Introducing Philosophy

Philosophy 103
Dr. Stephen Hicks
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Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays before 11 am and after 2:15 pm.

Philosophy asks big questions: What is it to be a fully developed human being? Am I in control of my destiny? What kind of world are we living in—for example, do gods or a God exist? How do we know these things—should we believe based on tradition, feelings, faith, evidence? And what difference does it make—what is the best kind of life to live? We will grapple with fundamental philosophical issues and discuss the views of major thinkers.

Goals
Improving your Knowledge, Skills, and Habits.
Knowledge: Major issues and major thinkers in Philosophy.
Skills: Listening, Note-taking, Reading, Interpretation, Argument, Speaking, Writing, Technology-use, Sociability.
Habits: Commitment, Perseverance, Self-reliance, Dependability, Timely completion.

Course topics and resources


Topic One

“Arachne and Athena.”
Stephen Hicks, “Why Philosophy Begins with Thales.”

Optional: Stephen Hicks, "Thales' Revolution" [podcast].

Topic Two

Was Socrates’ verdict just?
Plato, Apology of Socrates. The Internet Classics Archive.

Topic Three

Should Socrates have escaped?
Plato, Crito. The Internet Classics Archive.
Topic Four

Can God’s existence be proven?


Optional: John Wright and Stephen Hicks debate seven topics about religion.

Topic Five

Is religion in conflict with science?


Topic Six

What is the relation between mind and body? How far can artificial intelligence go?


Topic Seven

What is individualism, and is it good or bad?


Optional: Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself”.

Topic Eight

Do I know anything?

Plato, ”The Allegory of the Cave.”
René Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy (1641).


Topic Nine

Is religious morality good or bad for humans?

Sigmund Freud, Chapters 1 and 2 of *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930).

Topic Ten

Is life meaningful or meaningless?

*The Meaning of Life—Selected Quotations* from Psalms, Shakespeare, Brooke, Marvell, Thoreau, and others.
Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus" (1942).


Assignments

Final Exam: 1,200 words in response to questions based on the whole semester’s course materials. Weighting: 20-100% of your final grade, depending on how many optional essays you write. The questions will be based directly on the course materials. On the date during Exam Week set by the Registrar.

Optional Essays: For each of the Topics, you may write an optional 600-word essay. Weighting: Each essay will be worth 10% of your final grade and will reduce by that amount the weighting of your final exam. You may write up to eight essays.

On the Optional Essays

Each topics is about a controversial issue in philosophy.

Your essay should (a) demonstrate good understanding of the course materials and our class discussions for that topic, (b) present the arguments of both/all sides of the controversy, and (c) develop your own informed opinion on the topic in direct response to those arguments.

In grading your optional essays, I will use this template:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading template</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
<th>Your score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argument for one side</td>
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<tr>
<td>Argument for other side</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your informed opinion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of course materials</td>
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Due: Optional essays on each topic are due before the date we start the next topic.

I use the University’s standard scale. 90-100% is the excellent A range, 80-89 is the good B range, 70-79 is the average C range, 60-69 is the poor D range, and below 60 is failing.
Four Principles of Respect in Class

1. As your professor, I am a resource and not your boss, father, or enforcer.
2. If I have not read the material and prepared for class, I will not come. If you have not read the material and prepared for class, you will not come.
3. If I do not have the reading material with me, I will not come to class. If you do not have the reading material with you, you will not come to class.
4. I will keep my personal electronic devices turned off and put away. You will keep your personal electronic devices turned off and put away.

Syllabus Statements from Administrators and Accreditation Agency

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**Accommodations Statement**
If you believe you are eligible to receive any type of academic accommodation, through such federal laws as the ADA, please contact the Lang Center for Health, Wellness, Counseling and Disabilities Services at 815-226-4083. The Lang staff manages disability services for Rockford University.

**Academic Honor Code Statement**
In this course, the policies and procedures concerning the Honor Code, including the definitions of cheating and plagiarism as they appear in the current Rockford University Handbook, will be applicable.

**Senior Day Policy Statement**
All students are excused from class for “senior day.”

**Academic Concern with this Course**
From the Provost’s office: “Meet with the course professor to discuss your concern. If the issue is not resolved, then you may follow the chain-of-command: Department Chair, the Dean of your College, and the University Provost, in that order. To appeal a final course grade, complete the grade appeal form (located on the Portal under forms/undergraduate student documents or graduate student documents). A description of the grade appeal process is included on p. 55 of the Academic Catalog.”

**Workload Expectations**
This 3-credit course will meet for 50 minutes per session three times a week throughout the semester. A minimum of 2-3 hours of student preparation time outside of class is expected for each credit hour. Thus, please be prepared to devote 9-12 hours per week to this course (range includes in- and outside-class time).

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