

**PHIL 203: PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY**  
Spring 2020

*Class schedule:* MWF 9:30-10:20  
*Class Instructor:* Katherine Valde  
*Office:* DB 206

*Class Location:* DB 101  
*E-mail:* [REDACTED]  
*Office Hours:* W 11:30am-1:30pm

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*Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom. Thus, while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to what things are, it greatly increases our knowledge as to what they may be; it removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never traveled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect.*

-Bertrand Russell

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**Course Description:**

This semester, we will confront some of great problems in the history of philosophy. We will address such questions as: Do we know anything? And if yes, How? Is there free will? What makes us morally responsible for our choices? Might animals be capable of human-like consciousness? Is there any meaning to life? Through engaging in these debates, we will hope to understand something about the nature of philosophy, including why and how we should go about doing it.

**Course Objectives:**

This course is deigned to both to provide you with an introduction to some philosophical questions and to inspire your curiosity for such questions. You will learn to interpret, critique, and formulate arguments using reason. You will learn to recognize and engage with philosophical thought in everyday life. Along the way, this course will also help to develop your own sense of identity and perspective and inspire an excitement for creative thinking.

**Required Text:**

*What Does It All Mean?: A Very Short Introduction to Philosophy* by Thomas Nagel (1987)  
All other readings will be provided on Moodle.

**Class Expectations:**

Do the readings. *Think* about the readings. Our class will not be engaging for you if you do not come prepared. Treat each other and the instructor with respect. Be prepared to be challenged. Some of the readings will be difficult, and you may have more questions than clarity. That's okay!

**Grading:**

Moodle posts – 25%  
Students will be expected to post summary responses to class readings ten times throughout the semester. These posts are expected to be 250-500 words. Students will also be expected to respond to and interact with the blogs of their classmates at least ten times. Responses are expected to be at least one robust paragraph.

Short papers – 30% - (Short Paper 1 – 15% Short Paper 2 – 15%)

Short papers will be approximately 750 words that offer some critical engagement with one of the topics from the first two units, respectively. Further guidelines for the construction of good academic papers will be provided in class.

Participation – 25%

Participation will be assessed on student’s active engagement with the material. The most important portion for this is behavior and involvement during class meetings. Engagement beyond what is required with fellow classmates or the professor online can also count towards class participation.

Take-Home Exam– 20%

The comprehensive take home final will consist of short answer and long answer questions designed to promote students understanding and engagement with the ideas of this course.

## Course Schedule:

### UNIT 1: TRUTH AND TRUST

#### Week 1

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| M 2/3 | Welcome to Philosophy 201  |
| W 2/5 | <i>Chapter 2: How Do We Know Anything?</i> by Thomas Nagel   |
| F 2/7 | Video: “Anti-Vaxxers, Conspiracy Theories, and Epistemic Responsibility” by PBS Crash Course Philosophy found <a href="#">here</a> |

#### Week 2

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| M 2/10 | Podcast: “Fake News: An Origin Story” by NPR Hidden Brain found <a href="#">here</a> |
| W 2/12 | <i>Fake News and the Internet Shell Game</i> by Michael P. Lynch                     |
| F 2/14 | <i>Escape the Echo Chamber</i> by C. Thi Nguyen                                      |

#### Week 3

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| M 2/17 | <i>Epistemic Injustice</i> by Miranda Fricker   |
| W 2/19 | Podcast: “Miranda Fricker on Epistemic Injustice” by Philosophy Bites found <a href="#">here</a>                        |
| F 2/21 | Video: “How the current Internet culture undermines expertise” by Andrew Keen at TEDxUtrecht found <a href="#">here</a> |

#### Week 4

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| M 2/24 | <i>AI’s White Guy Problem</i> by Kate Crawford   |
| W 2/26 | Podcast: “How Humans Bias AI with Kris Hammond” by The AI podcast found <a href="#">here</a> |
| F 2/28 | <b>CLASS CANCELLED – Paper 1 due by noon on Moodle</b>                                       |

### UNIT 2: IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION

#### Week 5

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|-------|--|
| M 3/2 | Video: “Batman & Identity” by PBS Crash Course Philosophy found <a href="#">here</a> |
| W 3/4 | Video: “Personal Identity” by PBS Crash Course Philosophy found <a href="#">here</a> |
| F 3/6 | OPTIONAL: <i>Persons as Biological Processes</i> by Anne Sophie Meincke              |

**Week 6**

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| M 3/9  | <i>Dueling Dualisms</i> by Anne Fausto-Sterling |
| W 3/11 | <i>Dueling Dualisms</i> by Anne Fausto-Sterling |
| F 3/13 | <i>Why Be Non-Binary?</i> By Robin Dembroff     |

**Week 7**

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| M 3/16 | <i>Chapter 5: The Meaning of Words</i> by Thomas Nagel                                |
| W 3/18 | <i>Who Counts as a Woman?</i> by Carol Hay  |
| F 3/20 | Video: "How words can harm" by PBS Crash Course Philosophy found <a href="#">here</a> |

**Week 8**

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| M 3/23 | Podcast: "In the No Part 1" by Radiolab found <a href="#">here</a> |
| W 3/25 | Podcast: "In the No Part 2" by Radiolab found <a href="#">here</a> |
| F 3/27 | In class discussion – <b>Paper 2 due by midnight on Moodle</b>     |

**SPRING BREAK (NO CLASS 3/30-4/3)****UNIT 3: THE GOOD LIFE****Week 9**

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|--------|---|
| M 4/6  | <b>CLASS CANCELLED</b>                            |
| W 4/8  | Nagel, Chapter 10: The Meaning of Life            |
| F 4/10 | Video: <a href="#">Aristotle's Ergon Argument</a> |

**Week 10**

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| M 4/13 | Video: "Existentialism" by PBS Crash Course Philosophy found <a href="#">here</a> |
| W 4/15 | Video: "Metaethics" by PBS Crash Course Philosophy found <a href="#">here</a>     |
| F 4/17 | <i>The Maze of Moral Relativism</i> by Paul Boghossian                            |

**Week 11**

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| M 4/20 | Video: "Divine Command Theory" by PBS Crash Course Philosophy found <a href="#">here</a> |
| W 4/22 | <i>Doing Good Better</i> by William MacAskill  |
| F 4/24 | <i>Stop the Robot Apocalypse</i> by Amia Srinivasan                                      |

**Week 12**

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| M 4/27 | Video: "Non-Human Animals" by PBS Crash Course Philosophy found <a href="#">here</a> |
| W 4/29 | Video: "Debating Same Sex Marriage" by Michael Sandel found <a href="#">here</a>     |
| F 5/1  | Video: "Debating Same Sex Marriage" by Michael Sandel found <a href="#">here</a>     |

**Week 13**

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|-------|--|
| M 5/4 | <i>The Value of Philosophy</i> by Bertrand Russell |
| W 5/6 | Exam Review  |
| F 5/8 | Exam Review  |

**Final Exam**

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| W 5/13 | <b>TAKE-HOME DUE BY 5pm</b> |
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