

Philosophy 1000

The Big Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy

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Course Description

The central goal of the course is to learn critical thinking skills that are used by philosophers and that will be useful throughout your college career and your life after college. We will learn these skills by considering a number of philosophical questions from different areas of philosophy, so that we meet a second goal, learning how philosophy considers a broad range of issues. For example, these questions include: Do we know that the objects and events we experience are real, or might we be living in virtual reality? How to make rational decisions, and how could rationality be related to believing in God? Should we trust AI? What does the moral principle “do the greatest good for the greatest number” omit about morality? Are gender and race “real” or merely constructed by society? How are our minds related to our bodies?

We will give reasons for and against different answers to these questions. We will use philosophical skills and techniques to help us assess and give reasons for different answers. That will often require us to set aside our pre-conceptions about these issues, and at times will require us to manage difficult feelings. We will develop philosophical skills in class discussion and in writing, so it is very important that you should feel free to talk in class and to express your views about the material. Comments and questions are always welcome.

Contact Information**Instructor:** Tianqin Ren**Email:** trznz@mail.missouri.edu (Typically reply within 24 hours on business days.)**Office:** Middlebush 231**Office Hours:**

Monday 12:00-1:00, Friday 10:00-10:50, and by appointment.

You can come to my office hour either in person at Middlebush 231 or via zoom:

Meeting ID: 959 8397 2555 Passcode: 1000

Course Resources**Textbook**

The Norton Introduction to Philosophy, Second Edition, edited by Gideon Rosen, Alex Byrne, Joshua Cohen, Elizabeth Harman and Seana Shiffrin.

This is an electronic textbook available through the AutoAccess program. You will be able to access the digital content for this course through Canvas on the first day of class automatically. You will receive (or might have already received) an email from AutoAccess providing charge amounts, the opt-out process and any additional information. If you have questions, please call 573-882-7611, email AutoAccess@umsystem.edu or visit autoaccess.themizzoustore.com.

Online Resources

Additional materials will be provided on Canvas. I will send out announcements after every class about the plan and required reading for next class. Please read/watch the required material before coming to the class and be prepared to actively participate in the discussion.

All the slides will be uploaded to Canvas after class, so instead of trying to write down everything in your notes, focus more on the big picture, the important concepts, and the points where you have confusions/questions/thoughts. Think actively while taking notes, write down what you think is important, and be ready to move on even if you haven't finished your notes. You can always review the slides and fill in the details after class.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1	Jan.17	Welcome, Introduction Ship of Theseus	
	Jan.19		
Week 2	Jan.22	Stephen Yablo “A thing and its matter”, Ch.10	
	Jan.24		
	Jan.26		
Week 3	Jan.29	A Brief Guide to Logic and Argumentation, Getting Started	
	Jan.31		
	Feb.2		
Week 4	Feb.5	Exam #1	
	Feb.7	How to write philosophy papers	
	Feb.9	Descartes “Meditation I: What can be called into doubt”, Ch.6	
Week 5	Feb.12		
	Feb.14	First draft of the first paper due by Thursday, Feb.15	
	Feb.16		Peer review session
Week 6	Feb.19	Jonathan Vogel “Skepticism and Inference to the Best Explanation”, Ch.6	Final draft of the first paper due by Friday, Feb.23
	Feb.21		
	Feb.23		
Week 7	Feb.26	Exam #2	
	Feb.28	Blaise Pascal “The Wager”, Ch.2	
	Mar.1		
Week 8	Mar.4	Warren J. von Eschenbach: “Transparency and the Black Box	
	Mar.6		
	Mar.8		

		Problem: Why We Do Not Trust AI” (Library Resource)	
Week 9	Mar.11	Judith Jarvis Thomson “The trolley problem” (Library Resource)	
	Mar.13		
	Mar.15		
Week 10	Mar.18	Exam #3	
	Mar.20	Paper workshop	
	Mar.22	<i>Flexible day</i>	
Week 11	<i>No class (Spring break)</i>		
Week 12	Apr.1	Marilyn Frye “Oppression” (Library Resource)	First draft of the second paper due by Thursday, Apr.4
	Apr.3		
	Apr.5	Peer review session	
Week 13	Apr.8	Elizabeth Barns “The metaphysics of gender”, Ch.12	Final draft of the second paper due by Friday, Apr.12.
	Apr.10		
	Apr.12		
Week 14	Apr.15	Exam #4	
	Apr.17	John Rawls “Two principles of justice”, Ch.22	
	Apr.19		
Week 15	Apr.22	René Descartes “Meditation II: The nature of the mind and how it is better known than the body”, Elizabeth of Bohemia “Correspondence with Descartes” and Antoine Arnauld “Fourth set of objections”, Ch.7.	
	Apr.24		
	Apr.26		
Week 16	Apr.29	Semester wrap-up	
	May.1	Exam #5	

Classroom Policies

During the class, please:

Keep all electronic devices muted. Do not use electronic devices unless for course-related purposes (referring to materials and taking notes.)

Do not read other materials or work on other courses/projects.

Evaluation

Reading Quizzes (10%)

Beginning with the second week of the semester, there will be a reading quiz on Canvas once a week, typically due **before** class starts on Monday (or Wednesday, when there is an exam on Monday). They will contain straight-forward questions about the new readings intended to test

whether you have read the material carefully and some open-ended questions to help you prepare for the class discussion.

You will have two attempts for each quiz, the grade will be the average of all attempts. The lowest three scores will be dropped at the end of the semester.

Each quiz is 5 points in total. Any quiz submitted overdue but within the day will be deducted 2 points. Any submission after 11:59pm of the day will not be accepted (0 points.)

Exams (45%)

There are 5 in-class paper-based exams during the semester. An exam class will be composed by a 20-min review and a 30-min exam. Before an exam class, you can post questions/points that you'd like to go over in the review on the discussion board on Canvas.

Writing Assignments

First Paper: 3 pages, double spaced.

(2.5% for the draft, 2.5% for peer review, 10% for the final version.)

Second Paper: 4 pages, double spaced.

(2.5% for the draft, 2.5% for peer review, 15% for the final version.)

Revision tends to improve papers. For each paper, we will hold a peer review session after you turn in your first draft, where you comment on each other's paper draft under my instruction. Then you will have about a week to revise your paper with the help of your classmate's comments before turning in the final version. I can read one draft of each paper and give comments upon request. There will be more instructions when we arrive at that stage.

About AI writing: Generative AIs such as ChatGPT currently don't have the ability to generate good philosophy papers, even on the introductory level. The use of artificial intelligence during writing is discouraged and should be limited to searching/proofreading. (Rule of thumb: if you can't legitimately ask your friend to do something for your paper, don't ask it from ChatGPT.) Any use of AI should be indicated in endnotes. If a piece of work is detected to be AI-generated, the grade will not exceed C. If you are not sure whether specific use of AI is allowed, consult me before you use it.

Participation (10%)

Class participation (5%): Attendance will be taken for every class. The participation grade is based on both attendance and class participation. Actively participating in class discussion helps you keep focused and better understand the course material. It also fosters communication and collaboration with people from different backgrounds.

Canvas discussion board (5%): For each week, there will be a discussion board with thought questions posted on Canvas. You are expected to post your answers by the end of the last day

of each topic (typically Friday.) You can get full credits if you finish 9 discussions out of 12 (you can miss 3 with no penalty.) There are extra credits for completing more than 9 discussions.

Extensions and Make-Ups

Extensions and make-up exams can be approved only in exceptional cases. If you need an extension or will be absent for an exam with good reasons, please let me know via email in advance. I reserve the right to not give an extension.

If paper draft is late, and you have not received an extension before the due date, the penalty will be 5% of the grade per day. If you have a longer-term problem that is likely to affect your work throughout the semester, please talk to me as early as you can to see if we can make possible arrangements.

Excused Absence

Absences for religious holidays, athletic participation, or other university-sanctioned events are excused if you let me know by email up until 24 hours in advance of missed class.

Absences for illness, accidents, or personal tragedies are excused if you let me know via email no later than 24 hours after the missed class or provide appropriate documentation from a university official.

Remote attendance will be approved only in exceptional cases. If you have a circumstance that requires attending on Zoom (e.g. infectious disease, unexpected traffic condition, etc.), please let me know via email in advance. Sometimes zoom attendance is not feasible due to network conditions.

Feedback for the Instructors

Feedbacks about this course are always welcome. Feel free to email or talk with me if there are any suggestions/concerns that you would like to bring to my attention. You may also contact André Ariew (AriewA@missouri.edu), the Director of Graduate Studies of Philosophy Department, to address concerns to the instructor. You will have the opportunity to submit an anonymous evaluation at the end of the course.

Grading Scale

Letter grades will be assigned at the end of term using the following scale:

A+	97 and above
A	93 to 96
A-	90 to 92
B+	87 to 89

B	83 to 86
B-	80 to 82
C+	77 to 79
C	73 to 76
C-	70 to 72
D	60 to 69
F	59 or below

For statements on Covid, Academic Integrity, Disability Accommodations, Intellectual pluralism, see <https://provost.missouri.edu/faculty-affairs/syllabus-information/>.

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, including grading policies, when necessary. Any changes on syllabus will be announced via Canvas announcement or email.