

Basic Problems of Philosophy

Section H: 10am—10:50am MWF

Section I: 11am—11:50am MWF

Wake Forest University

Fall 2020

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Course Description

Most of us assume that we possess a distinctively *human* nature—a unique set of capacities that set us apart from non-human animals. For example, we ordinarily take ourselves to *know* complex truths about the world around us. We believe that certain of our actions and character traits are morally *good* or morally *bad*. Most of us assume we have *free will*. In our optimistic moments, we think our lives are full of *meaning* and *happiness*. Can this cherished self-conception of ours—as knowledgeable, moral, free, and happy beings—withstand rational scrutiny? Or are many of these assumptions riddled with contradiction and error? This course introduces students to philosophy, its methods, and its central questions.

Course Format

Instruction Method

Online

Modality

Synchronous + asynchronous

Recommended Technology

- Computer + highspeed internet access
- Webcam + mic

Weekly Structure

	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
Modality	Synchronous	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Activity	Zoom Meeting	Zoom Meeting	Lecture Video
Time	Section H: 10am—10:50 Section I: 11am—11:50	Section H: 10am—10:50 Section I: 11am—11:50	N/A
Platform	Zoom	Zoom	Canvas

Course Goals

Comprehend

Recommended weekly steps:

- *Watch* and re-watch the lecture video(s).
- *Fill-in* handout(s).
- *Read* before M/W class Zoom meetings.
- *Attend* class Zoom meetings.

Evaluate

Opportunities to critically evaluate philosophical views and arguments: (1) Zoom and/or Canvas discussions; (2) final papers; (3) office hours; (4) independent thinking, writing, & discussion.

Understand

By the end of the course, you should understand how to:

- Think critically
- Write clearly
- Discuss and debate charitably

Assessment

Participation (10%)

Active participation is essential to your success in this course. There are two ways to fulfill the basic participation requirement:

- (1) once per week, contribute at least one comment or question during a Zoom meeting,

OR

- (2) once per week, make two posts (original post + reply) on the Canvas discussion boards.

High-volume and/or high-quality participation may result in a small boost in your final course grade, especially if your average is borderline between two letter grades (ex. an average of 89.45 is on the line between a B+ and an A-). Conversely, low volume or particularly low-effort participation may slightly hurt your final course grade, especially in borderline cases.

Two Argument Reconstruction Papers (20% each)

1—2 pp (double-spaced) argument reconstruction papers. Prompts, specific requirements and instructions, and writing advice will be distributed roughly two weeks before the due date.

Written Exam (25%)

An essay-based exam. Administered synchronously via Zoom during regular class time on **Friday, October 16th**. Review session and study guide will be provided.

Final Paper (25%):

A 6—8 pp. double-spaced argument analysis paper, focused on a topic from the second half of the semester (ex. morality, freedom, meaning). Prompts and more details will be posted on Canvas.

Course Policies

Attendance

No more than **two** unexcused absences from M/W Zoom meetings. The first unexcused absence thereafter will result of a deduction of one-third of a letter grade from your final course grade, the second unexcused absence will result in an additional one-third of a letter grade deduction, etc.

Disabilities

I am committed to providing accommodations to students with disabilities. If you are eligible for accommodations, please contact me and/or the Learning Assistance Center & Disability Services (phone: 336.758.5929, email: lacds@wfu.edu).

Office Hours

Virtual: Monday 1pm—2pm on Zoom

In-person: Friday 3:30pm—4:30pm in Tribble B307

Texts

Available for download on Canvas.

Schedule of Readings¹
Week 1: Introduction

	Monday 8/24	Wednesday 8/26	Friday 8/28
Topic		Course Overview	Arguments and Validity
Modality		Synchronous	Asynchronous
Reading		N/A	N/A
Activity		<u>Class Zoom Meeting</u> Section H: 10am—10:50am Section I: 11am—11:50am	<u>Lecture Videos(s)</u> Arguments and Validity
Platform		Zoom	Canvas

Week 2: Does God Exist?

	Monday 8/31	Wednesday 9/2	Friday 9/4
Topic	<i>First Cause Argument</i>	<i>First Cause Argument</i>	<i>First Cause Argument</i>
Modality	Synchronous	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Reading	Aquinas, “Five Ways”	Aquinas, “Five Ways”	Aquinas, “Five Ways”
Activity	<u>Zoom Meeting</u> Section H: 10am—10:50am Section I: 11am—11:50am	<u>Zoom Meeting</u> Section H: 10am—10:50am Section I: 11am—11:50am	<u>Lecture Video(s)</u> Cosmological Argument I
Platform	Zoom	Zoom	Canvas

Week 3: Does God Exist?

	Monday 9/7	Wednesday 9/9	Friday 9/11
Topic	Argument from Contingency	Argument from Contingency	Argument from Contingency
Modality	Synchronous	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Reading	Clarke, “The Cosmological Argument”	Clarke, “The Cosmological Argument”	Clarke, “The Cosmological Argument”
Activity	<u>Zoom Meeting</u> Section H: 10am—10:50am Section I: 11am—11:50am	<u>Zoom Meeting</u> Section H: 10am—10:50am Section I: 11am—11:50am	<u>Lecture Video(s)</u> Cosmological Argument II
Platform	Zoom	Zoom	Canvas

¹ Note: this schedule is **tentative**. It is subject to change based on student need, instructor illness, and/or COVID-19 related disruptions. If and when such scheduling changes occur, I will distribute an updated schedule.

Week 4: Does God Exist?

	Monday 9/14	Wednesday 9/16	Friday 9/18
Topic	<i>Argument from Evil I</i>	<i>Argument from Evil I</i>	<i>Argument from Evil I</i>
Modality	Synchronous	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Reading	Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”	Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”	Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”
Activity	<u>Zoom Meeting</u> Section H: 10am—10:50am Section I: 11am—11:50am	<u>Zoom Meeting</u> Section H: 10am—10:50am Section I: 11am—11:50am	<u>Lecture Video(s)</u> Argument from Evil I
Platform	Zoom	Zoom	Canvas

Week 5: Does God Exist?

	Monday 9/21	Wednesday 9/23	Friday 9/25*
Topic	<i>Argument from Evil II</i>	<i>Argument from Evil II</i>	<i>Argument from Evil II</i>
Modality	Synchronous	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Reading	Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”	Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”	Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”
Activity	<u>Zoom Meeting</u> Section H: 10am—10:50am Section I: 11am—11:50am	<u>Zoom Meeting</u> Section H: 10am—10:50am Section I: 11am—11:50am	<u>Lecture Video(s)</u> Argument from Evil II
Platform	Zoom	Zoom	Canvas

*First paper due

Week 6: (What) Can We Know?

	Monday 9/29	Wednesday 9/31	Friday 10/2
Topic	<i>Evidentialism</i>	<i>Belief Without Evidence</i>	<i>Ethics of Belief</i>
Modality	Synchronous	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Reading	Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief”	Kelly, “Belief without Evidence or Argument	Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief” Kelly, “Belief without Evidence or Argument

Activity	<u>Zoom Meeting</u> Section H: 10am—10:50am Section I: 11am—11:50am	<u>Zoom Meeting</u> Section H: 10am—10:50am Section I: 11am—11:50am	<u>Lecture Video(s)</u> Ethics of Belief I Ethics of Belief II
Platform	Zoom	Zoom	Canvas

Week 7: (What) Can We Know?

	Monday 10/5	Wednesday 10/7	Friday 10/9
Topic	Skepticism I	Skepticism II	Skepticism
Modality	Synchronous	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Reading	Descartes, <i>First Meditation</i>	Descartes, <i>Second Meditation</i>	Descartes, <i>First Meditation</i> Descartes, <i>Second Meditation</i>
Activity	<u>Zoom Meeting</u> Section H: 10am—10:50am Section I: 11am—11:50am	<u>Zoom Meeting</u> Section H: 10am—10:50am Section I: 11am—11:50am	<u>Lecture Video(s)</u> Skepticism I Skepticism II
Platform	Zoom	Zoom	Canvas

Week 8

	Monday 10/12	Wednesday 10/14	Friday 10/16
Topic	Review Session	Exam	Ethics, Freedom, & Meaning
Modality	Synchronous	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Reading	Study guide (on Canvas)	N/A	N/A
Activity	<u>Zoom Meeting</u> Section H: 10am—10:50am Section I: 11am—11:50am	<u>Zoom Meeting</u> Section H: 10am—10:50am Section I: 11am—11:50am	<u>Lecture Video(s)</u> Ethics, Freedom, & Meaning
Platform	Zoom	Zoom	Canvas

Weeks 9—15

Weeks 9—15 schedule TBD. Topics: moral right and wrong, free will and responsibility, and the meaning of life.