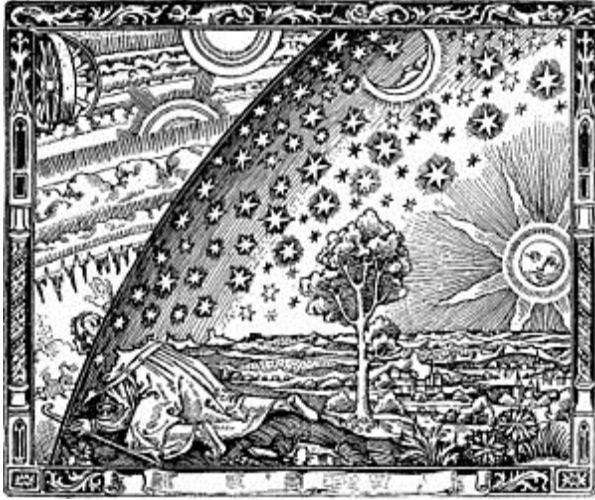


Introduction to Philosophy



Instructor: Dr. Evan T. Woods

Office: Knapp Hall 205D

Office Hours: MWF 11:00AM–12:00PM, and by appointment

E-mail: woodse@denison.edu

Location of Class: Knapp Hall 207

Time: TR 1:30–2:50

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we're going to ask and attempt to answer some central questions of philosophy that bear on the meaning of life. We'll begin with a few thinkers who seem to think of the good life as involving knowledge or philosophy. Well and good. But is knowledge even possible? After this, we'll try to get clearer on what sorts of things we're asking about when we ask what the meaning of *our* life is. Next, if there's a god, this *prima facie* has some bearing on what we ought to be doing with our lives. So, we'll need to ask if there's a god. After this, we will ask whether we can act *freely* and, if so, how we *ought* to act. Finally, we'll turn to the question of the meaning of life and see what conclusions, if any, we can draw.

REQUIRED TEXT

None! All readings will be distributed via Notebowl.

LEARNING GOALS

After completing this course, students will be able to do the following:

- Explain, recognize, and use some core concepts of philosophy, related to epistemology, personal ontology, free will, God, morality, and the meaning of life;
- Construct and evaluate arguments and positions using good philosophical method; and
- Articulate the importance and role of the topics of this course in autonomous thinking, discerning moral agency, and active citizenship both inside and outside of the classroom.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

Your final grade will be calculated on the following basis:

- Short writings: 30%
- Essay: 30%
- Journal: 20%
- Participation: 20%

EXPLANATION OF METHOD OF EVALUATION

Short Writings

Over the course of the semester, you'll be asked to do three short writing assignments either before or after class on the readings for particular classes. I will collect these and give you feedback on your work; you'll need to incorporate feedback in the rest of the course. This is part of the four credit hours for this course.

I suspect that most of you have never written a philosophy essay before. (If you have, take a different philosophy course!) These assignments will be organized as a form of *scaffolded writing*; we will break writing a philosophy essay down into parts and work on each one before putting the skills we've learned together at the end of the course when you write your...

Essay

I want us to do philosophy in this course. Doing philosophy well requires a lot of different competencies. One of them is presenting arguments clearly, concisely, and with care. Another competency necessary for doing philosophy well is putting views in conversation with one another. The essay will focus primarily on these two skills; you'll be asked to write about two different views we've discussed and come down on one side or the other. I'll tell you more about the essay in due time. In a sense, the whole semester's work will build toward this assignment.

Journal

The journaling exercises serve three goals. First, it affords students the opportunity to articulate their ideas more clearly and with more care than they might be able to do so in the classroom. Second, it ensures that students come to class with a deeper understanding of the material than they might otherwise have. Third, it forces students to think about the role that the ideas we'll study play in their own lives. There aren't really right or wrong answers here, so I won't be looking for anything like that when I read your entries. Instead, I'm looking for evidence that you're engaging with and thinking deeply about the big ideas in the class. I'll collect these at a few different points in the semester. I'll likely write a few words in response in an attempt to help you thinking more about what you're saying.

Participation

I want all of us to do philosophy together. This requires that we all come to class prepared and ready to discuss the readings. To be prepared in this way, you will need to have done the assignment for the day *before* showing up to class. This is a small class, and there's not much space to hide; if you're not doing the readings, I and your peers will notice.

There are a lot of different ways to participate in this class. Participation in this format includes, but isn't limited to:

- Asking a clarifying question
- Correcting my mistakes
- Assisting a classmate in class
- Answering a question
- Doing your best to work through a problem
- Attending class and being engaged in the discussion and work
- Seeing me in office hours
- Posting on Notebowl

SCHEDULE

	Class Meeting	Topic	Required Assignment Read the assigned reading and write the assigned writing <i>by the time the class meets.</i>	
Week 0	8/29	Introducing ourselves, the topic, and expectations	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Syllabus	Journal: Why are you taking this course? What are some goals you have for this course? How will you achieve those goals?
	Why bother with philosophy?			
Week 1	9/3	Human nature and the good life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Aristotle, excerpts from <i>Metaphysics A</i>Russell, “The Value of Philosophy”	Journal: In your own words, what are some of the things that Russell finds of value in philosophy? Are those things valuable to you? Explain.
	9/5			
What can we know, and what should we believe?				
Week 2	9/10	Skepticism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Descartes, selections from <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i>	Journal: What is Descartes doing here? What value, if any, do you think there is in doing what Descartes is doing?
	9/12	High standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">W.K. Clifford, “The Ethics	Journal: Clifford has very high

			of Belief”	standards for what we ought to believe. How do you think following them would affect your life?
What are we?				
Week 3	9/17	Immaterial thinking stuff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">René Descartes, selections from <i>Discourse on Method</i> and <i>Meditations</i>	Journal: What do you think you are?
	9/19			
Week 4	9/24	Animals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Olson, “An Argument for Animalism”	Journal: Suppose Olson is right and that you’re an animal. Do you think this means you should change the way you live? Explain.
	9/26	Nothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Buddha, <i>Samyutta Nikāya</i> III.66–8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Journals due. Turn in at end of class.Short Writing # 1 due
Is there a god?				
Week 5	10/1	The ontological argument	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Anselm, selections from <i>Proslogion</i>	Journal: Does it matter whether god exists? Why or why not?
	10/3			
Week 6	10/8	Evil	<ul style="list-style-type: none">David Lewis, “Divine Evil”	Journal: Do you think it’s fair for Lewis to compare believers of what he calls <i>the traditional picture</i> to Nazis? Why or why not?
	10/10			
Are we free? Responsible?				
Week 7	10/15	Not responsible	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Strawson, “The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Journals due. Turn in at end of class.

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short Writing # 2 due
	10/17	No Class—Autumn Break		

Week 8	10/22		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Strawson, “The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility”	Journal: If Strawson is right, should we live our lives any differently? Why or why not? If so, how?
	10/24	Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility”	Journal: Do you think it matters whether we’re free? Why or why not?
Week 9	10/29			
	10/31			<ul style="list-style-type: none">Journals due. Turn in at end of class.Short writing # 3 due
How should we act?				
Week 10	11/5	The individual and society	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Mo-tzu, <i>selections</i>	
	11/7			Journal: Has an argument for some moral claim ever changed how you act? Will you change in response to about Mo-tzu’s and Singer’s arguments? Why or why not?
Week 11	11/12	Abortion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”	Journal: Explain how Thomson uses the violinist case to argue for the permissibility of abortion.
	11/14			
The Meaning of Life				

Week 12	11/19		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friedrich Nietzsche, § 341 of <i>The Gay Science</i> 	Journal: What lesson do you think Nietzsche is trying to impart to us? What's the big deal?
	11/21		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wolf, "Meaning in Life and Why it Matters" 	
	11/22	Essay Due @ 11:59PM		
Week 13	11/26	No Class—Thanksgiving Break		
	11/28			
Week 14	12/3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nagel, selections from "The Absurd" 	
	12/5		Flexibility	
Week 15	12/10		Flexibility	Journal: What will you take from this class?
	12/12		Flexibility/Final thoughts	Journals due. Turn in at end of class.

ACADEMIC CREDIT POLICY

This course adheres to Denison's academic credit policy. Although there are only three hours of direct contact time per week, there are indirect forms of instruction. You'll need to meet outside of class with one another and with me to plan group presentations. In addition, there will be extensive written feedback on your work that I expect you to review and implement.—That's how you learn this stuff! Finally, you are required to attend Dr. Lackey's colloquium on October 5th.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

Proposed and developed by Denison students, passed unanimously by DCGA and Denison's faculty, the Code of Academic Integrity requires that instructors notify the Associate Provost of cases of academic dishonesty. Cases are typically heard by the Academic Integrity Board which determines whether a violation has occurred, and, if so, its severity and the sanctions. In some circumstances the case may be handled through an Administrative Resolution Procedure. Further, the code makes students responsible for promoting a culture of integrity on campus and acting in instances in which integrity is violated.

Academic honesty, the cornerstone of teaching and learning, lays the foundation for lifelong integrity. Academic dishonesty is intellectual theft. It includes, but is not limited to, providing or receiving assistance in a manner not authorized by the instructor in the creation of work to be submitted for evaluation. This standard applies to all work ranging from daily homework assignments to major exams. Students must clearly cite any sources consulted—not only for quoted phrases but also for ideas and information that are not common knowledge. Neither ignorance nor

carelessness is an acceptable defense in cases of plagiarism. It is the student's responsibility to follow the appropriate format for citations. Students should ask their instructors for assistance in determining what sorts of materials and assistance are appropriate for assignments and for guidance in citing such materials clearly. *For further information about the Code of Academic Integrity, see <http://denison.edu/academics/curriculum/integrity>.*

ELECTRONICS POLICY

To ensure a learning environment with minimal distractions, no electronic devices (e.g., laptops and smartphones) are to be used in class except in the accommodation of documented learning issues or when otherwise indicated (e.g., during course evaluations or to access an online resource at my direction).

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Class attendance and participation are required. Absences will be recorded. Students with more than three unexcused absences will receive no marks for participation in the course. Constructive participation will positively impact your grade. For those who are disinclined to speak in class, discussion during office hours constitutes constructive participation. Participation grades will be determined by the extent to which your constructive participation contributes to the aims and environment of the course. Any reading quizzes count toward participation.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Students with a documented disability who wish to request reasonable academic accommodations based on the impact of a disability should complete a Request for Academic Accommodations/Faculty Notification form with the Academic Resource Center (ARC) located in 020 Higley Hall and contact me privately as soon as possible to discuss specific needs and arrangements. I rely on the Academic Resource Center (ARC) to verify the need for reasonable accommodations based on the documentation on file in that office. Reasonable accommodations cannot be applied retroactively and therefore ideally should be enacted early in the semester as they are not automatically carried forward from a previous term and must be requested every semester.

APPROPRIATE USE OF COURSE MATERIALS

As an institution which strives to inspire and educate our students to become discerning moral agents and active citizens of a democratic society, we are committed to complying with all laws regarding copyright throughout the University. This syllabus and all course materials used in this course may be copyrighted and accordingly will be governed by the provisions of the U.S. copyright law (for an overview see <http://copyright.gov/circs/circ01.pdf> and for fair use guidelines see <http://copyright.gov/fair-use/more-info.html>). In particular, posting any course materials on commercial sites or creating a bank of materials for distribution to other students may be considered

a violation of the University's Code of Academic Integrity as well as a breach of copyright law. If you have any questions about these guidelines, please speak with your instructor.

REPORTING SEXUAL ASSAULT

Essays, journals, and other coursework submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University's student record policies. However, students should be aware that University employees are required by University policy and Title IX guidance to report allegations of discrimination based on sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation, including sexual misconduct, sexual assault and suspected abuse/neglect of a minor, occurring on campus and / or involving current students at Denison University when they become aware of possible incidents in the course of their employment, including via coursework or advising conversations. There are others on campus to whom you may speak in confidence, including counselors at the Whisler Center for Student Wellness, and clergy. More information on Title IX and University policy guidance on gender identity / expression bias and sexual misconduct / assault, including support resources, how to report, and prevention and education efforts, can be found at denison.edu/titleix; students may also contact Steve Gauger, Campus Title IX Coordinator, in Doane Administration 001, by email at gaugers@denison.edu, or by phone at 740-587-8660.

L2 OR MULTILINGUAL SUPPORT

In addition to the academic support services available to all Denison students, students who use English in addition to other languages can meet with Denison's Coordinator of Multilingual Learning, Kalynda Thayer. If English is not your first or only language, please consider utilizing this resource, which is available to ALL Denison students. Ms. Thayer offers a variety of support for L2 students, including consulting with you about your written language (grammar, syntax, word-choices), strategies to manage your reading assignments, assistance with class conversation and presentations, and to help devising ways to develop and effectively use all your skills in English. You can email her at thayerk@denison.edu to schedule an appointment.

