

Phil 101:
Introduction to Philosophy: Knowledge, Freedom and the Self
Lecture, Fall 2023



When/Where: Mondays and Wednesdays, 6:30-7:45pm, Location TBD

Instructor: Prof. Carmen De Schryver

Email: carmen.deschryver@trincoll.edu

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2:00-3:00pm on Zoom (<https://trincoll.zoom.us/j/93350896804>)

Wednesdays, 5:30-6:30pm in McCook 326

Course Description

This course provides an overview of philosophical responses to fundamental questions in the history of philosophy with a thematic focus on knowledge, freedom and the self. Through a series of close readings, we will explore a number of questions, including: What does it mean to know? Why should we value knowledge? In what ways do knowledge and identity intersect? Is knowledge culturally relative? Is human action free or is it causally determined? If human action is determined, how can we make sense of responsibility? If we are, to the contrary, free, what is the scope of our freedom? Are we free to make our own meaning? What is the thing we call a “self”? How do we account for the continuity of personal identity over time? In what ways are we constituted by our environments and those around us? Our engagement with these questions will draw on a range of philosophical traditions. In addition to building up skills in philosophical reading, analysis and argumentation, students will gain a familiarity with figures in Western, African and Latin American philosophy.

Learning Outcomes

- Understand and discuss the positions of a number of key philosophers on the topics of knowledge, freedom and the self
- Cultivate skills in critically reading and evaluating technical philosophical material and distilling the most salient information from complex texts
- Argue for your own view in central philosophical debates, both orally and in writing
- Learn to appreciate the breadth of perspectives on philosophical questions and interact respectfully with views which differ from your own

Course Elements

Grading for this course is based on:

- 10% Participation
- 10% Reading and Question Responses
- 10% In-class assignments
- 20% Reflection Papers (six one-page reflection papers at 3.33% each)
- 30% In-class reading quizzes (three quizzes at 10% each)
- 20% Philosophy Papers (two papers at 10% each)

- Participation (10%):
 - (i) Two short one-on-one meetings with me at some point in the beginning and the middle of the semester. These are low-stakes encounters – you will not be assessed on what you say. You just need to show up! Sign up sheets will be posted on the Moodle page.
 - Initial meeting to discuss your interests in and familiarity with the course content.
 - Mid-semester check-in to discuss your experience and progress in the course to date.
 - (ii) Punctual weekly attendance.
 - If you can't make it to class, please message me in advance (if possible) to determine some way to make this up.
 - If you miss more than three classes without providing an explanation, your participation grade will drop a letter grade.
 - If you regularly show up to class 5 or more minutes late without an explanation, your participation grade will drop half a letter grade.
 - Please don't come to class if you have or suspect you might have COVID – we will determine some alternative way for you to participate.
 - (iii) In-class engagement and participation.
 - You should be prepared to positively contribute to our class meetings. A positive contribution can take on a variety of forms: asking a clarificatory question, raising a discussion point, weighing in on an interpretation, offering an opinion, pointing us back to the reading, etc. At minimum, it requires that you be a respectful and engaged listener not only to what I say but to what your colleagues have to say.
 - Speaking up in larger group settings will be more comfortable for some than for others. I encourage you to meet with me during office hours if speaking up in larger group settings is uncomfortable for you and if you worry that I may not perceive your in-class engagement as sufficiently participatory.
 - Peer engagement. How you engage with your peers is a central component of your assessment in the course. You will be expected to contribute to a healthy and respectful dialogical space. If you tend to be more talkative, an important component of your helping create a lively discussion will be making space for others to speak.
- Reading and Question Responses (10%):
 - In order to get the most out of the course, **it is necessary that you read all of the required texts closely in advance of the class meetings.** This means reading the text twice and taking detailed notes. The texts in this course vary in length and difficulty. Don't be discouraged if you find the readings challenging or even confusing – philosophy is hard! I won't expect you to understand everything that you read, especially on the first try. I will expect you to make a good-faith effort to interpret the text on your own, and to participate in the class discussion on this

basis. The lecture and the class discussion are designed to (i) collaboratively make sense of the text and (ii) equip you with the skills that you need to fully comprehend and critically interrogate the course material, and ultimately to engage difficult philosophical texts on your own. Don't hesitate to raise clarificatory questions and be upfront about elements of the reading you found challenging; if you are confused about something, it is likely your peers will be as well, and your questions will be welcomed!

- For each class session that involves a required reading, **you should submit a response to the question posted to the Moodle discussion board before class.** The questions are formulated so as to assist your reading by guiding you to the relevant themes; the overall intent is to encourage you to fully digest the text so as to get the most out of our time together. Late responses will not be accepted (barring exceptional circumstances).
 - You have two freebies, *i.e.* you may miss two discussion posts without incurring any penalty. After that, your reading/question response grade will drop by a quarter of a letter grade for every post missed.
- In-Class Assignments (10% total):
 - Our class sessions will involve some combination of lecture, group work, general discussion and completion of various writing assignments. When we are using a handout or working on, *e.g.* philosophical reconstruction, you should submit your work to me at the end of the class. In-class assignments are a time for philosophical exploration: grades for this component of the course will therefore not be based on accuracy but on whether or not you are attempting to sincerely respond to the questions to the best of your ability. That is, as with the discussion posts, I will not expect you to always have a full understanding of what a philosopher is saying; I will, however, expect you to be putting in the effort.
- Six Reflection Papers (20% total):
 - Of the eleven topics covered in this class, you should plan to submit a short (two paragraph) reflection paper on **six** of these topics.
 - Reflection papers should be printed out and handed to me in class on the day we begin a new topic (*e.g.* if you choose to write on topic 2, “the point of education”, you should submit your reflection paper to me on the day we begin discussing topic 3, September 18th).
 - This means that, in a sense, you determine your own deadlines for reflection papers. This being said, I heavily recommend you spread these out over the course of the semester – don't put yourself in a situation where you have to submit five reflection papers in a row right at the end of the semester.
 - N.B. The reflection paper for topic 1 (“what is philosophy”) is required for everybody.
 - Reflection papers are relatively free form: they can consist in a detailed reconstruction of the views expressed in that week's readings, a reflection on something you found interesting or surprising in the reading or lecture, an elaboration of a point raised during our in-class discussion, a comparison between that week's readings and some of the material encountered previously in the course, a personal reflection on the readings and class discussion, a development of your own position vis-à-vis the arguments we've considered.... and so on. **The key requirement is that you engage substantively with the weekly topic and draw from the readings (including some quotation).**
- Reading Quizzes (10% each):
 - Each unit will conclude with an in-class comprehension quiz, consisting of multiple choice and some open-ended questions.

- Quizzes will be based on the reading and the content from the lectures. These are not intended to trip you up: if you have done the reading and attended the lecture, you will be in a position to answer all of the questions.
 - Two Papers (10% each)
 - Papers should be 2-3 pages, double spaced.
 - Prompts will be circulated on Moodle at least one week prior to the deadline. We will also devote class time to a philosophy paper writing workshop.
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Note on Office Hours

Office hours are a time for us to meet privately to discuss any aspect of your course experience. I encourage you to come to office hours regularly – this is a time that I am just sitting in my office waiting to chat with you (and I often have snacks). You can come to my office hours with any questions, ideas, or worries that were raised for you during the lectures or discussions; any difficulties that you are experiencing with the material or your own learning process; or any additional help and guidance you might need for assignments... or anything else! Anything pertaining to the course and your experience of it is on the table. If my office hours conflict with your course schedule, please do not hesitate to message me in order to set up an alternative meeting time.

Course Materials

All of the readings will be made available in PDF and posted to the relevant week on the Moodle page. If you cannot access the reading for some reason, please email me.

Tentative Course Schedule

N.B. The following is a provisional course schedule for the semester. Any changes to the schedule will be announced in class. The syllabus posted at the top of the Moodle page will always be the latest version, so when in doubt please refer to that document.

1. Introduction: What is Philosophy?

Wednesday, September 6: Welcome and Discussion of the Syllabus

- Kwasi Wiredu, “What is Philosophy” (after-class reading)

Unit 1: Knowledge

2. The Point of Education: Overcoming Ignorance, Valuing Knowledge

*Monday, September 11: *Bring first reflection paper to class**

- Plato, “Allegory of the Cave”, Book VII *Republic*, pp. 1132-1136

Wednesday, September 13:

- James Baldwin, “A Talk to Teachers”, in *The Price of the Ticket*, pp. 330-337

3. Free Discussion and its Limits: Determining Community Norms around Discussion

Monday, September 18:

- John Stuart Mill, “On the Liberty of Thought and Discussion”, *On Liberty*, excerpts
- Miranda Fricker, “Prejudice in the Credibility Economy”, pp. 30-35; 43-51

Wednesday, September 20: Discussion of Discussion

- No reading, but prepare contribution to community norms document

4. Ways to Knowledge: The Method of Doubt

Monday, September 25: No Class Meeting [Yom Kippur]

- No reading

Wednesday, September 27:

- Zera Yacob, *The Treatise*, Chapter I-IV, pp. 3-6

Monday, October 2:

- Descartes, *The Meditations*, Meditations I&II, pp. 27-34

Wednesday, October 4: Workshop on Philosophical Reconstruction

- Descartes, *The Meditations*, Meditation III, pp. 34-41.

5. The Question of Relativism

Monday, October 9: No Class Meeting [Trinity Days]

- No reading

Wednesday, October 11:

- Richard Rorty, “Solidarity or Objectivity”, pp. 393-408

Monday, October 16:

- Kwasi Wiredu, “Conceptual Decolonization: An Imperative in Contemporary African Philosophy”, pp. 53-64

Conclusion of Unit

Wednesday, October 18: In-Class Quiz

- No Reading

Unit 2: Freedom

6. Freedom and Determinism

Monday, October 23 (Midterm):

- Jacqueline Trimier, “On the Yoruba *Ori*”, pp. 440-441
- Segun Gbadegesin, “Toward a Theory of Destiny”, pp. 312-323

Wednesday, October 25:

- Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 86-88; 91-100

Monday, October 30: continue discussion of Trimier, Gbadegesin and Kant

- No Reading

Wednesday, November 1:

- Harry Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”, pp. 156-166

7. Radical Freedom: Existentialism

Monday, November 6:

- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, pp. TBD

Wednesday, November 8:

- Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, pp. TBD

Conclusion of Unit

Monday, November 13: Concluding discussion

- No Reading

Wednesday, November 15: In-Class Quiz

*****First Paper Due: Friday, November 17th at 11:59pm*****

Unit 3: The Self

8. The Nature of the Self: Substance?

November 20:

- Review Descartes' Meditations II&III, pp. 30-40

November 22: No Class Meeting [Thanksgiving break]

- No Reading

9. The Nature of the Self: Psychological Continuity?

November 27:

- John Locke, "Personal Identity", pp. TBD

10. The Nature of the Self: Multiplicity?

November 29:

- María Lugones, "Playfulness, World-Travelling and Loving Perception", pp. 3-19
- Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, pp. 3-13; pp. 23-45

December 4:

- Mariana Ortega, *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity and the Self*, pp. TBD

Conclusion of Unit

December 6: In-Class Quiz

- No Reading

Unit 4: What is Philosophy Redux

11. Concluding Thoughts: The Rewards of Philosophy (?) (!)

December 11:

- Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò, "The Knowledge Society and its Rewards", pp. 78-88; 90-91; 95-109; 114-117
- Bertrand Russell, "The Value of Philosophy", pp. 18-21

*****Final Paper due: Wednesday December 13th at 11:59pm*****

Course Policies

Community Norms

Each of you will be coming to into the classroom with your unique background, opinions and insights. This diversity of perspective is precisely what makes philosophical discussion exciting; throughout the semester, you are likely to encounter viewpoints, both in the texts and in our discussion, which will strike you as unfamiliar. At times, you may disagree strongly with what someone else has to say on an issue. In order to navigate these differences respectfully and productively, we will discuss, write up and ratify a set of community norms for how we engage with one another as well as with the material we are dealing with. Our aim will be to build a hospitable environment in which everyone feels safe to share and trusts that their contributions be taken up in good faith. This is especially critical given the sensitivity of some of the material we will be discussing, which impacts each of us differently. It is therefore imperative that you be thoughtful in how you engage with one another in this class. The document we come up with is to be open-ended: we will revisit it as need be throughout the semester add or amend our guidelines as needed.

Technology Policy

The general rule for notetaking in this class is that all notes are to be taken on paper. This helps facilitate better listening, comprehension, and class discussion—for the person taking the notes and for everyone else. I understand that taking notes on paper is not a possibility for everyone; exceptions apply to students who have an ADA-approved accommodation and nothing will change for those students as a result of this policy. I also understand that, for many of us, it requires a significant effort to cultivate the habit of notetaking on paper. Experimenting with this older form of classroom technology for this course will contribute in many positive ways to our conversations and to our thinking. If, however, you feel that you need to use a computer to take notes for this course – whether or not you have relevant accommodations – then please get in touch with me so that we can meet and discuss this possibility.

Note on Religious Holidays

Trinity College does not observe all religious holidays. If you cannot attend a session because of a religious holiday, please let me know at least a day in advance and we can work out some alternate form of engagement for that week.

Accessibility and Accommodations

Trinity College is committed to creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Like many things, the need for disability accommodations and the process for arranging them may be altered by the COVID-19 changes we are experiencing and the safety protocols currently in place. Students who may need some accommodation in order to fully participate in this class are asked to contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center, as soon as possible, to explore what arrangements need to be made to assure access. Student Accessibility Resources can be reached by emailing SARC@trincoll.edu. If you already have academic accommodations, please reach out to me by the end of week two of classes to let me know. For those students with accommodations approved after the start of the semester, a minimum of 10 days' notice is required.

Policy on Late Submissions

If you think you won't be able to complete the assignment by the deadline, please contact me **24 hours** before the deadline to discuss your situation and to arrange an alternate schedule for completion. If you simply

submit an assignment late without an explanation this will result in a late penalty. Depending on the circumstances, late submissions may not receive detailed commentary.

Academic Integrity

Any written work you submit should be your own. This means that you should not copy/paste, paraphrase or borrow ideas from a text, internet source or generative AI (see below) without proper citation. In other words, you should never present ideas taken from elsewhere as though they are your own. Failure to do so amounts to plagiarism, and the college takes violations of plagiarism very seriously, with possible consequences ranging from censure to expulsion. For further information, you should consult the [Student Handbook's](#) policies and procedures regarding academic integrity and plagiarism. If you have any questions about how to use/cite material appropriately, please do not hesitate to ask – it is better to be sure than to risk a violation. You are welcome to use either parenthetical or footnote citations in this course, in either Chicago or MLA format.

Statement on Generative AI

As noted above, any written work you should submit should be your own. This means that any attempt to pass off AI writing as your own will count as a violation of Trinity College's academic integrity policy. The use of AI writing tools for the purposes of cheating is also unwise for the following reasons:

- As with any other kind of cheating, **the main person you're cheating is yourself**. One of the aims of the course is to encourage you to think for yourself and to develop writing skills organically in order to refine your ability to engage in sophisticated argument. Using generative AI in your writing assignments very simply means that you will not be getting the most out of the course.
- **AI writing is oftentimes insensitive to context, inconsistent and risky to use**. In this class, written work will (i) largely draw on class discussion and (ii) encourage personal reflection. AI technology cannot consistently perform these tasks for you, and often generates generic responses that lack the ability to meaningfully integrate contextual detail. Having tested the writing prompts I've developed this semester with some of the best AI writing tools out there, I know that none of them can consistently produce writing that meets the standard required for this course. Finally, many AI generators cannot properly cite/synthesize sources (in fact, it often fabricates them, which is a major academic integrity violation if caught).
- There are **prudential reasons** to refrain from using generative AI tools in your written assignments: enough violations end with a return to blue-book exams, which no one likes.
- Finally, as a human being and your philosophical interlocutor, it is depressing to read what a robot thinks about the most profound questions human beings have been asking themselves through millennia. **I want to help you discover and refine your own perspective on these issues**, and I want you to walk away from this class with a deepened understanding not only of philosophy but of yourself. Using AI in your papers helps us achieve neither goal, and it ruins my weekend.

IP

Lectures and course materials (including lecture slides, presentations, handouts, quizzes, assignment prompts, paper writing guides etc.) should be considered the intellectual property of the instructor and may be protected by copyright. You are fully encouraged to take notes and utilize course materials for your own educational purpose. You should not, however, redistribute this content or post it online without the express written permission of the instructor. This includes but is not limited to sharing course materials to online social study sites like CourseHero and other services.

Policy on Recording of Class Lectures

In keeping with Trinity College's Academic Policy on Recording of Class Lectures, you may not record any class session without express written permission from the instructor. Student requests must include a brief rationale for the recording, the date(s) of recording, and its intended use. In addition, before a class can be recorded, a student must sign this [Student Pledge regarding Recording of Class Sessions](#), which affirms that any approved recording will be for personal use only (i.e., learning) and not circulated to anyone else. They should submit this form to their professor. Exceptions apply to students who have an ADA-approved accommodation follow a different process, as some students who receive ADA-approved accommodations from the Student Accessibility Resource Center (SARC) also receive permission to record class sessions as part of their accommodation. Nothing will change for these students as a result of this policy. In such cases, students follow SARC's [Audio Recording Policy](#) and sign the [Student Pledge regarding Audio Recording of Class Lectures](#).