



Philosophy 111
PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS

Fall 2022
Amherst College

Professor: Rafeeq Hasan
Email: rhasan@amherst.edu
Meetings: Tu/Th 10-11:20am

Office Hours: 209 Cooper House
Office Hours: W 1:00-2:30pm; Th 4:30-6:00pm
Class Room: Chapin 203

Course Description

In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates famously claims that "the unexamined life is not worth living." Philosophy is the thoughtful interrogation of some of life's most fundamental questions: e.g., How should I act? What is good? What is the nature of reality? What is it to have a mind? Can I be sure that I know anything at all? Am I free? Philosophy approaches these questions through reasoned argumentation and analysis of the arguments of others, both living and dead. Philosophy's answers often challenge common sense. In this course we learn to philosophize through close engagement with written work in the Western philosophical tradition.

Required Texts

No books have been ordered for this course. If you are officially enrolled in the course, you can pick up the course reader from Desy Williams, Philosophy Department Academic Coordinator, in Cooper House 208. There may occasionally be additional readings, which will be posted to Moodle.

Assignments/Grading:

Essay 1 800-1000 words (~3 pages)	Due: 10/3	20%
Midterm exam (take-home)	Due: 10/26	15%
Essay 2 1000-1200 words (~4 pages)	Due: 11/18	30%
Final exam (take-home)	Due: 12/15	15%
Class participation (includes homework)		20%

Policies/Requirements:!

¹ Some of what follows is borrowed from syllabi from two friends and colleagues, Katia Vavova (Mt. Holyoke) and James Wilson (University of Chicago).

1. Academic Honesty

According to the Honor Code's Statement of Intellectual Responsibility, "the College considers it a violation of the requirements of intellectual responsibility to submit work that is not one's own or otherwise to subvert the conditions under which academic work is performed by oneself or by others."²

I expect you will adhere to the Code. Therefore, everything you turn in should be *your own work* and *in your own words*. If your discussions of class topics with your friends, parents, etc., are helpful, cite them. Credit all sources appropriately, even (especially) Wikipedia and anything from your Googling bounty.

Please also consult the information contained in 'Intellectual Responsibility and Plagiarism' on the Dean of Students website: <https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/community-standards/intellectual-responsibility-and-plagiarism>. Particularly helpful is: <https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/community-standards/intellectual-responsibility-and-plagiarism/using-sources>

If questions remain about what constitutes academic honesty or dishonesty, please ask me.

The penalty for plagiarism in my course is failure, absolutely no exceptions

2. Deadlines

Late policy. Three principles guide my late policy:

1. Work should be assessed on its quality and on whether it demonstrates learning.
2. Each assignment has a purpose; that purpose can only be fulfilled within a certain timeframe.
3. Deadlines allow us to organize our time and learning and to meet our goals.

Late policy: If you find that you are unable to complete an assignment by the deadline because of a crisis or emergency, you must contact me no later than 2 days before the due date. I MAY be able to grant a slight extension. **Work that is submitted late and without an extension will be marked down .3 down (see #9 for grading scale) for every day of lateness. This means that even one day of lateness turns a B+ into a B.**

Essays/exams received late may not receive full comments. This is not about punishing you for getting in late work. It's about enabling me to schedule my time.

Finally, keep in mind first, that I am here to help. Get in touch if you're worried about anything.

Second, when it comes to assignments, late > never > plagiarized.

3. Communication

Important announcements and assignments will sometimes be communicated to you via email. It is your responsibility to make sure you are up to date with the latest news. Get in the habit of checking your email at least once daily and don't miss class. If you do miss class, check with your classmates.

Of course, you are always welcome to email me with any questions. But please keep in mind that there are a lot more of you than there are of me and modern email demands are crazy-making. To stay sane:

- **I do not answer emails in the evening (after 5pm) or on weekends.**
- I respond as promptly as I can, but not always on the same day.

² https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/dean_faculty/fph/policies/sir

- I can't guarantee a response to emails about assignments that are due within 24 hours of the email.

These rules are here so that I can manage to respond promptly to questions that do need to be answered via email.

4. Attendance

Attending class, on time, and well-rested is a crucial aspect of engagement with this course. I will take attendance at the *beginning* of every class.

Given that we are still in a global pandemic, however, it is important for your well-being, and the well-being of your classmates, that you stay home if you are not feeling well or need to isolate. If you need to miss class because of illness, family emergency, or some other pressing matter, please let me know by email before class begins. Excused absences will not negatively affect your participation grade, but you do need to get caught up with the material.

You are permitted one unexcused absence. There will be a .2 reduction in your overall participation grade for each additional unexcused absence.

I couldn't attend class. Did I miss anything important? Of course you did! To learn what you missed, contact your classmates, check Moodle for handouts, and make sure you get caught up. *After* you've done all that, feel free to come see me in office hours with questions and comments on the readings.

Things happen. **But you are expected to attend every class.**

5. Participation

In order to get full credit for participation, you must also regularly *participate* in class. Be ready to explore ideas critically, boldly, and creatively with others.

Your participation grade turns on the quality, not the quantity of your contributions, and the extent to which you exhibit the respect and care necessary to promote good discussion. Contributions do not have to be in the form of "answers" or completed "theories" about a text or position—thoughtful questions are highly encouraged, and you will certainly not be penalized for a spirit of humility. While good contributions obviously vary immensely, I especially value comments and questions that pay close attention to the relevant text and those that build on, and reflect attention to, others' contributions.

Why do I have to participate in class? Philosophy is a communal activity, and you've chosen to join our community this semester. Don't talk just for the sake of talking, but also don't wait for brilliance or insight to hit you before raising your hand. Shy? Nervous? Me too. Participation is more difficult for some of us than others, but writing papers, understanding the readings—these too are more difficult for some of us than others. And all of these are skills we must work on. If you have trouble speaking in class, please see me and we will work on it together—just as we would on any other aspect of the class that you find difficult.

6. Office Hours

Office hours: I will hold office hours from 1:00-2:30pm on Wednesdays and 4:30-6:00pm on Thursdays (EST). To meet with me, please schedule a 15-minute appointment at:

calendly.com/rafeeqhasan

You can schedule up to 10 days in advance. Since there are many more of you than there are of me, I ask that you please not schedule more than one meeting with per week unless we've made prior arrangements. **My office hours will fill up, so try to book at least one week in advance.**

Office Hours will be over Zoom at least until 9/15. At that time, I will revisit the policy based on the College's updated masking policy. Meeting over Zoom will allow us to get to know each other unmasked!

I sincerely hope you schedule an office hours appointment with me! Just a few minutes of one-on-one discussion can often help clarify a lot of issues. Please don't feel as if you have to have something brilliant to say schedule an appointment. You are not intruding by coming by.

Can we meet outside office hours? If you can't make my office hours because of a class or work conflict, or if all the spots are full, then email early in the week with a list of times when you are free to meet and I will *try* my best to find an alternative.

7. Reading

This is a course about making, analyzing, and evaluating arguments. Many of the readings are dense, and several are written in outdated language. Leave yourself ample time to complete the readings.

Take the reading process seriously: read actively, doing your best to think about, and respond to, the works you are reading. Active annotation (e.g., underlining, tabbing, note-taking) will help you track down important passages when you come back to them later, such as in class or when writing a paper.

Philosophy is not best read from a computer screen. You will have a very hard time comprehending the readings if you are also checking email, reading the news, chatting with friends, etc.

Some reading advice: **1. I will send out reading questions for almost every session. Use these to help focus your attention on what is most important.** 2. If you encounter a passage that you don't understand, re-read it a few times. If you still don't understand it, pass over it! Try to get a sense of the whole instead of getting lost in the part. 3. Jot down any questions or confusions you have about any particular passage or argument and raise them in class. (Note: if you're nervous about speaking in class, having a prewritten question on hand can help.) 4. Skim over the reading again after class discussion. It should be much easier to understand at this point. 5. If you're still unclear about something, get help: ask other classmates, schedule office hours, etc

8. Essays & Exams

When will my work be graded? I aim to return essays and exams within two weeks of the date they were submitted. I realize it's hard to wait, but it's also hard to grade. I want to give your work the care and attention it deserves.

Can I send you a draft of my essay to read? I'm happy to help you with your essay, but I don't read complete drafts. Feel free to schedule office hours with questions, an outline, a paragraph you've written, an argument you're considering, etc. We can talk through your ideas and questions. Don't forget also that you can visit the Writing Center with drafts. This is a great resource. To schedule an appointment, visit

<https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/support/writingcenter/makeappointment>

What sources should I use for writing my paper? You ***do not*** need to read any additional material beyond the assigned reading—and I don't encourage it. However, if you do consult outside sources, you must remember to *always* cite your sources.

Exams: There will be two take-home exams in this course, designed to assess your comprehension of the readings. Exams will consist of short answer questions of 200-250 words each. The exam questions will be based on the reading questions provided for almost every session. The final exam will not be cumulative, meaning that it will only cover material introduced *after* the midterm.

As for my expectations on writing, David Foster Wallace put it well in his own syllabus:

“If you want to improve your academic writing and are willing to put extra time and effort into it, I am a good teacher to have. But if you’re used to whipping off papers the night before they’re due, running them quickly through the computer’s Spellchecker, handing them in full of high-school errors and sentences that make no sense, and having the professor accept them “because the ideas are good” or something, please be informed that **I draw no distinction between the quality of one’s ideas and the quality of those ideas’ verbal expression**, and that I will not accept sloppy, rough-draftish, or semiliterate college writing. Again, I am absolutely not kidding. If you won’t or can’t devote significant time and attention to your written work, I urge you to drop... and save us both a lot of grief.”³

9. Grading

You will be given both a number grade and a letter grade for each assignment. Only the numerical grade is taken into account in determining your final grade. Numerical grades correspond to letter grades as follows:

A 10-9.5; A- 9.4-9.0; B+ 8.9-8.7; B 8.6-8.3; B- 8.2-8.0; C 7.9 or below.

10. Electronic Devices in the Class

All devices with an ON/OFF switch—laptops, phones, etc.—must be switched off during class, unless they are serving a medical purpose. The empirical evidence is pretty clear that people don’t learn as well with laptops, phones, and other gadgets in the classroom. Plus, you won’t need it. You’ll be expected to join in the discussion, not keep a written record of everything that is said. I’ll often provide handouts that summarize the main points, and you will have brought your copy of the relevant readings. If for some reason you really do need to bring some technology to class, come see me.

11. Accommodations

Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should make an appointment to speak with an Accessibility Services Staff Member. In order to receive reasonable accommodations for a disability, you must register with the *Office of Accessibility Services* at Amherst College (even if you are a 5-College student). (<https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/accessibility-services>). This office will provide a letter describing the appropriate accommodations. Once you have this letter, set up an appointment with me and we will discuss how to accommodate you.

13. Summary of Requirements

1. Don’t plagiarize.
2. Do all required readings. Bring readings to class in hard copy.
3. Don’t miss more than one class without a legitimate excuse.
4. Participate in class discussion.
5. Do two essays and two exams.

³ <http://alasophia.blogspot.com/2008/09/david-foster-wallaces-syllabus.html>

Reading Schedule

Note: This schedule is not a contract. It is entirely provisional. We may speed up, slow down, skip readings, or add readings, depending on where our discussion leads and the interests of members of the class.

How Should I Act?

Week 1:

Th 9/1 Introduction to the Course

Week 2:

Tu 9/6 Syllabus Quiz; Harry Frankfurt, "On Bullshit" (1986)

Th 9/8 Susan Wolf, "The Meanings of Lives," pp. 1-10 (2007)

Week 3:

Tu 9/13 Wolf, "The Meanings of Lives," pp. 10-16

Th 9/15 Plato, *Republic*, Bk. 1 (~375 BCE)

First Essay Assigned

Week 4:

Tu 9/20 Plato, *Republic*, Bk. 1 (continued) (Zoom session)

Th 9/22 Plato, *Crito* (399 BCE)

Week 5:

Tu 9/27 Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963)

Th 9/29 Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (1972)

Week 6:

M 10/3 **First Essay Due 5pm EST**

Tu 10/4 Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (continued)

Th 10/6 Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion," pp. 47-57 (1971)

Week 7:

Tu 10/11 No Class: College Break Day

Th 10/13 Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion," pp. 57-67 (continued)

Week 8:

Tu 10/18 Elizabeth Anscombe, "Mr. Truman's Degree" (1957)

Th 10/20 Thomas Nagel, "War and Massacre" (1972)

Midterm Assigned

What Do I Know?

Week 9:

Tu 10/25 René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), First Meditation

W 10/26 **Midterm Due 5pm EST**

Th 10/27 Descartes, First Meditation (continued)

Optional Event: *16th Amherst Lecture in Philosophy*, Professor Sally Haslanger, Ford Professor of Philosophy & Women's Studies MIT, title tba, 5:00-6:30pm (Paino Lecture Hall)

Week 10:

Tu 11/1 Descartes, Second Meditation

Th 11/3 Descartes, Third Meditation

Second Essay Assigned

Week 11:

Tu 11/8 Andy Clark and David Chalmers, "The Extended Mind" (1998)

Th 11/10 Charles Mills, "Non-Cartesian *Sums*: Philosophy and the African-American Experience" (1994)

Am I free?

Week 12:

Tu 11/15 Baron d'Holbach, "The Illusion of Free Will" (1770)

Th 11/17 Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" (1969)

F 11/18 **Essay 2 Due 5pm EST**

- Thanksgiving Break 11/21-11/27

Week 13:

Tu 11/29 Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities" (continued)

Th 12/1 Susan Wolf, "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility" (1987)

Week 14:

Tu 12/6 Wolf, "Sanity" (continued)

Th 12/8 Wrapping Up

F 12/9 **Final Exam Distributed**

Finals Week:

Th 12/15 **Final Exam Due 5pm EST (absolutely no exceptions!)**