

HURON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Undergraduate Course Outline 2022-2023

Phil1350F: Reality & What We Can Know of It

Tues 11:30–1:30, Thurs 11:30–12:30
Classroom: V214 (Huron)
Office: Lucas House Annex

Instructor: Emerson Doyle
email: edoyle9@uwo.ca
Hours: Wed 1:00–3:30 or anytime via Zoom

Course Description

In this age of fake news, climate change denial, global pandemics, anti-vaxxers, and our political and social leaders becoming ever-more willing to stretch the truth or deny facts outright, the study of epistemology and metaphysics is ever-more relevant. Many of these issues, and much of what we take ourselves to “know” about reality in general, depend upon fundamental but often unexamined philosophical assumptions. Should we trust an expert’s testimony or predictions? Can we trust our memories and perceptions? Our intuitions? Logic and mathematics? Science or faith? Can we be sure beliefs formed by these methods correspond to reality? Just what is real? Perhaps this is all a dream? From where do logical and ethical truths arise? We assume we have free will, that there are other minds, scientific facts, an external world—but how can we be sure? Such assumptions help us to make sense of our lives, but quickly evaporate upon philosophical reflection.

In this course we will examine some of these questions and the philosophical issues at their foundations. Our goal is to equip ourselves with tools and conceptual frameworks useful for navigating these issues, that we may attentively confront the realities of our modern age.

Course Objectives & Methods

Students should finish the course with an appreciation of just how much our daily affairs are underpinned by philosophical convictions, as well as the means to critically evaluate those convictions. You will also have the opportunity to improve your writing, critical analysis, and argumentative abilities. These are extremely valuable skills not just for success in academia, but also within the personal and professional spheres more generally.

Although this course will consist primarily of lectures, class discussion will be of key importance throughout. Students will be expected to attend **every** class having done **all** of the readings, and to regularly make contributions to the discussion. *I encourage you to see me with any questions or to recommend alternate approaches; while I will do my best to encourage a safe and positive atmosphere in the classroom.* In my experience courses are successful when everyone is engaged and comfortable making contributions—you must be an **active participant** in your education.



Texts

- Course readings will be posted on OWL.

One of the key outcomes of this course is learning how to confidently and successfully approach and read academic material. Academic—especially philosophical—writing is often dense, involving new or complex concepts and arguments. The course is designed to teach us strategies for reading in a productive and *active* way. While everyone here knows how to read, active reading is a new skill that must be learned and mastered. We'll learn how to approach dense articles together, and explicitly discuss methods for breaking them down and making them understandable.

Requirements

- Active Learning: 10% (in-class activities, group work, and short assignments)
- Writing Assignments: 36% (1 essay and 2 assignments)
- Final Essay: 24% (5 pages maximum)
- Final Exam: 30% (during the Fall exam period)

Active Learning will include group discussions/activities during class, take-home assignments, and contributions to Forum discussions. Something will be offered most weeks—you must complete to a high quality 10 such activities to get full points.

Writing Assignments are designed develop skills in critical reading, argument analysis/development, focused thesis construction, and staying on topic. Putting all these pieces together has the potential to much improve your academic writing overall. Late work submitted without arrangement with me **in advance** will be penalized by **5% per day late**, including weekends.

The **Final Essay** will be a more substantial argumentative piece, giving you the opportunity to demonstrate all the philosophical skills learned throughout the course. Potential topics will be distributed in advance, but speak with me if you are eager to write on a different topic. Due the last day of class. Late work submitted without arrangement with me **in advance** will be penalized by **5% per day late**, including weekends.

The **Exam** will occur during the Fall exam period. This will be a “take-home” style assignment done over the course of one full week, requiring a demonstration of understanding and a significant synthesis of course content.



Schedule

***Please be advised that the reading list is tentative.**

Week 1 (Sept 08)	Introductory Week <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Salmon, “A Contemporary Exposition of Zeno’s Paradoxes”
Week 2 (Sept 13/15)	The First Philosophical Puzzles <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lindberg, “The Greeks & the Cosmos”
Week 3 (Sept 20/22)	What is Knowledge? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plato, selections from <i>Theaetetus</i>• Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”
Week 4 (Sept 27/29)	How are Beliefs Justified? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Descartes, <i>First & Second Meditations</i>• Locke, “No Innate Principles in the Mind”• J. Nagel, “Rationalism & Empiricism”
Week 5 (Oct 04/06)	Let’s Hear What the Experts Say... (which experts? why believe them?) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• J. Nagel, “Testimony”• Anderson, “Democracy, Public Policy, and Lay Assessments of Scientific Testimony”
Week 6 (Oct 11/13)	Switch Topics! — Metaphysics: Is There An External World? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Berkeley, “Reality Consists of Ideas”• Russell, “The Existence of Matter”
<div>First Writing Assignment (essay) due October 13th — 12%</div>	
Week 7 (Oct 18/20)	Why do we Assume the Universe is Made of <i>Things</i>? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guttinger, “A Virus is Not a Thing: The Case for a Process View of Viruses”• Bickhard, “Issues in Process Metaphysics”
Week 8 (Oct 25/27)	But Don’t Things <u>Cause</u> Other Things? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hume, “Of the Idea of Necessary Connexion”• Mumford, “What is a Cause?”
<div>Second Writing Assignment (reflection) due Friday October 28th — 10%</div>	
Week ☹ (Nov 01/03)	No Class — Reading Week!! (whew!)
Week 10 (Nov 08/10) *Drop Date Nov. 12	So What of Science!? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whewell, “Against Pure Empiricism”• Whewell, “The Causes Behind the Phenomena”• Popper, “Science: Conjectures and Refutations”
Week 11 (Nov 15/17)	Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Turing, selections from “Computing Machinery & Intelligence”• Searle, “Can Computers Think?”

Third Writing Assignment (arguments) due November 17th — 14%

Week 12 (Nov 22/24)

What of Conscious Experience?

- Russell, “On Analogy”
- T. Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”
- Chalmers, introduction to “The Puzzle of Conscious Experience”

Week 13 (Nov 29/
Dec 01)

But There Must Be a Self... Descartes & Locke Said So!

- Hume, “Of Personal Identity”
- Mumford, “What is a Person?”

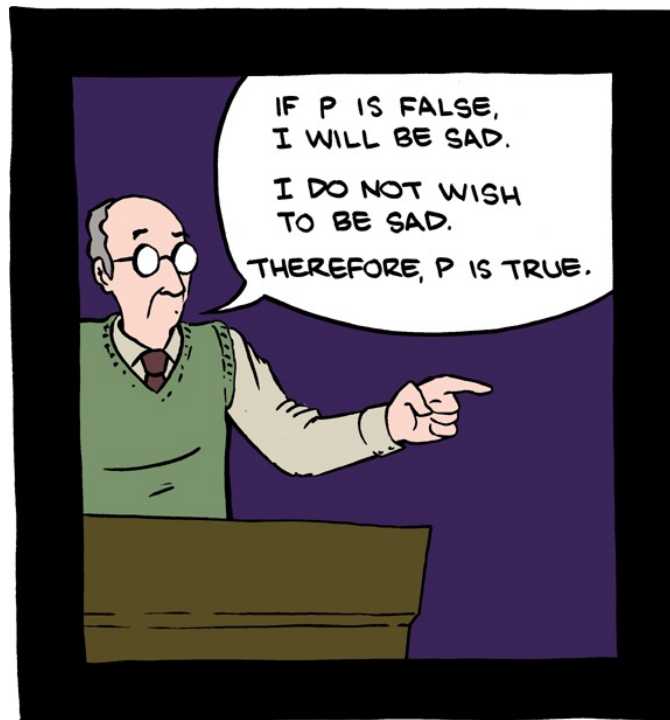
Week 14 (Dec 06/08)

Is Philosophy Important?

- Goldhill, “Why are so many smart people such idiots about philosophy?”
- Goldhill, “Bill Nye, the science guy, says I convinced him that philosophy is not just a load of self-indulgent crap”
- Russell, “The Value of Philosophy”

Final Essay due December 08th — 24%

Final Exam during Fall Exam Period — 30%



There. Now you can skip 99% of philosophical debates.