

What will you learn in this class?

Do you think some things are just wrong? If so, what makes them wrong? Is wrongness just a feeling you have, or is there something about reality that makes some things right and other wrong? This is the sort of class where we ask questions like these—questions that challenge our most fundamental assumptions about the nature of reality. Does God exist? What is gender? Am I the same person I was 10 years ago? Do I have any responsibility for animal wellbeing? Is artificial intelligence possible?

The discipline concerned with answering these sorts of questions is philosophy, and this class will not only introduce you to these questions, but will also show you how philosophers go about answering them—and how you can use philosophy's tools to answer them for yourself.

What will you accomplish by taking this class?

Besides satisfying one humanity's most fundamental urges (wonder), you will work toward several goals:

1. You will understand what philosophy is.
2. You will learn to read technical texts carefully.
3. You will begin to ask yourself philosophical questions and gain an appreciation for that questioning in your life.
4. You will learn how to answer those questions by analyzing arguments.

How will you accomplish these lofty goals?

Reading Guides: You will accompany your study of each philosophical text with a short 'reading guide.' These will help you understand what philosophy is, they will help you learn to read philosophy, and, if you make use of them, they will help you learn to analyze the philosophy that you read.

Quizzes: At the beginning of every class, you will take a short reading comprehension quiz. The quiz will be administered through Blackboard, and it will only be open for 5 minutes. If you are late, you will simply miss the quiz, but I will drop the 2 lowest quiz scores to account for unanticipated circumstances. Quizzes are 'closed-book' (no notes, internet, friends, telekinesis, etc.).

***Note about Quizzes:** The purpose of these quizzes is not to measure whether you *attended* class or to measure whether or not you *tried*. Of course, you will attend class and try hard, but you will be assessed on whether or not you have come to class *prepared* to be an active part of the class.

Analysis Assignments: You will write several short analyses of texts or problems. These will help you learn how to answer philosophical problems philosophically.

Reflection Assignments: You will write several short papers helping you reflect on the philosophical problems we discuss in class. These will help you see the relevance of these problems to your own life.

***Late Work:** I will accept late work, but I will take off 5% for every day it is turned in late. That adds up fast, so plan now to submit them on time.

Exams: You will take an in-class midterm exam and a final exam at the time appointed by the university (Monday, December 13, 7-10 p.m.). Like the quizzes, these will be 'closed-book.'

Engagement: You will be fully-engaged in class, and you will be graded on your engagement with a self-evaluation which you will submit both at midterm and at the end of class. I will then evaluate your evaluation and adjust the score accordingly.

So, how will I grade you?

As fairly and responsibly as possible. Because I am committed to this, I will use several forms of assessment and will grade written work anonymously. So, I ask that you omit any identifying information on your written submissions, as I will be using Blackboard's 'grade anonymously' tool to ensure my impartiality.

Grading scale

Grades	Percent
A	94%
A-	90%
B+	87%
B	84%
B-	80%
C+	77%
C	74%
C-	70%
D+	67%
D	64%
D-	60%

Grading breakdown

Category	Weight
Engagement	20%
Quizzes	15%
Analysis Assignments	25%
Reflection Assignments	10%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	15%

How can you get ahold of me?

Teaching is my life's work, and I will be as available to help you as possible. Please communicate with me over email at sdriscol@richmond.edu, though please note that I am not Google, so I am unplugged sometimes. Please do not send messages through Blackboard (or Twitter or carrier pigeon or whatever other platform you might have in mind); the best way to contact me is email.

I will also communicate to you through email, so please check your email and assure that your Blackboard account is linked to your correct email address.

I will also hold regular office hours. Details will be announced and are subject to change given the ever-shifting COVID landscape. But regardless of what happens with the virus, I will hold some form of office hours.

What are we going to read?

We are going to read texts that address some of the most interesting and mind-blowing questions humans have ever asked themselves. I will provide free versions of every text except one: please purchase Descartes' *Discourse on Method & Meditations on First Philosophy* (the Hackett version, ISBN: 9780872204201). All other course materials will be administered through Blackboard, so take some time to learn how to use Blackboard if you are unfamiliar with it.

A note on texts: This class is based on reading *primary texts*. Part of the goal for this class is to help you read the very words written by great thinkers like Plato, Aquinas, and Descartes. This adds a layer of difficulty, as these thinkers sometimes wrote in very technical language, sometimes for audiences who lived centuries ago, and sometimes just not very well. What they wrote will be different from the sorts of things you normally read (newspapers, emails, novels, or even textbooks). This will be difficult, but it will also be immensely rewarding if you put in the time. Of course, I have designed several things to help you in this pursuit, so you needn't come already able to read philosophical texts—but do be prepared to develop this new skill.

Here is an overview of the class:

Unit 1: What is philosophy and how is it done? (August 23 - September 8). We all have assumptions. But how do we know what our assumptions are, and how do we decide whose assumptions or opinions are better or right? Philosophy is the discipline that answers these questions—and it does so in a particular way: through reasoning, or logical argumentation. In this unit, we will talk about our assumptions and give you a taste for how philosophy approaches those assumptions critically.

Unit 2: Theoretical philosophy (September 13 - October 13). Most of us have a deep sense of awe at the world we live in. This is why we are fascinated, curious, and inquisitive. What is the world really made up of? There are lots of opinions out there—can I know what is real? Is there a god? Can I build a computer that thinks like my own brain does? Who am I? These and many other questions are asked in the 'theoretical' area of philosophy,' which

includes such distinguished-sounding sub-disciplines as metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of religion. In this unit, we will learn about a few of the most prominent questions in these fields.

--Midterm Exam (October 18)--

Unit 3: Philosophy of art (October 20 - October 27). Music, painting, and poetry are crucial to what it means to be human—and you may have asked yourself why. What is it about art that I enjoy? What makes art different from mere images or noises? How can I know if something is art or not? In this unit, we will focus on the question of whether or not there are any criteria for what constitutes art. We will do so by thinking about things like sham art and forgeries of art.

Unit 4: Practical philosophy (November 1 - December 1). How should I live my life? Are there right and wrong ways to do so? What makes an action the *wrong* thing to do, anyway? What about governments—can they act rightly and wrongly? Do they have any legitimacy? These questions are asked by ethics and social-political philosophy. The number of such questions we could ask in this class are immense, but I have selected some provocative and important ethical and social questions that most of you will have wrestled with already.

You can find what we will be reading and when on Blackboard under the “schedule” tab. In fact, I will put pretty much everything you need to know for class in that tab.

What other rules do you have to worry about?

Do not use electronic devices in class. Research has now convincingly demonstrated that these are actively detrimental to your learning and the learning of those around you. However, please contact me immediately if you have accessibility concerns that would require an exception to this rule.

Masks are required until further notice. This is a guideline announced by the university. If the guideline is rescinded at some point in the semester, we will reevaluate the policy.

Do not lie, cheat, plagiarize, or do anything of the sort. [Please familiarize yourself with the university's rules and regulations](#). If you copy and paste, quote, refer to, or even use a source while writing your papers, just cite it. Doing so will be seen as a strength, not a weakness.

Disability Support Services: If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please visit the University of Richmond Disability Services website to begin the accommodations process as soon as possible. If you already have a University of Richmond Disability Accommodation Notice (DAN), please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, so that I am aware of your accommodations. No student will receive accommodations of any kind without a DAN.