientations, sexual identities and gender expressions, abilities, classes, ages, and political

ideas. Diversity in identity, thought, belief and perspective enrich the academic experience and is critical to your growth as a lifelong learner. It is our expectation that every member of our university community uphold a standard of civility and respect both inside and outside of the classroom. WFU's [Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#) is a campus resource available to anyone seeking support or with questions about diversity and inclusion at WFU. Please visit the [Report Bias](#) webpage to report unjust bias and discrimination, and visit Human Resources' [Nondiscrimination Statement](#) for further clarification and elaboration on WFU's policies and procedures.

### **Sexual Misconduct - Title IX Information**

Wake Forest is committed to fostering a safe, productive learning environment. University policies prohibit gender discrimination, sexual assault, sexual harassment, dating violence, and stalking. We understand that sexual misconduct can undermine students' academic success. We encourage students who have experienced some form of sexual misconduct to talk to someone about their experience, so they can get the support they need. The University Safe Office provides confidential support and assistance with academic accommodation requests via a 24-hour crisis line (336-758-5285). You may find information about the Safe Office on the [website](#). Alleged sexual misconduct can be reported to the Title IX Office (a non-confidential resource) by emailing [titleixcoordinator@wfu.edu](mailto:titleixcoordinator@wfu.edu) or calling 336-758-7258. The Student Sexual Misconduct Policy may be reviewed by visiting the Title IX [website](#). Alleged criminal conduct may also be reported to law enforcement by calling University Police at 336-758-5911 or by submitting a [silent witness report](#).

### **Recording of Class Sessions**

All or some in-person and synchronous classes may be recorded. Student images and voices may be captured in these recordings. Recordings will be available for viewing only by students enrolled in the class via Canvas or an alternative platform. The recordings are not available for download. *No other recording, including by students, is permitted.* Synchronous class recordings may include events that happen before class officially begins or after it officially ends. Students should take care to not discuss any confidential matters during these periods of time.

### **Access to Recordings**

Students may access the class recordings made available to them solely for the purpose of participating in the course. The recordings may not be used by any person other than a student enrolled in the course or for any purpose other than to participate in the course. Students are prohibited from downloading or distributing any portion of the recordings for any purpose. Students should understand that technical problems or human error may prevent successful recording. **Copyright Notice.** Students are advised that Wake Forest University faculty members hold the copyright in their course materials. The University and the faculty have legal rights in class recordings.

**The Office of the Dean of the College expects the following COVID-19 statement to be on Fall 2020 (21) syllabi for any classes taught in person (face to face or blended):** Each of us shares responsibility for the health and safety of all in a learning space. Maintaining a consistent six feet of distance; wearing a face covering; limiting our gathering sizes; and isolating or quarantining when ill or exposed to someone with the virus are Wake Forest University directives

and policies we all must follow. Students are encouraged to visit the Our Way Forward website ([ourwayforward.wfu.edu](http://ourwayforward.wfu.edu)) to stay informed about the latest guidance and review the [Public Health Emergency Addendum to the Student Code of Conduct](#).

Specifically, in this room, we will mitigate the risks of virus transfer and take care of our community by abiding by the following safety directives:

- Maintain six feet of distance at all times when feasible.
- Wear a face covering for the entirety of class. This face covering should cover your mouth and your nose. A face shield without a face covering is not an acceptable substitute for a face covering.
- Stay out of class when sick or after being exposed to someone who is sick.

In this class, any student who does not follow these requirements will be asked once to follow the safety directives. I will offer you a mask or ask you to find one. If you do not comply, I will ask you to leave the class for that day. I will also refer the matter to the COVID-19 compliance reporting system. Possible disciplinary actions may follow as described in the Wake Forest University Undergraduate Student Conduct Code Public Health Emergency Addendum.

## Reading Schedule

*All reading assignments should be completed before you arrive in class on that date.*

### **Week 1: Introduction**

Mon, Aug 22: [First day of class, Introduction, No Assigned Reading]

Wed, Aug 24: Rachels – “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”

### **Week 2: Ethics – What is the nature of morality?**

Mon, Aug 29: Rachels – “Ethical Egoism”

Wed, Sept 31: Plato – “Euthyphro”, and Rachels – “Does Morality Depend on Religion?”

### **Week 3: Ethics – Are we obligated to follow the law?**

Mon, Sept 5: Plato – “Crito” & **[1<sup>st</sup> RQ Deadline]**

Wed, Sept 7: MLK Jr – “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”

### **Week 4: Ethics – What are our duties to help others in need?**

Mon, Sept 12: Singer – “The Life You Can Save” ...and/or the first 36 minutes of ...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbgFbZmldeY>

Wed, Sept 14: Appiah – “Kindness to Strangers”

### **Week 5: Ethics – What are our duties to non-human animals?**

Mon, Sept 19: Singer – “All Animals are Equal” & **[2<sup>nd</sup> RQ Deadline]**

Wed, Sept 21: Warren – “Human and Animal Rights Compared”

### **Week 6: Ethics – Morality and Luck - & Review for MIDTERM**

Mon, Sept 26: Nagel – “Moral Luck” & [Study Guide Posted]

Wed, Sept 28: [No Reading – Review for Midterm]

### **Week 7: MIDTERM**

Mon, Oct 3: [No Reading – **In-Class Midterm**] OR [**1<sup>st</sup> Short Paper Due**]

Wed, Oct 5: [No Class]

**Week 8: Epistemology – Do we have knowledge of the external world?**

Mon, Oct 10: Descartes – Meditation 1 and 2

Wed, Oct 12: Rinard – “Reasoning One’s Way Out of Skepticism”

**Week 9: Epistemology – Is learning impossible? [Oct 17 Midterm Grades Due]**

Mon, Oct 17: Plato – *Meno* Dialogue (First half, pp 58-71) & [**3<sup>rd</sup> RQ Deadline**]

Wed, Oct 19: Plato – *Meno* Dialogue (second half, pp.72 - end) & Aristotle – Selections from the *Posterior Analytics*

**Week 10: Epistemology – Is science rationally justified?**

M, Oct 24: Hume–“Induction” (For a summary, see Okasha – “Scientific Inference” (pp. 16-22))

Wed, Oct 26: Salmon – Selections from the *The Problem of Induction* (pp. 433-446)

**Week 11: Epistemology – Can we give an adequate account of knowledge?**

Mon, Oct 31: Chisholm – “The Problem of the Criterion”

Wed, Nov 2: Plato – Selections from *Theaetetus*; &, Gettier - “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” & [**4<sup>th</sup> RQ Deadline**]

**Week 12: Metaphysics – Are there non-physical objects?**

Mon, Nov 7: Levinson – “What a Musical Work Is”

W, Nov 9: Dennett – “Where am I?” and/or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KP7rTp2vwTs>

**Week 13: Metaphysics – What makes me the same person over time?**

Mon, Nov 14: Williams – “The Self and the Future”

Wed, Nov 16: Parfit – “Personal Identity” excerpt from *Reasons and Persons*

**Week 14: Metaphysics – Do we have free will?**

Mon, Nov 21: Ayer – “Freedom and Necessity” [**5<sup>th</sup> RQ Deadline**]

Wed, Nov 23: [No Class – Thanksgiving] [Study Guide Posted]

**Week 15: Metaphysics – Do we have free will? (cont.)**

Mon, Nov 28: Bourbaki – “[Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility](#)” & .....

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSfXdNIolQA&t=2s>

Wed, Nov 30: [No Reading – Review for Final]

**Final Exam:** [See [Final Exam Schedule](#)] OR [**2<sup>nd</sup> Short Paper Due**]