

# Introduction to Philosophy Fall 2020

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Office Hours: Thursdays 2–3pm  
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## Teaching Assistants

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## Description

This course is an introduction to philosophy as it is practiced in the typical philosophy department in the English-speaking world. We will cover a range of topics, some of which have puzzled people for a long time (What is the right thing to do? Should we be afraid of death?), and some of which have only relatively recently received sustained attention (What is it to be a man or woman?). We will also discuss how philosophers approach these questions and what tools we have for answering them.

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, successful students will:

1. Produce philosophical writing that meets the field of philosophy's expectations regarding structure, argumentation, and evidence.
2. Understand the major positions in several theoretical and applied areas of philosophy.
3. Learn how to approach new philosophical problems critically and constructively.

## Evaluation

### **Participation** 10% of grade.

Attendance will be taken at section. Missing section or an obvious lack of preparation in section (not having done the reading, not having anything to say about the reading) will negatively affect your final course grade; participation (regularly asking good questions) will positively affect your final course grade.

You are required to meet with your section leader at least once during the course of the semester, during which time the section leader may ask you questions about the content to check your understanding. You will not be graded on the accuracy of your answers.

### **Discussion posts** 20% of grade

Starting in Week 2, you will be asked to write a short post about the assigned reading. The posts should be between 150 and 400 words in length. The post should focus on a

particular question, concept, claim, or argument from the reading and discuss it critically and from your own point of view, with the aim of either:

- a) deepening our understanding of the claim, concept, or problem *or*
- b) communicating an objection to a claim or an argument.

Please do not merely summarize the reading but try to persuade us to see it, or the problems it discusses, in a certain way. The point of these posts is to make sure that you keep up with the assigned reading throughout the term, and do the reading thoughtfully and critically, and to prepare you for section.

**Posts are due by 5pm on Wednesday, on your section's Canvas page**

If you have to miss class, you still need to submit a post. The posts cannot be made up without permission. One lowest grade will not be counted toward the final course grade. No posts are due in Weeks 12–14 (semi-finals and break).

**Midterm paper 1:** 4 pages, 25% of grade

You will be given several prompts, and will be asked to respond to one of the prompts.

**Logical reasoning assignment:** 15% of grade

You will be given the task of reconstructing arguments from given passages of the readings.

**Final paper:** 5 pages, 30% of grade

You will be asked to write an essay on a single topic based on a list of prompts (you may also choose your own topic with permission of your section leader).

## **Grading Policies**

1. Extensions can be granted on assignments, but you need to talk to your section leader a few days in advance. If you do not make arrangements beforehand, late papers will be downgraded by 1/3 letter grade per day.
2. Note: to pass this class, you must complete the midterm exam and the final paper.

## **Notes on Academic Integrity**

1. Each student in this course is required to adhere to Cornell's Academic Integrity Code: <http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/aic.cfm>. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the Code, and what constitutes a violation of it. All work submitted must be the student's own, and all sources must be properly cited.
2. Each essay assignment will be submitted to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. Further, all papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of Turnitin.com service is subject to the usage policy posted on the Turnitin.com site.
3. Students are not permitted to buy or sell any course materials, online or otherwise. This includes handouts, paper topics, homework questions, etc. Such behavior constitutes academic misconduct.

## Gender-Inclusive Language Guidelines

The Cornell Office of Diversity and Inclusion and LGBTQ Resource Center each provide helpful guidelines for how to be more inclusive in our speech and writing:

<https://dos.cornell.edu/lgbt-resource-center/trans-inclusion-cornell>

<https://diversity.cornell.edu/networks-and-orgs/lgbt-staff-faculty/gender-inclusive-pronouns>

Following these guidelines is essential to fostering an inclusive environment at Cornell. Our language is gender-inclusive when we use words that recognize and affirm how people describe, express, and experience their gender. Gender-inclusive language avoids assuming a male speaker ('freshman', 'upperclassman', 'mankind', etc.), erasing non-binary gender identifications, and conflating biological sex with gender expression.

## Students with a Disability

Students with Disabilities: Your access in this course is important. Please give me your Student Disability Services (SDS) accommodation letter early in the semester so that we have adequate time to arrange your approved academic accommodations. If you need an immediate accommodation for equal access, please speak with me after class or send an email message to me and/or SDS at [sds\\_cu@cornell.edu](mailto:sds_cu@cornell.edu). If the need arises for additional accommodations during the semester, please contact SDS.

SDS is located on level 5 of Cornell Health, 110 Ho Plaza, 607-254-4545, [sds.cornell.edu](http://sds.cornell.edu).

## Course Materials

Readings will be posted on the course site.

### Recommended Online Resources

- The publisher's student resources for the Perry, Bratman, and Fischer introductory textbook (useful for studying): <http://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780190200237/stud/>
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu>
- Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://www.rep.routledge.com>
- The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy: (google it)
- Website for the Philosophy Talk public radio show: <http://www.philosophytalk.org>

**Note: you must cite these resources if you consult them for papers.**

## Tentative Schedule of Readings

### Week 1 Sept 2

#### Wednesday

Introductory class. What is philosophy? How do we do it?

#### For section:

Perry, Bratman, and Fischer, "On the Study of Philosophy," 1-7

Perry, Bratman, and Fischer, "Logical Toolkit," 8-13

## **Topic 1: Ethics**

### **Week 2 Sept 7**

#### **Monday**

Ursula Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"  
James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"

#### **Wednesday**

N. K. Jemisin, "The Ones Who Stay and Fight"  
Jeremy Bentham, "The Principle of Utility," 480–483  
E. F. Carritt, "Some Criticisms of Utilitarianism," 500–501

### **Week 3 Sept 14**

#### **Monday**

J. J. C. Smart, "Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism," 502–509

#### **Wednesday**

Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," 518–526

### **Week 4 Sept 21**

#### **Monday**

Immanuel Kant, from *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 527–543  
*Optional*: Velleman, "A Brief Introduction to Kantian Ethics" 544–560

#### **Wednesday**

Christine M. Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil"

### **Week 5 Sept 28**

#### **Monday**

Onora O'Neill, "Between Consenting Adults"

#### **Wednesday**

Rae Langton, "Duty and Desolation"

**\* Brainstorm assignment due by Sunday midnight \***

## **Topic 2: Sex and Gender**

### **Week 6 Oct 5**

#### **Monday**

Simone de Beauvoir, Excerpt from *The Second Sex*  
*Optional*: Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World* Chapter 1 and 2

#### **Wednesday**

Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race", Sections 1 and 2

**\* Midterm paper due by Sunday midnight \***

**Week 7 Oct 12**

**Monday**

Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race", Finish

**Wednesday**

No class Wednesday, Oct 14

**Week 8 Oct 19**

**Monday**

Mari Mikkola, "Ontological Commitments, Sex and Gender" (begin)

**Wednesday**

Mari Mikkola, "Ontological Commitments, Sex and Gender" (finish)

Charles W. Mills, "Notes from the resistance: some comments on Sally Haslanger's 'Resisting Reality'", Section 2.2 "Defining Race"

**Week 9 Oct 26**

**Monday**

Talia Bettcher, "Trans Women and the Meaning of "Woman""

**Wednesday**

Talia Bettcher, "Trans Women and the Meaning of "Woman"" (cont.)

**Topic 3: Time**

**Week 10 Nov 2**

**Monday**

Sider, "Time"

**Wednesday**

Mark Hinchliff, "The Puzzle of Change", Sections I-IV

A.N. Prior, "Some Free Thinking About Time"

**Week 11 Nov 9**

**Monday**

David Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel"

**Wednesday**

Kadri Vihvelin, "What Time Travelers Cannot Do"

### **Week 12–13 Nov 16–29**

Semi-finals: logical reasoning assignment

Break

### **Topic 4: Death and the Meaning of Life**

#### **Week 14 Nov 30**

##### **Monday**

Philip Larkin, "Aubade" (a poem)

Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus"

Lucretius, selection from Book 3 of *On the Nature of Things*

##### **Wednesday**

Borges, "The Immortal"

Thomas Nagel, "Death"

#### **Week 15 Dec 7**

##### **Monday**

Bernard Williams, "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality"

##### **Wednesday**

Susan Wolf, "The Meanings of Lives"

*Optional:* Taylor, "The Meaning of Human Existence"

#### **Week 16 Dec 14**

##### **Monday**

Nagel, "The Absurd"

##### **Wednesday**

Russell, "The Value of Philosophy"