

## **Introduction to Philosophy**

Instructor: Joe Nelson ([joseph.nelson@duke.edu](mailto:joseph.nelson@duke.edu))

### Course Objectives

This course has two main aims. The first is to introduce you to interesting recent philosophical writing on topics such as morality, free will, death, knowledge, the mind, and the fundamental nature of science. The second is to use that work to improve your philosophical skills: your ability to recognize, reconstruct, develop, and criticize arguments.

- **Recognize:** Identify the central argument of a text, identifying the key premises and the final conclusion.
- **Reconstruct:** Restate arguments in a way that makes their content and structure clear.
- **Develop:** Define technical terms with precision and devise examples to illustrate concepts and principles.
- **Criticize:** Suggest where an argument may be weak, in need of clarification, or just plain wrong, and explain.

These skills go beyond philosophy: working on them will help you to clarify and express your own thoughts, make you a better at rationally convincing others, and protect you from bad arguments.

### What to Expect in Class

Each week will consist of two phases: exegesis and symposium.

In the exegesis phase, we will work together in class to extract the central argument from the day's reading, break it down premise-by-premise, get a handle on its key terms, and discuss its philosophical background. We will only be reading one journal article, book chapter, or excerpt per week (with one exception; see the schedule of readings below), so we will be able to dig deep.

In the symposium phase, each student will submit a one-page criticism, question, or comment on the reading for the week. I will anonymize these responses, compile them, and make them available to the whole class. Before the next meeting, each student will vote (confidentially) on which response would most like to discuss. The top vote-getter each week will receive a bit of extra course credit—as long as they show up to class that day!

### Assignments and Grading

Outside of symposium participation, the only assignments in this class are five short papers. So your course grade will break down like this:

- Symposium participation (response and voting): 10%
- Papers 1 and 2 (two pages): 10% each
- Papers 3 and 4 (three pages): 20% each
- Paper 5 (up to five pages): 30%

Each paper will require you to recognize, reconstruct, develop, and criticize an argument from one of the assigned readings, and offer critical comment of your own devising. You will have the option of resubmitting your first two papers, with revisions, for a higher grade.

## Course Readings

<u>Week</u>	<u>Area(s)</u>	<u>Reading</u>
1	N/A	None; course overview and the three critical strategies for responding to arguments.
2	Ethics	Peter Singer "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (1972)
3	Ethics	Judith Jarvis Thomson "The Trolley Problem" (1975)
4	Ethics	Jeff McMahan "Death and the Value of Life" (1988)
5	Ethics/Metaphysics	Derk Pereboom "Why We Have No Free Will and Can Live Without It" (2007)
6	Philosophy of Mind	John Searle "Minds, Brains, and Programs" (1980)
7	Philosophy of Mind	Brie Gertler "In Defense of Mind-Body Dualism" (2007)
8	Philosophy of Mind	Patricia Churchland "The Hornswoggle Problem" (1996)
9	Epistemology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Edmund Gettier "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" (1963)</li><li>• Michael Clark "Knowledge and Grounds: A Comment on Mr. Gettier's Paper" (1963)</li><li>• J.T. Saunders and Narayan Champawat "Mr. Clark's Definition of 'Knowledge'" (1964)</li><li>• Linda Zagzebski "The Inescapability of Gettier Problems" (1994)</li></ul>
10	Epistemology	Michael Huemer "Direct Realism and the Brain-in-a-Vat Argument" (2000)
11	Epistemology	Susan Haack "Foundationalism Versus Coherentism: A Dichotomy Disclaimed" (1996)
12	Philosophy of Science	Karl Popper "Conjectures and Refutations" (1963)
13	Philosophy of Science	Larry Laudan "A Confutation of Convergent Realism" (1981)
14	Philosophy of Science/Ethics	Philip Kitcher "Constraints on Free Inquiry" (2001)
15	N/A	Symposium on final paper topics