

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy

Professor Behrends

Stevenson Hall 352

Monday and Wednesday from 1:35 – 2:50

Course Description and Goals

This course is designed primarily to provide an introduction to several core topics in the Western philosophic tradition, and to assist students in developing basic philosophical skills. Some of the questions with which we will be concerned during the term are:

- Does God exist? Does the complexity of the world provide evidence for God's existence? Does the existence of evil provide evidence for God's non-existence?
- What is knowledge, and how much about reality (if anything) can humans know?
- What is it to have free will, and do humans have it? What follows if we *don't* possess a will that is free?
- What are the standards for morally correct conduct? Is morality primarily or solely concerned with bringing about good outcomes?

The course is designed for students who have little or no background in studying philosophy. A primary goal of the course, then, is to provide some introduction in philosophical reasoning generally, and further, to help you begin reasoning philosophically on your own. For that reason, this class is as much about learning a *skill* as it is about gaining information. Reasoning well, and being able to clearly articulate your reasoning, will serve you well in whatever fields you pursue.

Although this course is *introductory*, it is very unlikely to be *easy*. Reading philosophical texts, and writing and thinking philosophically are typically difficult tasks. The good news is that repeated practice at these kinds of tasks does pay dividends; students who dedicate themselves to the work of this course typically show significant progress in the kinds of skills we'll be seeking to develop.

Contact Information

Email: jmbehre@ilstu.edu

Office: 339 Stevenson Hall

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday from 10:00 – 11:00 (except on 1/15, and the first Wednesday of each month thereafter), and by appointment

I'm usually quite quick to reply to e-mails. It's very rare that I will take longer than 24 hours to respond to an email, and it's usually much faster than that. Please understand, though, that I cannot *guarantee* very quick responses, so please adjust your expectations accordingly. You are of course welcome to email me with any questions or concerns you have, but you should be aware that I might respond by inviting you to set up a meeting to discuss the issue in person; email is sometimes not well suited to philosophical discussion or instruction.

I know that my office hours will not be convenient for everyone. *Please* feel free to schedule appointments with me at different times if you'd like to come by.

Required Texts

Reason and Responsibility, 15th edition, eds. Joel Feinberg and Russ Shafer-Landau
This text is available at the University Bookstore

Course Requirements

The following requirements will determine your grade for the course:

Exams: 40%

There will be two exams in this course, and each will be worth 20% of your final grade. The exams will consist entirely of essay questions. One week prior to each exam, you will be given a list of essay questions. I will choose a certain number of these questions to appear on the exam, and you will be required to answer all of them (I'll let you know how many will appear once I distribute the list). The date for the first exam is listed below. The second exam will take place during finals week. The second exam will *not* be cumulative.

Critical Assessments: 45%

You will be required to hand in a critical assessment of three primary source articles that we will cover. Each will be worth 15% of the final grade. These assignments should be at least one page long, and no more than two. **The articles for which you must turn in an assessment are noted in the reading and assignment schedule below.** For each assessment, you must do the following:

1. Identify one important thesis for which the author is arguing.
2. Reconstruct an argument that the author gives for the claim identified in 1.
 - a. The reconstructed argument must be valid.
3. Critically assess the argument.
 - a. To critically assess an argument is to say whether it is good or bad and why. Because the reconstructed argument must be valid, only the truth or falsity of the premises could make the argument good or bad. So, in this stage, you should either attack a premise in the argument, or defend a premise in the argument from a possible objection, or defend a premise by providing your own support for it (don't simply repeat the author's support).
4. Email me your assessment as an attachment. Please use the following format in titling the attachment: "[Your Last Name] Critical Assessment #" (So, if I were turning in my first assessment, I would title it "Behrends Critical Assessment 1"). **You must turn in the assessment prior to the start of the class during which we're to discuss the relevant article.**

Because this kind of writing may be new to many of you, you are permitted to hand in one practice critical assessment. I will provide comments and feedback on the practice assessment, but it will not count toward your Critical Assessment grade. If you hand in a practice critical assessment, you must indicate to me that it is a practice assessment. You may submit your practice assessment at any time during the semester, on any of the assigned readings that we have not already covered, except the readings for which you must submit a graded assessment.

Philosophical Living: 10%

In this assignment, you are required to describe and reflect upon an instance in which you employed philosophical reasoning this semester in a situation that is unrelated to the other

requirements for the course. You should take a very broad view of when this might occur: during a late-night conversation with a friend or roommate, while watching *The Daily Show*, while conducting research for another class, while watching a YouTube clip of Richard Dawkins, while attending a meeting of the Philosophy Club, and many other scenarios. As we'll see throughout the term, the heart of philosophy is a methodical, reflective approach to argumentation, and this approach can be deployed in a wide array of circumstances. For the assignment, you are required to do each of the following:

1. Describe the situation. Provide me with an understanding of the circumstance in which you found yourself approaching a topic philosophically, so that I can understand the context for the remaining features of the assignment.
2. Explain why you believe that you took a distinctively philosophical approach to the situation. What philosophical skills or methods did you employ, and how?
3. Critically assess your philosophical approach. What, at the time, did you do particularly well? How might you have better deployed philosophical skills or methods? You must provide at least one piece of self-criticism.
4. Critically assess the philosophical approach of others. What, at the time, did others do particularly well? How might someone else in the situation have better deployed philosophical skills or methods? You must provide at least one piece of other-criticism. (Depending on the scenario, you may want to keep the identities of your interlocutors private).

The assignment should be at least 3 pages in length. In terms of grading, I will be most interested in points 2 – 4, above. **There is no hard due date for this assignment. You may hand in the assignment, via email, at any point in the semester prior to our final class meeting.** If, as the term draws on, you just can't imagine how to complete this assignment, please speak with me.

Attendance and Participation: 5%

Acquiring a new skill requires practice, and much of that practice will be available only during our meetings. You are allowed up to three absences during the semester, no questions asked. Except in exceptional circumstances, missing more than three meetings will negatively impact this portion of your grade. Your involvement in class discussions will also be taken in to consideration (we'll talk throughout the term about the several ways in which you can be a productive participant in our discussions), as will any discussions during office hours.

Grading Scale

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

A	100 – 90%
B	89 – 80%
C	79 – 70%
D	69 – 60%
F	<59%

Grades that fall in between these divisions will be rounded up or down at my discretion. There will be no opportunity for extra credit in the course.

Cheating of any kind, including plagiarism, will not be tolerated. If you are found to be in violation of the University's policies governing academic dishonesty, you will be penalized in accordance with University guidelines. For information concerning the University's policies concerning academic dishonesty, see Section V.B of the [Code of Student Conduct](#). See also <http://deanofstudents.illinoisstate.edu/students/get-help/crr/academic-dishonesty.shtml> and the relevant links contained therein.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments (subject to revision)

Weeks 1 and 2 (1/13 – 1/22): Course Introduction, Logic, and the Value of Philosophy

1/13: No readings; course introduction

1/15: No readings; logic material to be distributed in class

1/20: No class meeting, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

1/22: Russell, "The Value of Philosophy"

Weeks 3 – 5 (1/27 – 2/12): The Existence of God

1/27: Rowe, "The Ontological Argument"

2/3: Rowe, "The Cosmological Argument"

2/10: Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" (**critical assessment due for this reading**)

Weeks 6 – 8 (2/17 – 3/5): Epistemology

2/17: Pollock, "A Brain in a Vat"

2/24: Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy"

3/3: Moore, "Proof of an External World" (**critical assessment due for this reading**)

Weeks 9 – 12 (3/17 – 4/9): Free Will

3/10 and 3/12: No class meetings, Spring Break

3/17: First Exam

3/19: van Inwagen, "Freedom of the Will"

3/24: Chisholm, "Human Freedom and the Self"

3/31: Ayer, "Freedom and Necessity"

4/7: Pereboom, "Why We Have No Free Will and Can Live Without It" (**critical assessment due for this reading**)

Weeks 13 – 15 (4/14 – 4/30): Ethical Theory

4/14: Mill, "Utilitarianism"

4/21: Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism"

4/28: Ross, "What Makes Right Acts Right?" (**final day to submit the Philosophical Living assignment, and last day of class**)

Week 16:

Date of second exam TBA

Special Needs

Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability should contact Disability Concerns at 350 Fell Hall, 309-438-5853, www.disabilityconcerns.ilstu.edu