



*The Thinker* (Auguste Rodin, 1903)

# Introduction to Philosophy

PHIL 151  
Summer 22  
4-Week Session

**\*\*\*Please note: This is an *asynchronous* course—there are no live/zoom meetings. Still, students are expected to listen to, take notes on, and post on multiple video lectures *each weekday* (posted on a M-T-W-Th-F schedule). Students are also expected to pass exams designed to test you on your understanding of the lectures and readings.\*\*\***

Dr. William J. Devlin  
Tillinghast Hall, Room 319  
Bridgewater State University  
Telephone: 508-531-2602  
E-mail: [WDevlin@BRIDGEW.EDU](mailto:WDevlin@BRIDGEW.EDU)

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Who are we? What makes me, *me*? What can we know? Do we really know the things we assume we know? What is the nature of the world and of reality? Does God exist? What is the good life? What is the right thing to do in certain moral situations? These questions, and many others, are addressed in the study of philosophy. This course introduces the study of philosophy through the examination of specific questions, issues, and ideas regarding the human being, the world, and the relation between them. We will cover such philosophical topics as epistemology (What can we know? How do we come to know things? How do I justify my beliefs?), metaphysics (What is reality? Who is God? Who am I?), and ethics (Are morals relative or universal? What makes a certain act moral and another act immoral?) through readings from various philosophers throughout the history of philosophy, and through films that demonstrate philosophical positions, arguments, and attitudes (Meets: Core Humanities Requirement)

## **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Students will be able to:

1. Identify and differentiate three major branches of philosophy: Ethics, Epistemology, and Metaphysics
2. Identify, describe, and recall major thinkers, schools, core philosophical questions, terms, concepts and positions in the three major branches of philosophy specified above.
3. Read and comprehend philosophical texts, both classical and contemporary.
4. Discuss core philosophical questions and problems, such as: How do we justify an action as morally good?; Is knowledge entirely dependent upon experience?; Are persons completely defined as complex physical systems or do they have properties not reducible to anything physical?
5. Explain, analyze, critically evaluate and defend positions on central philosophical problems.
6. Compose clear and concise explanations and arguments concerning central philosophical problems.

## **TEXTBOOK**

In *lieu* of a textbook, web links to the readings will be posted on our Blackboard course-site. Students then have the opportunity to either do the readings online or print out hard copies. Each reading will be posted in the appropriate topic folder (e.g., virtue ethics; deontology; etc.) that is assigned for the lecture of that topic. Required readings are drawn from The Internet Classics Archive ([classics.mit.edu](http://classics.mit.edu)) and Early Modern Philosophy ([earlymoderntexts.com](http://earlymoderntexts.com)).

## **SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS**

---

For those interested, when available, you will find supplemental resources for a given topic posted on our Blackboard course-site. These resources consist of secondary essays concerning a given ethical philosopher or issue (e.g., links to entries from *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*)

## SUPPLEMENTAL VIDEOS

---

For those interested, when available, you will find supplemental YouTube videos that address a specific ethical issue or moral philosopher on our Blackboard course-site. These videos range from: *The School of Life* (a series of educational videos focusing primarily on individual philosophers, including their general philosophical views and biographical entries); *8 Bit Philosophy* (a collection of brief videos that encapsulate a single philosophical issue through 8-bit video games); *Crash Course Philosophy* (a series highlighting key philosophical ideas often related to modern day popular culture examples); and *Right & Wrong* (a series of videos narrated by Harry Shearer and Stephen Fry that succinctly present a single ethical issue).

## SUCCESS IN THIS COURSE

Success in this course is dependent upon satisfying the following conditions:

1. Meet the technology requirements outlined below
2. Complete the exams on time
3. Complete the readings on time
4. Follow and take notes on the lectures
5. Ask and answer many questions on the discussion board on time and throughout the entire session.

## COURSE FORMAT

This course is designed to be a simulation of a face-to-face introductory course to philosophy. Each topic covered in the course (and each exam) appears as a separate topic on Blackboard. Each topic will include audio/power point lectures. Each exam is its own separate topic with due dates (due dates are also listed in the course schedule below). Make sure to pay close attention to those dates—after the date has passed, the exams/quiz become unavailable. The discussion board is organized by the daily/weekly topics and can be located in the Discussion Forums. The discussion questions are presented at the end of each lecture. Students have until the deadline of the corresponding exam for that set to contribute to the discussion topic.

## REQUIREMENTS

### TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

---

All students, in order to take this course, must have the following:

- A functional BSU email address, checked regularly
- A functional BSU Blackboard account
- Enrollment in the appropriate Blackboard section of the course (PHIL151)
- Regular and reliable internet and computer access

With any technology questions or issues call 508-531-2555, the IT Help desk at BSU. They can help you with any technical questions you have, either about Blackboard or any other relevant technological issues. I do not provide any technical assistance.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

---

Because this is an online course, it will be crucial for you to listen to, and follow, lectures, complete the readings in a timely manner, prepare and complete the exams. In addition, all students will be required to post regularly in our Blackboard discussion forums. This is the optimal way for us to simulate class discussion, and is essential for succeeding in this course.

## LECTURES

---

Lectures will be offered for each topic. The lectures help to simulate the classroom setting to introduce you to the material in the course. Lectures can be found under “Lecture Sets” in the corresponding Topic folders on our Blackboard course site.

### LECTURE SETS

Each Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday (by 4am EST), a lecture set will be posted (see **Course Schedule** below for exact dates). By doing so, we can follow a scheduled routine for when we can expect lectures and help simulate the face-to-face style of class.

Each lecture set includes a video lecture. Students are **required** to listen to and follow the video lectures that are presented. Skipping a lecture is analogous to skipping a class in a face-to-face course. Aside from the intrinsic philosophical value lectures offer, following lectures are beneficial for at least two reasons. First, students who skip lectures inevitably fail the exams. Second, any discussion post submitted without following the corresponding lecture beforehand will not count (see “**Discussion Board**” below for more details).

Note: Blackboard records student access to these lectures. “Blackboard Course Evaluation reports” provide objective, time-stamped, data to help verify which students accessed the video lectures and which students did not.

Most “Lecture Sets” include a pdf file of the power point slides (entitled “PDF: Title”) which form the basis of video lectures. The pdf files are designed to supplement (not substitute) lecture and assist in your preparation for each exam.

Students who have taken this class in the past have recommended that you not only listen to every lecture, but also take your own notes on the lectures. Doing so will help you understand the readings, post insightful and higher-quality discussion points, and perform well on the exams. Likewise, using the study guide questions to help structure your notes will prove valuable for successfully completing each exam.

## READINGS

---

Readings are assigned throughout the semester. A link to each reading set will be posted in the corresponding Topic on our Blackboard course site. The reading assignments are also listed in the **Course Schedule** below. Reading is essential to understand the lectures, follow and contribute to discussion, *and perform well on the exams*. Students who fail to complete the readings often perform poorly on all of those aspects of the course. Please read carefully, and ask any questions about the readings in the appropriate Discussion forum.

## GRADING

---

The graded elements of the course are as follows:

1. Exam 1: 25%
2. Exam 2: 25%
3. Exam 3: 25%
4. Discussion posts 25%

## EXAMS

---

Students are expected to take 3 topical online exams. Dates for these exams are below. **After these dates pass, the exams will be taken offline. There are no extensions for the exams.** Students can review their exams—including their correct and incorrect answers—after the deadline passes.

Ethics Exam: available by 4am (EST), Friday, July 14 until 9am (EST) Monday, July 18

Epistemology Exam: available by 4am (EST), Friday, July 29 until 9am (EST) Monday, Aug. 1

Metaphysics Exam: available by 4am (EST) Friday, Aug. 5 until 9am (EST) Monday, Aug. 8

Each exam will consist of multiple choice questions (30 questions per exam). Questions will cover material from (a) the readings; (b) the audio/power point lectures; and (c) discussion posts. It is imperative that you keep up with all aspects of the course for the purposes of the exams.

Three important points about these exams:

- 1) Each exam can only be taken **once** and only in one two-hour sitting. You cannot take an exam multiple times or over several sittings. Please make sure that you reserve a time of two hours for yourself to take each exam when they are posted.
- 2) The dates and times are **not** changeable; you must be available to take them during these periods to take this course. After these times, the exam will no longer be accessible to you. **No late attempts are possible. Do not request extensions. Students who do not complete the exam in the available timeframe automatically get a zero for the exam. No extra credit for the exams is offered. It is the student's responsibility to complete the work on time.**
- 3) You must make sure to take the exams on a computer that works, using a reliable internet connection. It is your responsibility to make sure the grade was recorded. If there is a technical

problem, you must report it to me immediately so I can try and fix it from my end (this happens, but only rarely). If the deadline passes and you have no recorded grade for the exam, you will get a zero for that work.

Among other things, students in the past have found that it is helpful to prepare answers to the study guide questions ahead of time (including flash cards for definitions), as this will help elevate one's performance on the exams.

## DISCUSSION BOARDS (*PHILOSOPHICAL FORUMS*)

---

I expect you will have lots of questions, lots of answers, and lots of reflections about the material! Those questions, answers, and reflections will be dealt with in the discussion board forums. I have set up many forums, and you should look at them regularly, ideally several times a week.

For general course questions, use the **Admin/Logistics Forum**; this forum is for logistical questions (when is a test scheduled, when is a test due, etc.). Most answers will be found in this syllabus, but in case they are not, use this forum.

For general technical problems you can post in the *student-only* **Technical Forum** (although to get help it is best to call the Help Desk at 508-531-2555).

Together, the remaining forums constitute the *Philosophical Forums*, as these will be used to discuss the philosophical questions and issues to be examined and analyzed this semester. These *Philosophical Forums* include:

### Introduction Forum

#### Ethics Exam Set

Topic 1: Intro. to Ethics  
Topic 2: Virtue Ethics  
Topic 3: Deontology  
Topic 4: Consequential.  
Topic 5: Existentialism

#### Epistemology Exam Set

Topic 6: Intro to Epistemology  
Topic 7: Plato's Cave  
Topic 8: Rationalism  
Topic 9: Empiricism  
Topic 10: Skepticism

#### Metaphysics Exam Set

Topic 11: Intro to Metaphysics  
Topic 12: Ontological Arg.  
Topic 13: Teleological Arg.  
Topic 14: Intelligent Design  
Topic 15: Personal Identity

Here, you will ask questions, help answer other students' questions, follow up on other comments in the respective category. Each forum corresponds to a Topic in the course and an appropriate lecture(s) (and will be available when that Topic arises—see **Course Schedule** below). At the end of each lecture, I offer "Discussion questions". Students are to address and answer these questions in the corresponding forum in the Discussion board.

Important points about the *Philosophical Forums*:

### GRADING

1) Excluding the forum, “Introduction” (where posting is optional), each student is required to participate in *at least ten* of the *Philosophical Forums* (Topics 1-15) listed above. I encourage you to post *many* times in each of the forums you choose. Students who participate in less than ten discussion forums will automatically fail the discussion portion of their final grade. Ten forums (one post per each forum) is the bare *minimum* to form a basis for a passing grade (C or D) in discussion points. However, students who seek to excel in their discussion grade (A or B) will post *more* than ten times throughout the semester.

2) Do not post before completing the assigned lecture for the topic. Only post after you completed the assigned lecture (see “**Course Schedule**” below for assignment dates). Without completing/attending lecture, a student has nothing philosophically significant to contribute to discussion (**analogy to the face-to-face classroom**: if a student skips class, they cannot come to the next class acting like they know the material! If you skip an online lecture, you cannot post acting like you followed the lecture). Blackboard records student activity, including time-stamped access to lectures. I regularly review Blackboard reports. Any post submitted without completing the assigned lecture will not count towards your discussion grade.

3) The quantity of posts is important. But **quality of posts** are just as (if not more) important. While I encourage politeness and proper etiquette on the discussion forums, posts that simply consist of “thank you”, “you’re welcome”, “I agree”, or “yes”, “no”, etc. will not be counted towards the calculation of final grade discussion points. Likewise, discussion posts that clearly indicate a failure to do the readings and follow the lectures will not be counted. Frankly, some people believe that philosophy is an art of talking idly and nonsensically. I assure you, philosophy properly understood is not such an art form, and our academic course will not include such uninformed, poorly prepared, and lazy rambles. Instead, please make sure your posts demonstrate (a) that you have completed the readings; (b) that they are informed by the lectures; and (c) a proper amount of time and consideration to thoughtful reflection and critical evaluation (i.e., logically justifying and supporting your position). Students who do not offer quality posts will inevitably fail the discussion portion of their final grade.

4) For those students who have submitted quality posts in at least ten forums, final grade discussion points are calculated in the following way: at the end of the course, I check how many posts each qualifying student made (Blackboard keeps track of this). I take the average number, and then create a grading scale based on that average. Students who post more than the average amount get a better discussion grade, and those who post less get a worse discussion grade.

5) To help you to keep track of the number of philosophical forums you’ve posted in throughout the semester, students will receive marks for each forum, located in the grade center on Blackboard. For each of the fifteen philosophical forums, students will receive marks of ‘1’s and ‘0’s. Those students who have submitted a post in a given forum will receive a mark of ‘1’ in the column (in grade center) for that forum. Those students who have *not* submitted a post in a given forum will receive a mark of ‘0’ in the column (in grade center) for that forum. These marks do

not indicate your final discussion grade. They only indicate which forums you've posted in and which ones you have not.

### POSTING

6) At the end of each lecture, I offer discussion questions (located on the last slide of each lecture). *There should only be one thread per discussion question.* This entails two important points:

First, if you would like to post on a discussion question that has not been posted yet, then please feel free to create a new thread with some reference to the discussion question title. For example, if you are addressing a discussion question on Aristotle's account of happiness, title the thread "Aristotle and Happiness" and compose a response. When you do, please make sure that you only address *one discussion question per thread*. If you want to address two different discussion questions, do not post both of your answers in one thread. Instead, create two separate threads. For example, if you would like to discuss a question on Aristotle's account of happiness and a further question on Aristotle's virtues, then create two different threads—one on happiness question one on virtue. If you address multiple discussion questions in a single thread, your thread will be deleted, and you will receive zero credit.

Second, if a classmate has already created a thread on that discussion question, **do not create a new thread**. Instead, post in that student's thread. Consolidating the number of threads is in your best interest as it not only allows you to hone in on one thread when you want to say something about that discussion question, but it is also helpful for you when reviewing discussion forums for the exams. Please note that I will delete multiple threads on the same discussion topic, and only keep the original thread. So, you will neither be graded on, nor receive any credit for, a redundant thread/post. Likewise, if you notice that there are two threads on the same discussion question and you wish to contribute to that topic, please post in the thread that was created first. Your post will be deleted if it is in the second, redundant thread.

7) When posting on an already existing thread, please be sure to address the conversation already taking place in the thread. This will help to ensure a real discussion is taking place in the discussion forums.

8) Each discussion forum will open when its corresponding lecture(s) opens. Posting options for a discussion forum will close when its corresponding exam closes. **No late discussion posts are possible.**

9) The Introduction forum will remain open for the duration of the semester. The purpose of this forum is to initiate opening conversations about philosophy as we begin the course and to give engaged students a platform to continue discussions about any philosophical topic they may be interested in, even when the other relevant forums have closed. Any threads created or posts submitted in this forum will *not* count towards your discussion grade.

10) Plagiarism in discussion forums and posts at any time is prohibited and entails failure for the entire course. See subsection Academic Dishonesty below.

A reminder about email: Please do not email me with course content questions, technical problems, or general questions. Instead, please use the discussion forums. The reason for this is simple: if you have a question about some aspect of the material, I know others may have that same question. You can help by posting it, and I will help by answering it so that everyone can benefit from the answer. However, if you have a specific question of some other type (e.g. personal emergency), please feel free to email me.

## ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

---

One of the foundational strengths of the University is its emphasis on academic and personal integrity. Academic dishonesty is an affront to our integrity and is considered a violation of our Academic Integrity Policy (see <http://catalog.bridgew.edu/content.php?catoid=10&navoid=970>). As such, academic dishonesty is *not* tolerated in my course or at the University in general.

The University defines *academic dishonesty* as “an attempt to misrepresent one’s efforts on any academic assignment or exercise submitted for evaluation.” Such attempts include, but are not limited to, plagiarism and cheating. *Plagiarism* is defined as “intentionally or knowingly presenting the work of another as one’s own.” This includes, but is not limited to, plagiarizing discussion posts, exams, essays, journal reflections, etc. *Cheating* is defined as “intentionally using or attempting to use prohibited materials or information in any academic exercise.” This includes, but is not limited to, cheating on exams, quizzes, and tests (definitions retrieved from “What is Academic Honesty?” *Bridgewater State University*. Accessed 11 November 2017. <https://www.bridgew.edu/academic-integrity/academic-dishonesty>).

There are at least three reasons why you should not commit academic dishonesty of any kind (especially plagiarism and cheating):

1. The most significant consequence to academic dishonesty is the detriment to your intellectual, academic, and moral development: you will fail to learn anything, your academic development will become hindered, and your ethical integrity will become corrupted.
2. Instead of being dishonest, honestly giving credit to a secondary source in writing assignments (such as essays, online discussion posts, etc.) to help develop your own independent reflection and critical thinking will often help to *elevate* your work and your grade. In academia, proper citations will help to demonstrate that you have done research to assist your goal of understanding. As such, you will often receive a higher credit for giving credit to a source through citation.
3. Bridgewater State University severely (but justifiably) sanctions (i.e., penalizes or punishes) academic dishonesty. Students guilty of academic dishonesty immediately *fail* my *entire course*, regardless of your grade in any other assignment in my course. Furthermore, per rules of the University and per my duties as a professor, I am obligated to report you and the violation to the appropriate figures of the administration at the University. Sanctions from the University range from academic suspension, dismissal from the degree program, and permanent dismissal from the University. Having served as a committee member on academic review panels for student violations of the Academic Integrity Policy, I implore you to not commit academic dishonesty of any kind in my course or at the University in general.

For details concerning the violation of the Academic Integrity Policy (reporting, sanctions, etc.), please see here: <http://catalog.bridgew.edu/content.php?catoid=10&navoid=970#sanctions>

Finally, if you have questions or are unsure of the definitions of academic dishonesty, plagiarism, or cheating, or if you are uncertain about the rules of citation or what it means to give credit to secondary sources, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am always eager to help clarify and promote academic integrity.

## ENGAGING IN PHILOSOPHY

---

If you have completed reading through the syllabus, understood the demands of the course, and found that you are willing and able to continue (and succeed) in this course, then welcome to PHIL 151! Above all, philosophy is a *fun* and *exciting* topic for those students putting in the heavy amount of reflection and abstract reasoning that is involved. The Ancient Greek philosophers maintain that philosophy begins with a sense of wonder and awe with the world around us. I hope you have that sense of wonder and are ready to begin to pursue what that sense means and what it entails! I look forward to working with you through the lectures and discussions!

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### PART I: ETHICS

---

#### WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION & VIRTUE ETHICS

Monday July 11

##### **Topic 1: Introductions**

Lecture: "Introduction: Philosophy: The What and the Why"

Lecture: "Introduction to Ethics"

Tuesday July 12

##### **Topic 2: Virtue Ethics**

Lecture: "Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* I"

Lecture: "Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* II"

##### **Readings**

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I-II

Wednesday July 13

##### **Topic 3: Deontology**

Lecture: "Kant's *Grounding* I"

Lecture: "Kant's *Grounding* II"

##### **Readings:**

Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Chapters 1-2

Thursday July 14

**Topic 4: Consequentialism**

Lecture: “Mill’s *Utilitarianism*”

**Readings:**

John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapters 1-2

**Topic 5: Existentialism**

Lecture: “Introduction to Existentialism”

Lecture: “Sartre: ‘Existentialism as a Humanism’”

**Readings**

Jean-Paul Sartre, “Existentialism as a Humanism”

Friday, July 15

**Exam 1**

Study Guide posted

Exam 1 posted

Due Date: Monday, July 18, 9am (EST)

**PART II: EPISTEMOLOGY**

---

WEEK 2: EPISTEMOLOGY

Monday, July 18

**Exam 1** due by 9am (EST)

**Topic 6: Introduction to Epistemology**

Lecture: “Introduction to Epistemology I”

Tuesday, July 19

**Topic 6: Introduction to Epistemology**

Lecture: “Introduction to Epistemology II”

Wednesday, July 20

**Topic 7: Plato’s Cave**

Lecture: “Plato’s Allegory of the Cave”

**Readings:**

Plato, *Republic* (pp.21-43)

Thursday, July 21

**Topic 8: Rationalism**

Lecture: “Descartes’ *Meditations* I”

**Readings:**

Rene Descartes, *Meditations*, Book 1

Friday, July 22

**Topic 8: Rationalism**

Lecture: “Descartes’ *Meditations* II”

**Readings:**

Rene Descartes, *Meditations*, Book 2

**WEEK 3: EPISTEMOLOGY II**

Monday, July 25

**Topic 9: Empiricism**

Lecture: “Locke’s Empiricism”

**Readings:**

John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, (pp.53-61)

Tuesday, July 26

**Topic 10: Skepticism**

Lecture: “Hume’s Empiricism”

**Readings:**

David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section 4

Wednesday, July 27

**Topic 10: Skepticism (part 2)**

Lecture: “Hume’s Skepticism”

**Readings:**

David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section 4

Thursday, July 28

Exam 2 Study Guide posted

Friday, July 29

**Exam 2**

Exam 2 posted

Due Monday, August 1, 9am (EST)

**PART III: METAPHYSICS**

---

**WEEK 4: METAPHYSICS**

Monday, August 1

**Exam 2** due by 9am (EST)

**Topic 11: Introduction to Metaphysics**

Lecture: “Introduction to Metaphysics I”

Lecture: “Introduction to Metaphysics II”

**No Readings**

Tuesday, August 2

**Topic 12: The Ontological Argument**

Lecture: “The Ontological Argument for the Existence of God”

**Readings:**

Rene Descartes, *Meditations*, Chapter 5

“Gaunilo’s Reply”

Wednesday, August 3

**Topic 13: The Teleological Argument**

Lecture: “The Teleological Argument for the Existence of God: David Hume”

**Readings:**

David Hume, *Dialogues*, Part II

Thursday, August 4

**Topic 14: Selfhood**

Lecture: “Personal Identity”

Friday, August 5

**Exam 3**

Study Guide posted

Exam 3 posted

Due Monday, August 8, 9am (EST)

Monday, August 8

**Exam 3 due by 9am (EST)**