

Zach Blaesi

Teaching Dossier

Last updated December 29, 2022

For additional teaching-related materials, visit my website: zachblaesi.com/teaching

Table of Contents

1	Teaching Statement	2
2	Reference Letter from Director of the Plan II Honors Program at UT Austin	3
3	Course Evaluations	4
3.1	Evaluations as Instructor (ACC)	4
3.2	Evaluations as Instructor (UT Austin)	7
3.3	Evaluations as Teaching Assistant (UT Austin)	11
3.4	Selection of Student Comments	15
4	Course Syllabi, Descriptions, and Schedules	24
4.1	Full Syllabus for Ethics	24
4.2	Full Syllabus for The Mind–Body Problem	40
4.3	Course Description and Schedule for Introduction to Philosophy	49
4.4	Course Description and Schedule for Introduction to Aesthetics	51
4.5	Course Description and Schedule for Philosophy and Film	53
5	Sample Assignments	55
5.1	Discussion Assignment (Ethics)	55
5.2	Find-a-Flaw / AITA Assignment (Ethics)	56
5.3	Four Part Paper Proposal (Ethics)	59
5.4	Final Paper Prompts (Ethics)	60
5.5	Final Paper Grading Rubric (Ethics)	65
5.6	Reading Response Assignment (Introduction to Aesthetics)	68
5.7	Reading Response Rubric (Introduction to Aesthetics)	69
5.8	Philosophy Application Project (Introduction to Philosophy)	70

1 Teaching Statement

My primary aim as an instructor is to help students view philosophy as a way of life: an ongoing process of asking “why” questions and refusing to accept “because I said so!” answers. To this end, I teach with an *expose-and-assess* approach, one that exposes the philosophical assumptions that people simply take for granted and equips students with the skills needed to assess those assumptions.

Consider the assumption that it is morally permissible to spend one’s money on luxuries and frills. When covering the ethics of poverty, I begin with a news clip about five Florida teens who taunted a man as he drowned to death. Even though these teens were never convicted of a crime, my students agree that their failure to help the drowning man was seriously wrong. But how do students feel about their own failure to prevent suffering and death around the world? Rather than just asking them, I have them write down three unnecessary purchases they’ve made in the last month. Recently, this prompted one student to announce that she spent \$7,000 on a fancy new mattress. I use students’ volunteered examples to enter dollar amounts into the website, *The Life You Can Save*, so that they can visualize the potential impact of their money around the world. This helps them see that their spending habits reflect an assumption about their moral obligations to the poor.

Or consider the view that life begins at conception. When covering the abortion debate, I play media clips to expose the assumption that we are biological organisms. According to substance dualism, however, we aren’t biological organisms at all: we are immaterial souls. After introducing this view, I have students get into groups to consider how a dualist might answer the question of when we begin to exist. This helps them realize that different theories of personal identity may have different implications for the moral status of the fetus, and it equips them with the concepts needed to adjudicate these issues. As one student put it, “[I] learned that many of the issues today that are branded as ‘scientific issues’ or ‘government issues’ are actually philosophical issues that must first be answered on the philosophical side of the debate before any common ground might be found.”

In order to assess philosophical assumptions, I believe that students must first learn to identify, evaluate, and construct arguments. However, many students enter my courses without a clear understanding of what an argument even *is*. Hence, I devote an entire unit to distinguishing argument from rhetoric and introducing basic argumentative strategies, which I reinforce throughout the semester. For example, I recently introduced my students to the optimistic induction from the success of science to the truth of physicalism. One of my students observed that the argument resembles an induction from the sun’s having risen every day in the past to the conclusion that it will rise again tomorrow—an example that we discussed the second week of class. Validating her observation helped my students understand that their task is to assess these arguments for cogency.

I have students put these argumentative strategies into practice by completing a variety of short writing assignments, which task them with either summarizing an argument from an assigned reading or critically evaluating a philosophical claim. This ensures that my students already have some experience writing the major components of an argumentative paper before they have to write one for the course. Moreover, I require students to write a final paper in stages by developing a thesis statement and writing an outline explaining how they plan to support it; submitting a rough draft for feedback; and revising and resubmitting their paper with a cover letter explaining where, how, and why they revised it. This approach enables me to assess students’ progress over time and help them make specific improvements at different stages of the writing process. For example, many of my students begin with a thesis that is too broad to support within the page limit. By having them develop a thesis first, I’m able to help them fix this mistake far in advance.

To further assess students’ progress, I administer a mid-semester evaluation, which is designed to prompt students to reflect on their own role in the course and to enable me to adjust my teaching methods to their unique educational needs. For instance, when some of my students commented that they sometimes found it difficult to focus when I would respond to students’ questions, I began using students’ questions to solicit answers from other students for the rest of the class to assess. This method kept my students much more engaged. Even if my methods change, however, my primary objective in teaching remains constant: to empower students to question the world around them.



PLAN II HONORS PROGRAM

305 E. 23rd Street, G3600 • RLP 2.102 • Austin, Texas • 78712-1250 • 512-471-1442 • fax 512-471-7449
www.utexas.edu/cola/progs/plan2/ • planii@austin.utexas.edu

October 24, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of the Plan II Honors Program, I am pleased to acknowledge the contribution of time and service provided by Zach Alan Blaes, PhD Candidate/Teaching Assistant, Department of Philosophy, College of Liberal Arts, The University of Texas at Austin.

The Plan II Honors Program is the premier honors major at The University of Texas at Austin, providing an interdisciplinary education in the arts and sciences to the best and brightest undergraduates at the university. A year-long course sequence in Philosophy is a core component of the curriculum of the Plan II Honors major.

Immediately prior to the start of classes for the fall 2019 semester, one of the long established veteran instructors of the Plan II Philosophy course fell ill. With just a few days' notice, and while wrapping up his own graduate education, Zach Blaes stepped up to take over instructional duties for the course. Plan II Honors students have high expectations of their faculty: they want to learn, be challenged, engage in dialogue, absorb knowledge, but also contribute to the classroom experience. Lecture, even in a class of almost 100 students, is not a satisfactory learning experience for this group. Student reaction to Zach Blaes's teaching of the Plan II Honors core Philosophy course has been nothing short of fantastic! Students report that Zach Blaes's pedagogy is engaging, accessible, and produces an environment of active learning in the classroom.

The Plan II Honors Program is grateful to Zach Blaes for his service and leadership in taking over the Plan II Philosophy course. While we are sad to see such a fine scholar leave the 40 acres, we wish him all the best moving forward to join the ranks of faculty at another institution, in the next steps of his academic career. We enthusiastically endorse his application and again acknowledge our appreciation for his service to Plan II Honors and the university.

Sincerely,

Alexandra K. Wettlaufer
Director, Plan II Honors Program
Hayden W. Head Regents Chair in Plan II,
Stuart W. Stedman Director's Chair in Plan II

2 Course Evaluations

2.1 Evaluations as Instructor at ACC

I have designed and taught the following course sections at ACC:

Course	Semester	Enrollment
Ethics (38714)	Spring 2022	15 students
Ethics (38690)	Spring 2022	20 students
Introduction to Philosophy (44306)	Summer 2022	23 students
Ethics (44323)	Summer 2022	15 students

For each section, students were presented with the following statements:

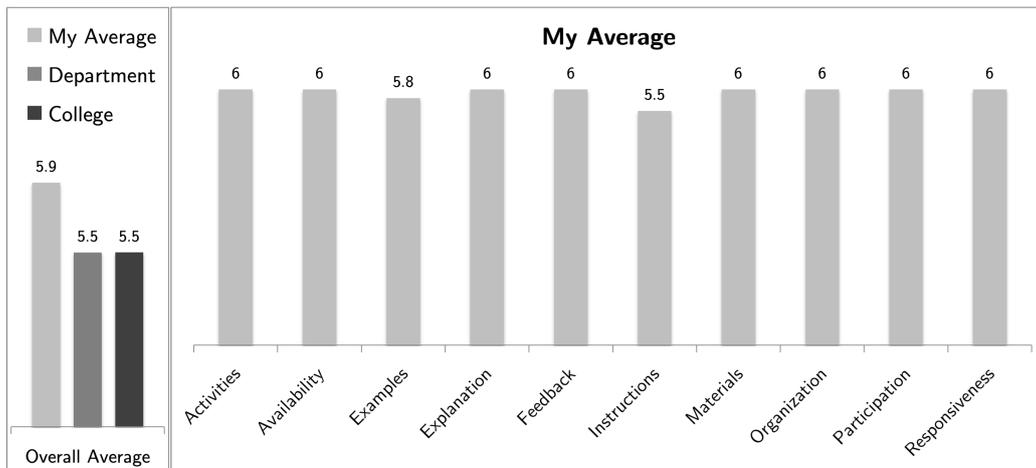
ACTIVITIES:	The instructional activities address the course content and objectives.
AVAILABILITY:	The professor is available during scheduled office hours.
EXAMPLES:	The professor uses examples and rephrases concepts, ideas, and explanations.
EXPLANATION:	The professor explains the concepts and other related information effectively.
FEEDBACK:	Timely feedback is provided on tests, papers, or other assignments.
INSTRUCTIONS:	Tests, papers, or other assignments include clear instructions.
MATERIALS:	The instructional materials are related to the course content and objectives.
ORGANIZATION:	The professor's lectures or presentations are well-organized.
PARTICIPATION:	The professor provides opportunities for students to participate in class and ask questions.
RESPONSIVENESS:	The professor is responsive to questions that are relevant to course content.

They were then asked to report the degree to which they agreed with each of the previous statements (on a scale from 1–6). My averages are on the following page.

Note: the leftmost charts compare my overall averages for each individual course to the overall course averages for the department and college for the corresponding semesters. However, department and college averages per specific question are not currently available; ACC was only able to provide me with the overall course averages for the department and college for a given semester.

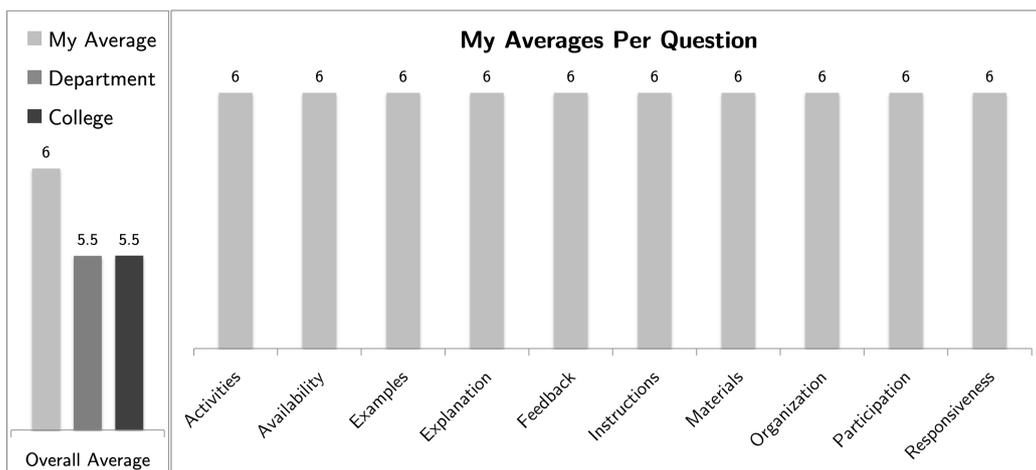
Ethics (38714) (Spring 2022)

6 = Always 5 = Very Often 4 = Often 3 = Sometimes 2 = Rarely 1 = Never



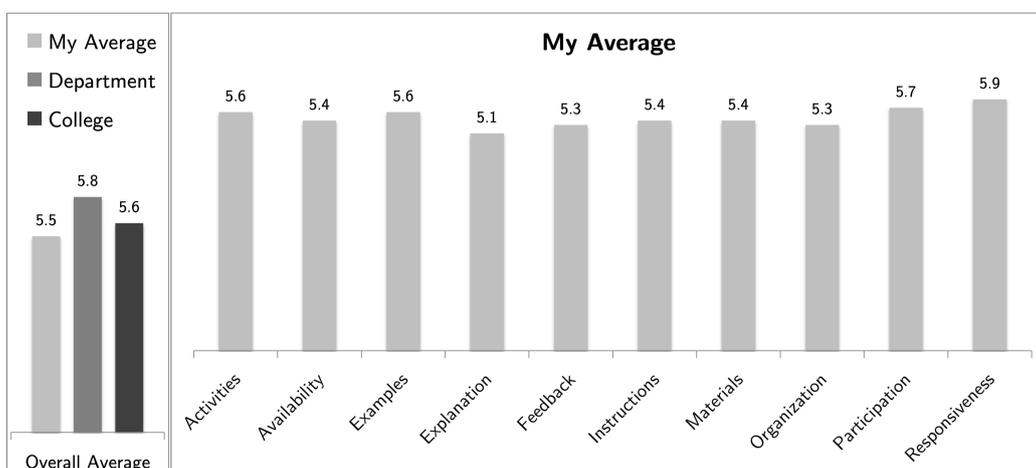
Ethics (38690) (Spring 2022)

6 = Always 5 = Very Often 4 = Often 3 = Sometimes 2 = Rarely 1 = Never



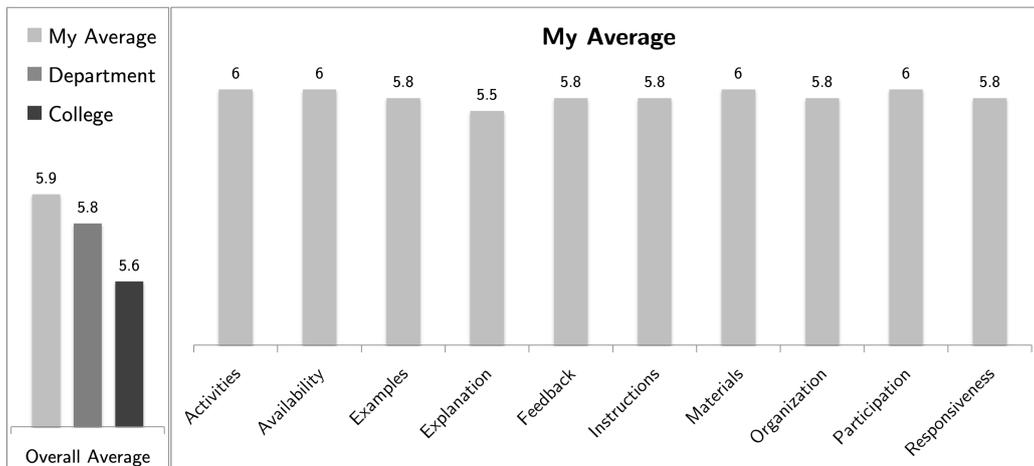
Introduction to Philosophy (44306) (Summer 2022)

6 = Always 5 = Very Often 4 = Often 3 = Sometimes 2 = Rarely 1 = Never



Ethics (44323) (Summer 2022)

6 = Always 5 = Very Often 4 = Often 3 = Sometimes 2 = Rarely 1 = Never



Students were also presented with a series of statements that they could classify as either “yes” or “no.” Here are my results:

Ethics (Spring 2022) (38714)

The professor gave you a copy of the course syllabus during the first week of class.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

The professor discussed the course syllabus during the first week of class.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

The objectives of the course were stated in the course syllabus.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

The course requirements were stated in the course syllabus.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

The grading policy was stated in the course syllabus.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

Ethics (Spring 2022) (38690)

The professor gave you a copy of the course syllabus during the first week of class.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

The professor discussed the course syllabus during the first week of class.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

The objectives of the course were stated in the course syllabus.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

The course requirements were stated in the course syllabus.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

The grading policy was stated in the course syllabus.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

Introduction to Philosophy (Summer 2022) (44306)

The professor gave you a copy of the course syllabus during the first week of class.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

The professor discussed the course syllabus during the first week of class.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

The objectives of the course were stated in the course syllabus.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

The course requirements were stated in the course syllabus.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

The grading policy was stated in the course syllabus.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

Ethics (Summer 2022) (44323)

The professor gave you a copy of the course syllabus during the first week of class.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

The professor discussed the course syllabus during the first week of class.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

The objectives of the course were stated in the course syllabus.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

The course requirements were stated in the course syllabus.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

The grading policy was stated in the course syllabus.
Yes (100%) No (0%)

2.2 Evaluations as Instructor at UT Austin

I have designed and taught a total of four courses at UT Austin:

Course	Semester	Enrollment
Introduction to the Philosophy of the Arts	Fall 2017	147 students
Introduction to the Philosophy of the Arts	Spring 2018	48 students
Contemporary Moral Problems	Fall 2018	117 students
Philosophy and Film (web-based)	Fall 2020	26 students

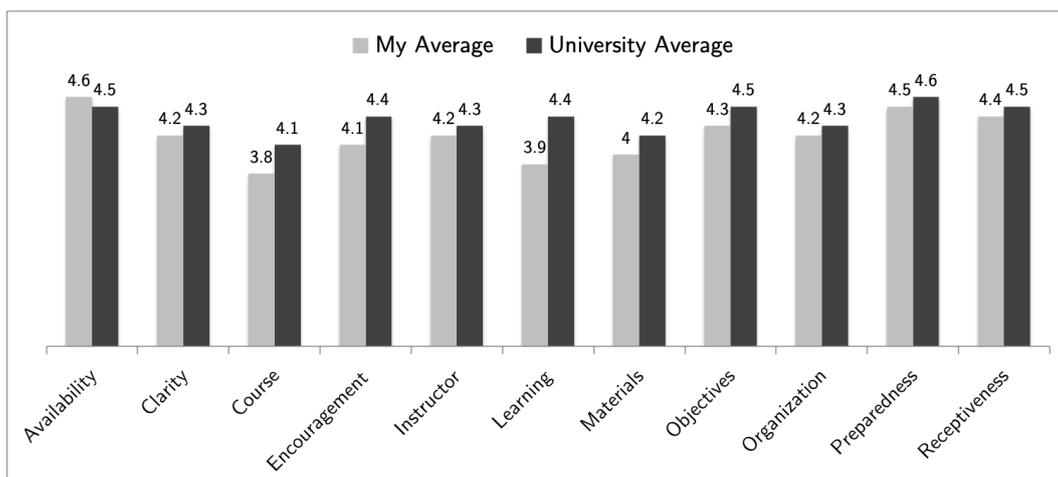
For each course, students were presented with the following statements:

- AVAILABILITY: The instructor was available to students either electronically or in person.
- CLARITY: The instructor communicated information effectively.
- COURSE: Overall, this course was [5 = excellent / 4 = very good / 3 = neutral / 2 = satisfactory / 1 = unsatisfactory].
- ENCOURAGEMENT: The instructor encouraged me to take an active role in my own learning.
- INSTRUCTOR: Overall, this instructor was [5 = excellent / 4 = very good / 3 = neutral / 2 = satisfactory / 1 = unsatisfactory].
- LEARNING: Overall, I learned a great deal in this course.
- MATERIALS: The course materials (e.g., text and supplemental materials) were helpful to me.
- OBJECTIVES: The instructor clearly defined and explained the course objectives and expectations.
- ORGANIZATION: The course was well organized.
- PREPAREDNESS: The instructor was prepared for each instructional activity.
- RECEPTIVENESS: The instructor made me feel free to ask questions, disagree, and express my ideas.

They were then asked to report the degree to which they agreed with each of the previous statements (on a scale from 1–5). Here are my averages in comparison with university averages:

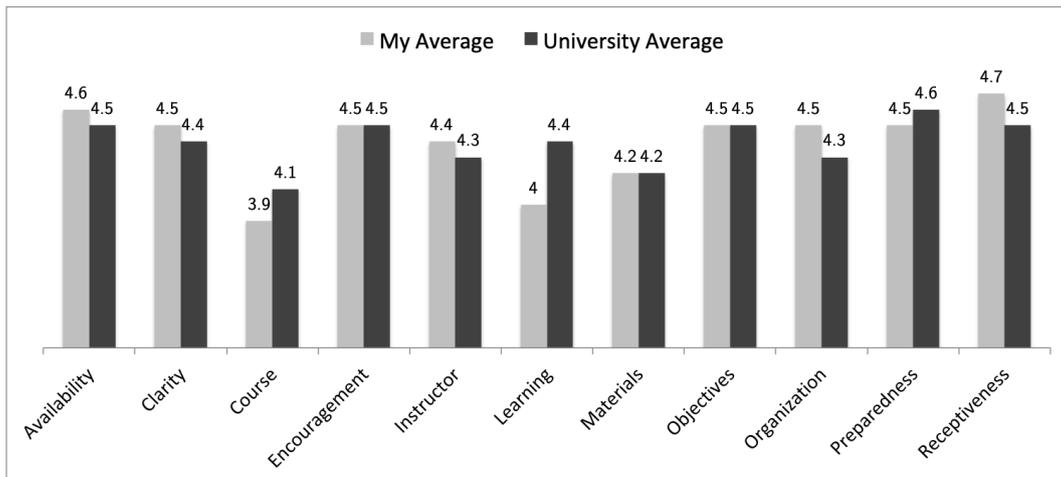
Introduction to the Philosophy of the Arts (Fall 2017)

5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Neutral 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly Disagree



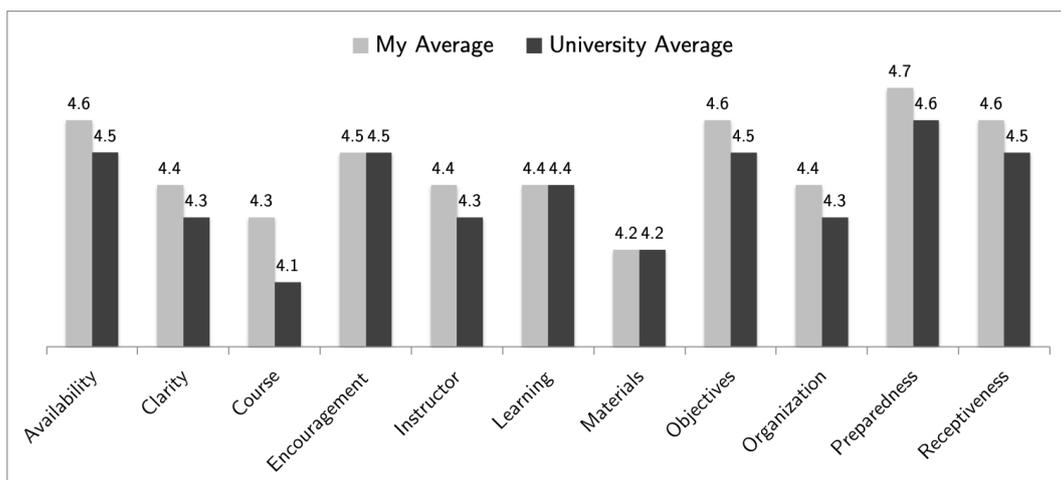
Introduction to the Philosophy of the Arts (Spring 2018)

5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Neutral 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly Disagree



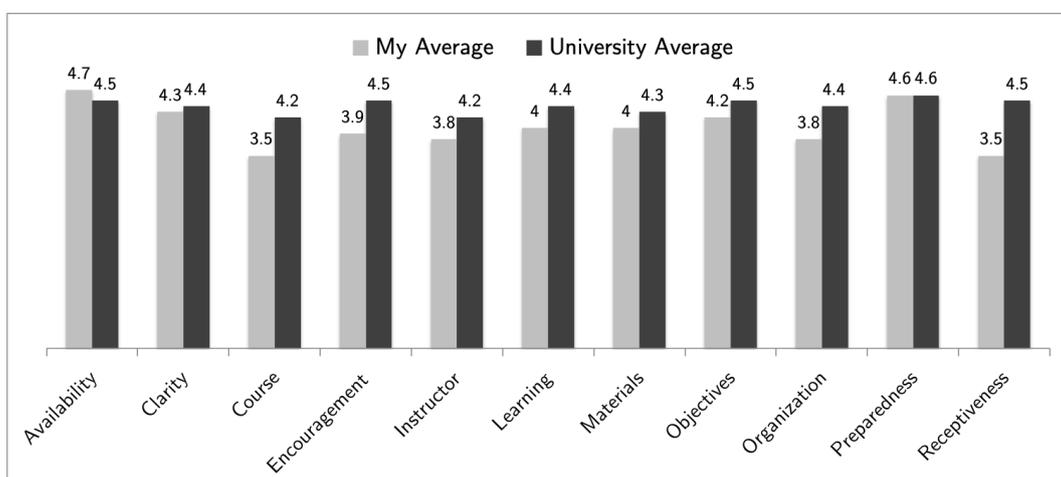
Contemporary Moral Problems (Fall 2018)

5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Neutral 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly Disagree



Philosophy and Film (web-based) (Fall 2020)

5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Neutral 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly Disagree



Note: Fall 2020 was my first time teaching a web-based course due to sudden administrative changes implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since I work best with students in person, this change was a big adjustment for me. With decreased visual feedback from students, I moved at a slower pace to make sure that every student fully understood the material, which led to falling behind schedule and left less time for student interaction during synchronous Zoom meetings. On top of this, in the midst of a chaotic semester, I forgot to send my students a reminder to submit their online evaluations, leading to a 20% decrease in surveys returned in comparison to my previous three courses. While my other quantitative evaluations demonstrate an upward trajectory from my first time teaching in Fall 2017, I believe that the aforementioned factors played a role in my receiving lower quantitative evaluations for Fall 2020 in comparison to Fall 2018. Despite the lower quantitative evaluations, my [qualitative evaluations](#) for Fall 2020 are largely positive.

Having learned from this experience, I adjusted my approach to Zoom in Spring 2021 when leading discussion sections for Introduction to Ethics, leading to some of my best evaluations as a Teaching Assistant since coming to UT Austin in 2014 (click [here](#) to see the results). I believe that by making similar adjustments in future web-based courses, I will receive similarly positive student evaluations.

2.3 Evaluations as Teaching Assistant

I have worked as a Teaching Assistant / Discussion Leader for a total of seven courses at UT Austin:

Course	Semester	Instructor
Medicine, Ethics, and Society	Fall 2014	Jeff Leon
Introduction to the Philosophy of the Arts	Spring 2015	Katherine Piatti
Science and the Modern World	Fall 2015	Cory Juhl
Mind and Body	Spring 2016	Michael Tye
Problems of Knowledge and Valuation	Fall 2016	John Deigh
Problems of Knowledge and Valuation	Fall 2019	Ian Proops
Introduction to Ethics (web-based)	Spring 2021	Nicole Smith

My responsibilities included leading weekly discussion sections; conducting review sessions; grading and providing feedback on assignments, quizzes, exams, and/or papers; and mentoring students during office hours.

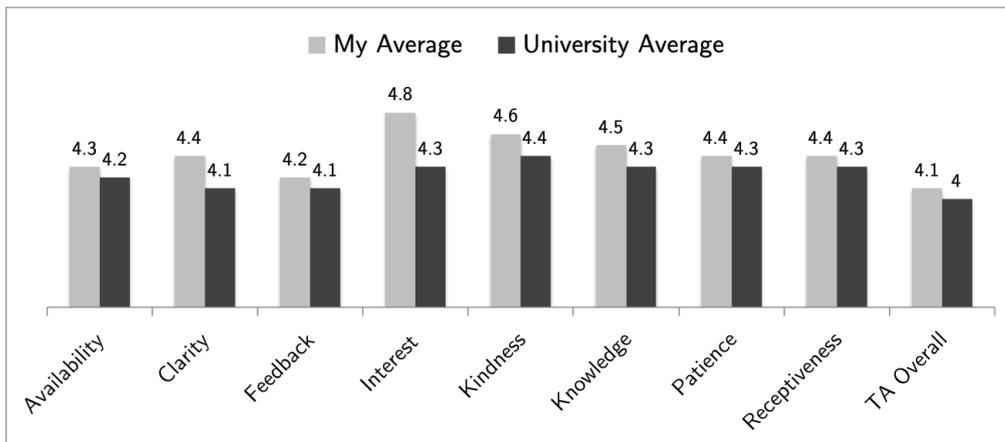
For each course, students were presented with the following statements:

AVAILABILITY:	The teaching assistant was available for scheduled office hours.
CLARITY:	The teaching assistant explained the material clearly.
FEEDBACK:	The teaching assistant provided helpful comments and feedback on assignments.
INTEREST:	The teaching assistant seemed interested in the subject matter.
KINDNESS:	The teaching assistant was kind and respectful of me.
KNOWLEDGE:	The teaching assistant was knowledgeable about the subject matter.
PATIENCE:	The teaching assistant was patient with my questions.
RECEPTIVENESS:	The teaching assistant was receptive to my questions.
TA OVERALL:	Compared with other TAs I've had, I would rate this TA [5 = Excellent / 4 = Very Good / 3 = Satisfactory / 2 = Unsatisfactory / 1 = Very Unsatisfactory].

They were then asked to report the degree to which they agreed with each of the previous statements (on a scale from 1–5). Here are my averages in comparison with university averages:

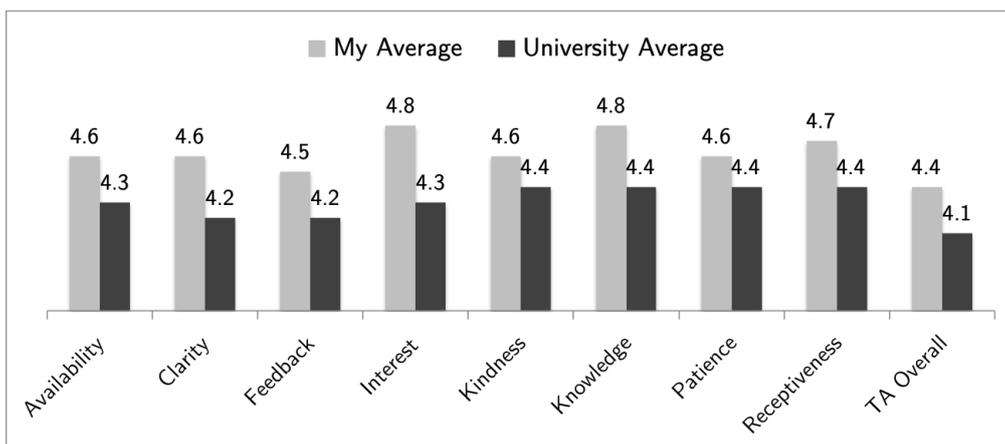
Medicine, Ethics, and Society (Fall 2014)

5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Neutral 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly Disagree



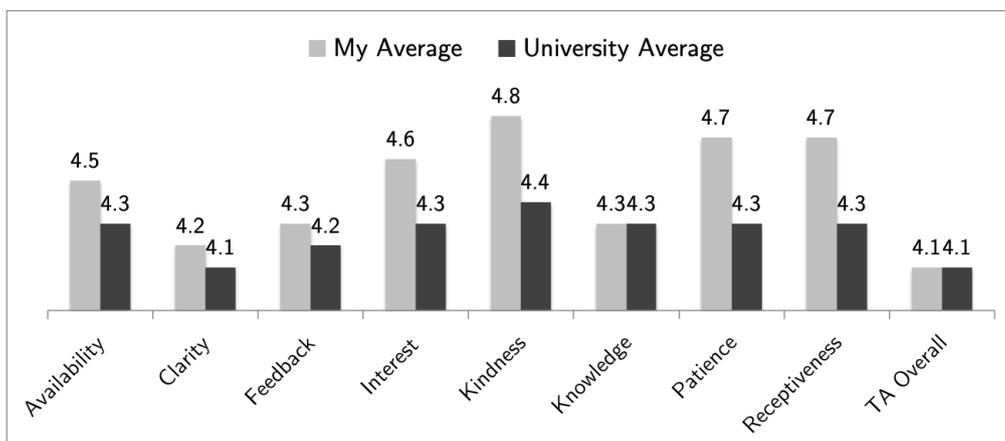
Introduction to the Philosophy of the Arts (Spring 2015)

5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Neutral 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly Disagree



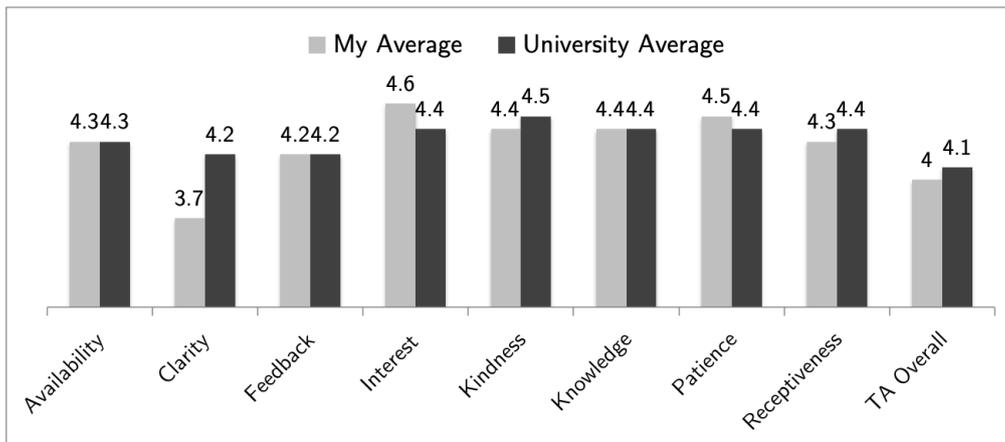
Science and the Modern World (Fall 2015)

5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Neutral 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly Disagree



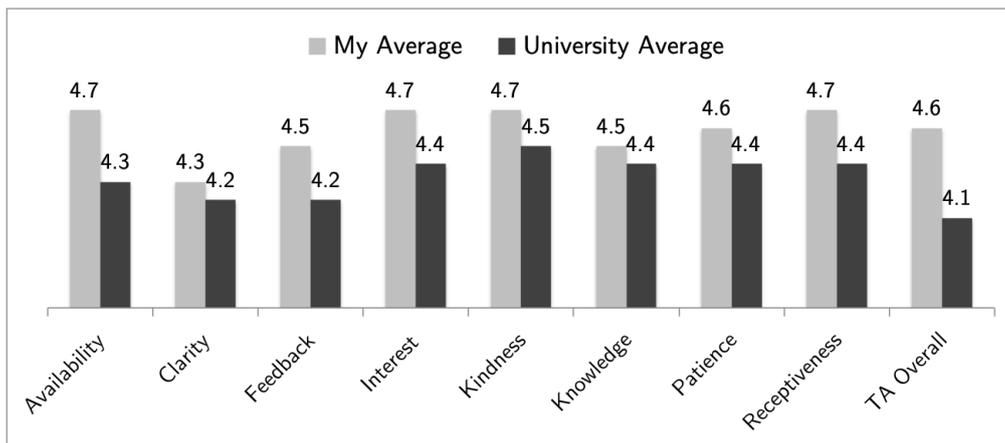
Mind and Body (Spring 2016)

5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Neutral 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly Disagree



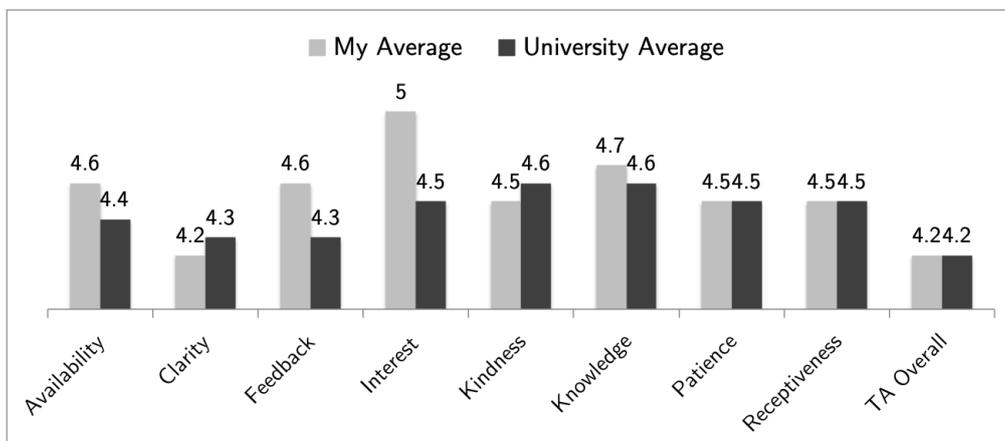
Problems of Knowledge and Valuation (Fall 2016)

5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Neutral 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly Disagree



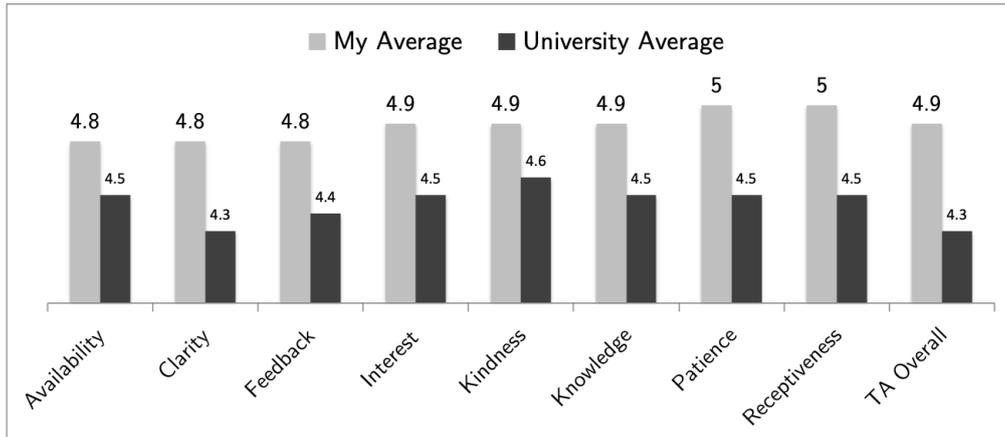
Problems of Knowledge and Valuation (Fall 2019)

5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Neutral 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly Disagree



Introduction to Ethics (Spring 2021)

5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Neutral 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly Disagree



2.4 Selection of Student Comments

These comments are quoted verbatim from my student evaluations. For the original evaluations together with a complete list of comments, visit my website: zachblaesi.com/teaching

2.4.1 Ethics (44323) (ACC) (Instructor, Summer 2022)

“Great professor.”

“You can tell the Professor is passionate about what he does! I liked this class!”

2.4.2 Introduction to Philosophy (44306) (ACC) (Instructor, Summer 2022)

“He was a good teacher. He provided a lot of examples and kept his lectures very concise and effective. I liked the clips he used in class that consisted of shows/movies he would watch that also had relation to the material. That helped making class really tiresome while also still engaging in the material. Overall, this professor is good and has an understanding of students.”

“Overall a pretty good experience! Went in to learn and go over philosophical subjects and he delivered really well. I had a good time in this course!”

“Very knowledgeable and easily understandable when explaining the course material.”

2.4.3 Ethics (38690) (ACC) (Instructor, Spring 2022)

“good professor.”

“Professor Zach is a brilliant philosophy teacher. He is kind and helpful with anything presented and always willing to help even beyond class times if needed.”

2.4.4 Philosophy and Film (web-based) (UT Austin) (Instructor, Fall 2020)

“I really enjoyed having Zach as my professor this semester! I especially appreciated his individualized, detailed feedback on our writing assignments, as they helped me improve my writing skills and streamline my corrections. He was also always available during his office hours, so I would often go and speak with him about my specific assignment and receive any clarification, if needed. Overall, an amazing professor!”

“The professor for this course is the most critical grader I have encountered, and for that I am grateful. The instructor made the course objectives and expectations very clear from the beginning while relaying to us the difficulties that come with philosophy courses and work. Through the instructor’s critiques of my assignment, the instructor allowed for resubmission of work and gave insight into where the assignment went right and where it went wrong. The instructor was the most instructive grader I have had in my academic career and was incredibly patient when explaining what is expected from philosophical writing, both style and structure.”

“Overall, I very much enjoyed this course. You’re a very intelligent person with extensive knowledge in the fields of film and philosophy, so it was rewarding to hear your lectures. As someone who was taking this class for fun, I would’ve liked to have more discussion on how philosophy was directly working within films vs discussion on the philosophical ideas we see within them. On top of that, I felt the workload was a bit high, especially for an intro class, while trying to juggle other classes, a job, independent pursuits, and during COVID with little leniency on late or missed work. However, I took this class for enjoyment and certainly got that. I feel your inclusion of optional readings really opened up the world to philosophy for me and your detailed feedback was always very helpful. Thank you!”

“For being the first online class this professor taught, it went very well. The class was engaging and interesting.”

2.4.5 Contemporary Moral Problems (UT Austin) (Instructor, Fall 2018)

“This is by far my favorite course that I’ve ever taken at UT, and maybe even in my entire educational career. All of Zach’s lectures were interesting and actually made me want to come to class. He was always open to questions and could always come up with a very well put response. He genuinely cared about his students and took their feedback very seriously. For example, students complained that the assigned readings were too long so he took the time to read through the articles he assigned and cut out all the extra ‘fluff.’ I have recommended this course to multiple friends and would definitely take another course offered by Zach.”

“A really great course. I felt really comfortable expressing my own opinions and Zach was respectful of everyone. Zach is really knowledgeable about the subject matter and I learned a lot. This class has actually changed some of my viewpoints about the world and will influence how I talk about issues and make decisions for the rest of my life.”

“Professor Blaesie is one of the most caring, eloquent, inspiring, and engaging professors. It is evident how much effort and time he puts into this course. He has office hours in person and online, his lectures seem so prepared, and he provides so many resources and optional readings for those who want to read more about a topic we briefed over in class. Maybe it is just in the nature of this course, but he makes us think and talk about issues that are uncomfortable but necessary. He also cares about what we think while questioning our beliefs. Most importantly, he teaches us how to carefully determine our beliefs and how to stay consistent with our beliefs.”

“Even though I probably did terrible in this class, that is on me. With the readings and discussion group section, I feel as if I have acquired a new sense of the world and a new perspective on ongoing issues happening almost everywhere. Instead of dismissing ideas, I had to research and find stances for both sides of various moral issues and to then debate them more often th[a]n not finding myself on the side that I would normally disagree with. Great class.”

“I thoroughly enjoyed this course. I have never had a professor who has put in so much work and

thought into their class. Zach was always available to his students and constantly communicated with us about assignments and topics we would discuss in class. He also listened to feedback from his students and tried to accommodate everyone. When students voiced concerns that the workload was heavy, he did his best to slim down assignments while still giving us important material needed for the class. He also provided multiple opportunities outside of class for extra practice if students were confused. Zach is the most fair and hardworking professor I have had during my time at UT and I would love to take a class with him again in the future.”

“Zach has been one of the most dedicated professors I have had at UT. He was always really prepared for each class. Also, anyone could see his passion on the subject, and his ability to make it understandable for undergraduate students. I have never taken a philosophy course, and have now found myself very interested in the topic. Zach went the extra mile for every class, and his effort was evident. This was a great class.”

“Zach was a great teacher. He had engaging presentations and lectures that related well to the content we were learning in class. There was a good balance of reading and material for the course but it was not overwhelming. I liked that he was engaging us in class discussion and using squarecap to help facilitate discussion.”

“This was one of my favorite classes. You can tell that Zach is passionate about what he is teaching and wants students to excel. He does a great job of providing information and optional readings for us! Great class.”

“I LOVE Professor Blaes. He was always available to students, and it was so obvious that he really cared about each and every one of us. He is passionate about Philosophy and sparked student[s] interests as well. He really worked very hard to make this class the best it could be for his students.”

“Zach was always prepared for lectures. It was obvious how much effort he put into what he was teaching. You could tell that he was very passionate about not only the material but making sure that his students understood the material well.”

“Zach was a good professor, and me coming into this course knowing absolutely nothing about what i was going to learn was awesome because i learned a whole lot. I was able to think outside the box and refute my own opinions and challenge myself. I really enjoyed this class.”

“Great teacher!”

“Makes the class very interesting and fun.”

“Zach is an amazing instructor. I couldn't ask for a better intro to philosophy professor.”

“Super passionate about this and very approachable. Great guy.”

“The instructor was well versed with most of the topics provided. This class did open my eyes to a

world of philosophical debate. Because of this class, I ended up in so many arguments with friends of mine.”

“It was an amazing and fun class. Really enjoyed it!”

“Professor Blaesi is an excellent professor and the course was one on my favorite courses at UT so far.”

2.4.6 Introduction to the Philosophy of the Arts (Instructor, Spring 2018)

“I originally took this course for the VAPA credit, but ended up enjoying it a lot more than I thought. The topics we covered, for the most part, were very interesting, and some I was aware of but hadn’t known it was an actual concept or theory (e.g. the male gaze). Zach was very knowledgeable on the topics in lecture but also kept us entertained and engaged. Zach was a wonderful instructor that showed his passion for the subject, which allowed us to become interested in it as well. This class helped me gain a new perspective in looking at art, and has already changed how I watch films. Thanks for a great class and semester!”

“The instructor was very knowledgeable about the topic and was approachable, while still being professional. The class was entertaining and his lectures were informative. In addition, the instructor was incredibly receptive to suggestions to improve the class. Overall, the instructor showed a lot of effort to better our understanding of the material and our general appreciation of philosophy and created a good environment for us to learn in.”

“I appreciate how open to change the instructor is. I.e. Mid semester surveys.”

“The course helped me broaden my ideas in philosophy beyond the Ancient philosopher to more modern philosophy and how philosophy can be done about basically any issue. Zachary Blaesi was a great professor that knows a great deal about what he is talking about, and he is an excellent instructor. He tells you exactly what is required of you.”

2.4.7 Introduction to the Philosophy of the Arts (UT Austin) (Instructor, Fall 2017)

“Zach Blaesi’s course has been one of my most enjoyable courses at the University of Texas. His lectures are interesting and informative. The workload is somewhat high, but the readings are resourceful. Zach was willing to work with my accommodations and provide assist[ance] on all assignments.”

“Professor Blaesi’s class was very cool to take. This was my first semester at UT and I appreciate the learning skills that I obtained while in this class. We had writing assignments and short quizzes, so I never felt too stressed out about this class. Blaesi structures his teaching in a way that encourages learning, whereas some teachers may just lay all of the information out on the table and expect students to absorb it all. With this philosophy class, I was able to retain the knowledge I needed to be successful at my own pace, which I am very thankful for.”

“Zach made the subject matter very interesting and, though philosophy can be a difficult topic to understand, Zach ALWAYS connected subjects within the course to real life scenarios. He’d always show clips of shows or popular movies that exemplified what we talk about in class, making it so much easier to comprehend. Overall, [a] super fair, funny, and engaging teacher.”

“Offers an incredibly clear understanding/interpretation of the material and was always very helpful via email whenever I had questions. Always took the time to ensure I had a sufficient understanding of the readings and gave thought provoking essay topics. The class was very organized and he made complex material easy to follow.”

“One of my favorite classes and teachers. I could tell he was really interested in the course and loved to get involved with students. I felt like I actually learned useful information in this class.”

“Zach was a great professor. He seemed to be very interested in the course material and did a good job of explaining the concepts in his lectures. As I have never taken a philosophy class before and struggled with some of the readings, he always used examples in class to help clarify the topics. The readings sometimes felt long and confusing, and the clicker quizzes were sometimes difficult even when I had done all of the readings, but overall, the grade distribution was fair and the course load was an appropriate amount. He was available with office hours which was helpful when I needed help since I wasn’t used to writing philosophy papers. Zach was very nice, understanding, and did what he could to help us understand the concepts”

“Fun class that talked about complex topics. However, Zach made sure to help us understand each topic.”

“Professor Blaesie was a very thorough professor. He explained every topic very well and was receptive to questions.”

“Zach Blaesie is very knowledgeable about both philosophy and art and obviously brings [h]is own intellectual curiosity and passion to the class and it’s subjects.”

“I thought the course was very interesting, and I enjoyed listening to the instructor’s presentations. He seemed very well-versed and engaged in the topic material.”

“Zach is highly enthusiastic about teaching the material of this course and provided a lot of opportunities to engage with students in a large lecture setting.”

“I really found this course interesting! I’ve always wanted to take philosophy course and I’m really glad this course fulfilled my VAPA credit. I talked about almost everything in this class with some of my friends who had taken philosophy courses before. I may have never spoken up in the class, but I was fascinated and I think it added a lot to my studies as someone who makes art and participates in art themselves. The class felt very relaxed and not intimidating.”

“Professor Blaesi is dedicated and excited about the work he is doing in this class. Throughout the semester, he was always willing to help and give the best insight he possibly could. Excellent class.”

“Zach is a great teacher all around. Very knowledgeable about the subject and passionate about the material. His communication was enthusiastic and fun. Would definitely recommend.”

“Zach is a stand up guy. Very understanding and knows his stuff.”

“Awesome course. Being the first college course I ever took in college, it was a great way to start my semester. Learned a great deal about a subject I never thought I would [e]ver be this invested in.”

2.4.8 Introduction to Ethics (UT Austin) (TA, Spring 2021)

“Zach has truly been one of the most helpful and detail oriented TA’s I have had at UT. I truly appreciated his swift and thorough responses to any questions or curiosities I had throughout the semester. It is evident that he is extremely knowledgeable about the material and he is very passionate about what he does. The discussions he led were always meaningful and engaging and truly promoting higher levels of analytical thinking among students. I hope to have him as a TA for future courses!”

“This was actually my first time taking a philosophy class (I’m a computer science major) and I was surprised how much I enjoyed it and learned about the ways we justify morality. I loved the progression of thoughts/modes of thought and how the sequence of theories was presented. Your discussion sessions made it simple and clear how different philosophical approaches have changed over the years and I appreciate how thoughtful and thorough you were in answering all of my questions. Thank you for a great semester!”

“Compared to other TAs that I’ve had, Zach was by far the most dedicated. For almost every assignment that I have submitted, Zach would supply me with multiple papers or articles that were relevant to my topic that he thought were interesting reads. Additionally, there was an occasion when he responded to one of my assignments with a response that was longer than what I had turned in. It was an honor to have him as a TA as his discussions always struck a healthy balance between being purely educational and being interesting.”

“Zach is a very thorough TA who knows his stuff. He is invested in our understanding of the material and has shared with us resources outside of the lecture materials that would further expand our knowledge. Zach also takes the time to discuss questions in a manner that makes me feel seen when he would address mine. He is amazing!”

“TA was very helpful and seemed very interested in the class and its material. Held very interesting and helpful discussion sections and went above and beyond to share extra materials to help understand the subject matter[.]”

“Zach was the best TA! He always answered any additional questions we had at length, making sure

to provide supplementary reading so we could apply the ethical concepts we learned to our own work/lives.”

“Zach always did a great job in discussions of making us feel comfortable and really took time to help us understand topics. On top of being very knowledgeable about philosophy, he did a great job of making things digestible for us beginner philosophers.”

“Zach was a great TA! He went above and beyond to help his students grasp the dense material the class covered. He was always very kind and never made me feel like any of my questions were dumb questions.”

“Zach was a great TA who always answered any questions and created engaging discussions.”

“He took his time explaining each topic we discussed during his zoom sessions and helped everyone with their questions if they had any. I felt as if I learned a lot from his explanations and feel confident in my knowledge of ethics moving forward. If something challenged me during this class, he was unequivocal when explaining something a second time.”

“Our TA Zach was one of the best TAs I have ever had. In discussion sections, he made sure everyone could speak and understand materials. He was always willing to listen to my questions and help me to better understand material. I am very thankful!”

2.4.9 Problems of Knowledge and Valuation (UT Austin) (TA, Fall 2019)

“Zach is a great Philosophy TA. He has been patient with us when we do not understand the material. He lets us ask questions and is always available to talk about the material to help us boost our understanding. I can tell he wants us to succeed in this class. His grading is just and his comments are very helpful. I am happy I have a friendship with this guy because he is a really interesting and intelligent man. He stepped in to teach while our professor was sick and he did an excellent job. I received a foundation which I use to this day to understand philosophy texts and write my own philosophy essays from Zach's teaching.”

“Zach is perhaps the most knowledgeable, professional, and engaging teaching assistant at the University. He did a fantastic job leading discussion hours. My favorite aspect of Plan II is small group seminar environments, thus, at the beginning of the semester, I knew our discussion hour had the potential to fulfill that for me. Without someone like Zach leading, however, the experience would not have been nearly as fulfilling. Each Monday, I was excited for the brain exercise that was discussing prompts with Zach. He knew the subject extremely well and could go down nerdy, funny, highly thought-provoking rabbit holes with us. I was not familiar with much philosophy before this, but Zach has made me excited to continue philosophizing[.]”

“Zach was very helpful and one thing I really appreciated was he never made me feel dumb or like my questions were dumb, and he always tried to understand my reasoning. He also made extra office

hours and a writing workshop, both of which were helpful.”

“Zach was one of the best TAs that I have ever had; he could be a professor. He was extremely helpful for assignments and was always patient with us. He made himself readily available for extra help, and I really appreciate how he went out of the [way to] help us.”

“Fantastic. Dedicated. Knowledgeable. Most invested and responsive TA I have had yet.”

2.4.10 Problems of Knowledge and Valuation (UT Austin) (TA, Fall 2016)

“Zach brought interest and excitement to an otherwise fairly uninspired course. Any praise I could write here wouldn't do Zach justice. Favorite TA I've had.”

“He made the material easier to understand and would often explain things more lucidly than the professor would. He also provided really helpful handouts that outlines the material. Was also a great grader, very fair and objective. Much of my success in the class is due to him. I also appreciated how personable he was.”

“The absolute best TA I have ever had by a long shot. Mr. BlaesI inspired me in class and was always helpful.”

2.4.11 Mind and Body (UT Austin) (TA, Spring 2016)

“Zach is a wonderful TA! Knew just as much as the prof. but could explain the material even better, he also seemed to care more about answering questions, and was very respectful and friendly toward his students. Zach was one of the best TAs I have ever had!”

“Zach did a very good job in explaining everybody's answers even if it was a bit repetitive at times. He was incredibly patient, and showed that he cared.”

“You did an excellent job explaining question[s] in S.I. [supplemental instruction sections] and were very approachable so we felt free to ask those questions, which was much more intimidating [in] class. You were also very responsive to what your students wanted, and I appreciated how you would check in with us to see what concepts you should cover and how we should use our time together.”

2.4.12 Science and the Modern World (UT Austin) (TA, Fall 2015)

“Zach was great, always very helpful and dedicated himself to make sure we knew the material. This class has been a challenge, however Zach provided enough help and plenty of resources to ensure that we would be successful in class. Great TA!”

“Zach was genuinely interested in what we had to say, and wanted us to do well in the course. He was enthusiastic, helpful, and inspiring.”

“Engaging and thought provoking. Consistently excellent discussion sections. Probably my favorite

TA in college thus far!”

2.4.13 Introduction to the Philosophy of the Arts (UT Austin) (TA, Spring 2015)

“Zachary encouraged an open and active learning environment as well as participation.”

“He really tried to make the concepts more understandable which was great for philosophy. I appreciated his hard work. Thanks Zach!”

“Zach, you were awesome and seemed very interested in the course material. If you keep TA'ing, don't change your style!”

2.4.14 Medicine, Ethics, and Society (UT Austin) (TA, Fall 2014)

“Zach was very informed on every topic we covered in class. He was available, caring, kind, engaging, and thoughtful. An excellent instructor.”

“Zach really took his time grading all of our exams and unlike most TA's, he provided very useful and detailed feedback on each exam question. You could tell that he genuinely cared about the course material and wanted us to be just as interested in the material as he was.”

“It's nice to have a TA that makes the students critically think and share their thoughts. Zach was a great TA, and cares/knows a lot about what he teaches us.”

PHIL 2306 Ethics

Fall 2022 (syllabus last updated December 29, 2022)

Credit hours: 3

Classroom Contact Hours Per Week: 3

TTh 12:00–1:20 PM Zoom Meetings

Zach Blaes (instructor)

<http://zachblaes.com>

zach.blaesi@austincc.edu [include “TTh Ethics” in the subject line]

512-640-9104 [Google Voice number; send me a text before calling]

Virtual Office Hours: TTh 2:00–3:00 PM or by appointment. Sign up for office hours at least 1 hour in advance here: <https://calendly.com/zblaesi/regular-office-hours>

Zoom Office: when you sign up for a slot through Calendly, you will receive an email confirmation with the Zoom information for our scheduled meeting.

Course Description

Ethics concerns right and wrong, good and bad, reasons for and against, and what to do. We are confronted by ethical questions on a daily basis, whether on the news, through social media, or in our personal lives and social interactions. Many of us have strong views on a range of ethical issues, and these views play an important role in guiding our decisions. This is sometimes most apparent during election seasons, when we are faced with the challenge of deciding whom to support to represent our interests and values within the United States government. But whether we notice it or not, our views on ethics also inform what we eat, how we spend our money, and how we interact with each other.

Some people are *not* rationally entitled to their opinions, such as those who unjustifiably believe that the Earth is flat on the basis of conspiracy theories. But what about *you*? Are you rationally entitled to your opinions on ethical matters? When’s the last time you examined why you hold the ethical views that you do or to consider the possibility that your ethical views might be wildly mistaken? What if you lead an inconsistent life? Does anything really matter in the first place?

This course is an introduction to principles of morality through a critical examination of various ethical theories and their application to contemporary moral problems. We will begin by considering a range of metaethical views on the nature and existence of morality, including the radical view that morality is at best a useful fiction. We will then examine some influential ethical theories that are meant to guide our decisions in a variety of situations. Finally, we will consider several important questions in contemporary applied ethics, such as: Is it typically wrong to have an abortion? Is it typically okay to bring sentient creatures into existence? Are we morally obligated to use our financial resources to alleviate global poverty? Is it okay for us to buy meat and other animal products?

We will also work toward cultivating a number of practical philosophical skills, such as:

- Developing a methodology for addressing controversial ethical issues
- Identifying, demonstrating understanding of, and describing various major figures, divisions, theories, and concepts in ethics
- Analyzing written texts from moral philosophy
- Applying concepts from philosophy to moral issues of both individual and universal significance
- Developing and defending a moral argument in a written essay

There are no course prerequisites for this class. A passing score or the equivalent on the reading and writing portions of the TSI is required.

Course Rationale

One of the most distinctive things about human beings is that we are not simply determined by natural forces; we have the capacity to decide how to act. One of the greatest challenges for human beings is that along with the capacity to decide how to act comes the responsibility to do so rightly. Through the study of ethics one can gain greater insight into how to meet this responsibility successfully.

General Education Competencies

- **Communication Skills:** Develop, interpret, and express ideas and information through written, oral, and visual communication that is adapted to purpose, structure, audience, and medium.
- **Critical Thinking Skills:** Gather, analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and apply information for the purposes of innovation, inquiry, and creative thinking.
- **Personal Responsibility:** Identify and apply ethical principles and practices to decision-making by connecting choices, actions, and consequences.
- **Social Responsibility (Civic and Cultural Awareness):** Analyze differences and commonalities among peoples, ideas, aesthetic traditions, and cultural practices to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities.

Instructional Methodology & Course Expectations

This is an online course with both synchronous and asynchronous components. We will hold two Zoom meetings per week at the scheduled times (TTh 12:00–1:20 PM). You can access the Zoom meetings by clicking “[Zoom Meetings](#)” from the left-hand menu on the Blackboard course site.

Many of the Zoom meetings will be lecture-based. However, during the lectures, there will be opportunities for students to ask questions and engage each other in discussion. We will also use several Zoom meetings to complete graded class activities in breakout rooms.

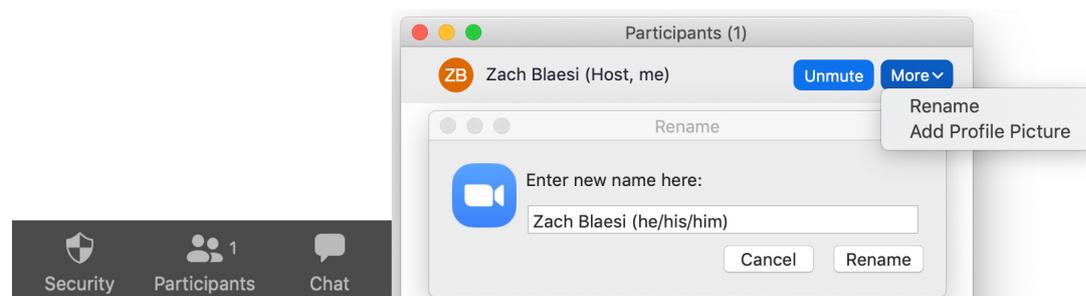
You are expected to:

- be responsible for your own education by completing the required readings, keeping track of your assignment deadlines and grades, requesting outside help when you need it, and not waiting until the last minute to ask assignment-related questions;
- be on time and stay for the entirety of each Zoom meeting (except to maintain one’s health or avoid extreme distress—see [Content Advisory](#) below);
- prepare yourself to demonstrate your understanding of course content, ask questions, move into breakout rooms, and/or participate in discussions and activities on Zoom;
- stay engaged by using the in-meeting chat, raising your hand, using the “**clap**” button when you like a point, participating in polls, and speaking up when I’ve missed students’ questions;
- minimize distractions to yourself and classmates and mute your audio when you aren’t talking;
- ensure that your profile picture and/or Virtual Background are appropriate for a college setting;
- edit your profile to display the name and pronouns that you use ([instructions included below](#));
- show respect to your instructor and classmates;
- and be sensitive to the viewpoints and experiences of others.

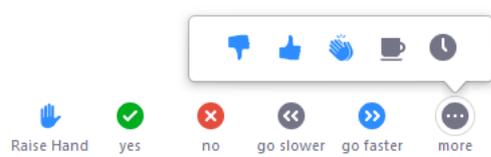
Visit the following three webpages for information on how to get started with Zoom, sign in to your ACC Zoom account, and change your Virtual Background:

- <https://zoom.us/download>
- <https://it.austincc.edu/2020/08/12/getting-started-with-zoom>
- <https://it.austincc.edu/2020/08/28/signing-in-to-your-acc-zoom-account>
- <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/210707503-Virtual-Background>

Students are strongly encouraged to edit their Zoom profile to display the names and pronouns that they use (see “[Names & Pronouns](#)” below). You can do this by clicking on your name from the participants page:



We will utilize the following conventions for Zoom meetings:



- If I am moving too fast, press the “**slow down**” button.
- If you don’t understand something that was just said and need me to quickly explain it before we move on, press the red “**no**” button.
- If you have a new question, press the “**raise hand**” button.
- If you have a follow-up question, press the green “**yes**” button.
- If you like a point that someone made, press the “**clap**” button.
- Feel free to post your questions and observations to the chat.
- Feel free to respond to classmates through the chat.

There has been some debate as to whether instructors should require students to enable video during Zoom meetings. On the one hand, students are understandably concerned about their privacy. On the other hand, meetings without video are less engaging (visual cues benefit discussion and help build a sense of community) and less accessible (students who are deaf or hard of hearing may struggle to understand their classmates when they cannot see them).

While I have decided not to require it, I **strongly encourage** you to enable video during our Zoom meetings, unless your Internet speed does not support video or you have other strong reasons not to do so (I will not ask what those reasons are). Of course, it is okay to temporarily disable your video during a meeting (e.g., if you need to use the restroom, tend to a dependent, or move to a different room). You’re also welcome to wear whatever you want (so long as you’re clothed) and log in from whichever location is most comfortable for you (so long as it isn’t extremely noisy and you’re able to

talk). Finally, feel free to use whatever [Virtual Background](#) you like (so long as it isn't offensive or otherwise inappropriate for a college setting).

Students have the option to access computers from the ACCelerators, campus libraries, and open computer labs. Visit the following webpages for more information:

- <https://www.austincc.edu/students/learning-lab/student-computer-access>
- <https://www.austincc.edu/students/accelerator>
- <https://library.austincc.edu/loc/index.php>

Weekly Feedback

Feel free to use the following Google Form to supply me with (anonymous) feedback on a weekly basis: <https://forms.gle/pkifSoZRRLUy7NQ7>

COVID-19 Policies

This information does not have much relevance for online courses, but I have included it for those who plan to visit ACC facilities.

Beginning Monday, March 21, 2022, ACC will implement the following health and safety protocols on campus:

- Face masks will be *optional*.
- The college's Appian health screening app will remain available to everyone who visits campus. This continues to be a good way to check your own health before coming to class or work.
- Health Liaisons will continue to be available on campus.
- ACC will expand access to events and activities that are hosted by the college on our campuses and centers. This expansion allows the college and its departments and offices to invite internal and external guests to their events and activities. We continue to restrict access for external parties seeking to host activities at ACC.
- The process for requesting accommodations will continue. Any employee who has a qualifying medical condition or disability and needs to request an accommodation in order to complete their essential duties is encouraged to submit an ADA accommodation request. Information about the process, form, and related Administrative Rule can be found on our website.

I recommend that students carefully consider wearing a mask when inside an ACC facility. I also recommend that students learn how to wear a mask properly (if they choose to wear one at all).

How NOT to Wear a Mask



For more information on how to wear a mask properly, visit the following link for the CDC's most recent guide to masks: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>

Note that some types of masks provide more protection to the wearer than others. You can learn more here:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/types-of-masks.html>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/wirecutter/reviews/where-to-buy-n95-kn95-masks-online>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/wirecutter/blog/12-signs-you-have-a-fake-n95-kn95-or-kf94-mask>

If you have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 14 days; are exhibiting any symptoms of COVID-19; or been exposed to anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 14 days; stay home, contact your primary care provider, and complete ACC's COVID-19 self-report form. Upon receipt of the self-reporting form, the college may contact you to share further instructions about the best next steps for you. Visit the following webpage to access the form: https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?AustinCC&layout_id=124

Visit the following webpage for a convenient flowchart with COVID Instructions for ACC Students, Faculty, and Staff: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FSp7MLfL4Oh-4CZ8GYukKIF3j6GWv9y-/view>

Visit the following webpages for COVID-19 testing resources:

- <https://meds.tdem.texas.gov>
- <https://curative.com>
- https://www.walgreens.com/findcare/covid19/testing?ban̄covid_vanity_testing
- <https://www.cvs.com/minuteclinic/covid-19-testing>

ACC encourages anyone who is eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine to make time to do so. The college continues to host vaccination clinics on campus. To learn more, visit ACC's COVID-19 vaccination webpage: <https://www.austincc.edu/coronavirus/covid-19-vaccinations>

For ACC's latest updates and resources for students and employees to ensure the continued health, safety, and well-being of the ACC community during the COVID-19 pandemic, visit the following webpage: <https://www.austincc.edu/coronavirus>

Contacting Me / ACC Email Policy

I am happy to respond to emails to answer any questions you might have. I am also happy to discuss philosophy or even just have a casual chat during office hours. However, before asking questions concerning course material, assignments, or grades, double-check the syllabus to make sure that I haven't already answered them. Finally, while I will try my best to respond to emails in a timely manner, **I may not respond to emails received after 10:00 PM and/or over the weekend until the next business day.** If you do have assignment-related questions, contact me **at least three days in advance** of the assignment due date; in general, I will not respond to last-minute emails to answer assignment-related questions.

All College email communication to students will be sent solely to the student's ACCmail account, with the expectation that such communications will be read in a timely fashion. ACC will send important information and will notify students of any College-related emergencies using this account. **Students should only expect to receive email communication from their instructor using this**

account. Likewise, students should use their ACCmail account when communicating with instructors and staff. Information about ACC email accounts, including instructions for accessing it, are available at: <https://www.austincc.edu/help/accmail/questions-and-answers>

Course Materials

You are not required to purchase a textbook for this course. Instead, the readings for each week will be made available for download via Blackboard under “[Course Files](#)” or the corresponding [Weekly Checklist](#) from the left-hand menu. This course is meant to introduce you to competing positions on a wide range of issues in ethics. **As a result, it is a reading intensive course.** Many of the readings will also be dense and require multiple read-throughs to fully grasp. In some cases, we will only have time to focus on the big picture in class, leaving out some of the more subtle details for your personal reflection or to bring up during class discussions. The readings for each week are listed on the [Course Schedule](#) below.

Attendance Policy

In Spring 2022, I did not require attendance. I reasoned that since my students are adults, I should give them the freedom to decide whether or not to come to class. Many students still chose to come to class on a regular basis. But for some, my decision turned out to be disastrous. Since attendance was optional, they stopped coming to class, and their final grades suffered as a result.

This semester, I have decided to adopt a different approach. **Attendance is not mandatory, but there will be several class activities on Zoom throughout the semester.** These are worth a total of 14% of your final grade, and in order to complete them, you need to attend the Zoom meetings regularly. If you are going to come to a Zoom meeting, you are expected to show up **on time** and stay for the entirety of the meeting (except to avoid extreme distress—see [Content Advisory](#) below). If you show up to class extremely late, you will receive a warning, and future offenses will result in a 10% reduction of your grade for the Class Activities grade category.

Note that I am required to certify attendance on Wednesday, September 7. So, you should definitely make an effort to attend the Zoom meetings during the first two weeks of the semester. You can learn more about ACC’s attendance certification policy by visiting the following webpage: <https://www.austincc.edu/facstaff/attendance-certification-questions-and-answers>

Assignments & Grading

Note that major written assignments will be graded anonymously. This is meant to help mitigate the effects of potential [implicit bias](#).

PERUSALL ASSIGNMENTS – 20 points

- Beginning on Week 3, you will complete reading assignments every week through [Perusall](#), a social learning platform that allows students to interact and discuss course materials online. Detailed [instructions](#) are on Blackboard.
- Perusall is calibrated to automatically score students’ submissions as either pass (1 point) or fail (0 points). In most cases, students won’t have a problem with this. However, if you wish to challenge one of your automatic scores, you must email me **within 48 hours of receiving your grade** to explain your concerns so that I can check your submission and consider adjusting your score.
- Each Perusall assignment is worth 1 point, or 1% of your final grade. This may seem insignificant. However, these assignments add up to a significant total of 20 points, or 20% of your final grade.
- There will be twenty-four Perusall assignments throughout the semester. As a result, it is possible to miss four of them and yet still earn the full 20 points for this grade category. Students who pass

all twenty-four Perusall assignments will receive 4 points of extra credit toward their final grade.

SURVEYS AND DISCUSSION – 16 points

- Throughout the semester, you will complete three surveys: an Entry Survey, a Mid-Semester Survey, and an Exit Survey (1 point each). You will also complete six Discussion Board assignments through Blackboard (2 points each for the first five and 3 points for the sixth). Most of these will be graded for completion.
- Taken together, these assignments are worth a total of **16 points**, or 16% of your final grade.

CLASS ACTIVITIES – 14 points

- To incentivize you all to show up to and participate in the Zoom meetings, I will administer several graded class activities throughout the semester. In order to complete all of them, you will need to attend the Zoom meetings regularly. I will announce some of these activities a class or two in advance so that students have an opportunity to prepare for them before completing them through Zoom, but most of them will be unannounced.
- Taken together, these assignments are worth a total of **14 points**, or 14% of your final grade.
- There will be two extra class activities. As a result, it is possible to miss two graded class activities and yet still earn the full 14 points for this grade category. Students who pass all of the class activities will receive 4 points of extra credit toward their final grade.

FIND-A-FLAW / AITA ASSIGNMENT – 15 points

- The question “Am I an asshole?” appears to be a moral question that is arguably traceable back to at least Aristotle, who would have put it like this: “Am I a virtuous person, or am I a vicious person?” Sometimes we argue about whether someone is, in fact, an asshole.
- As will become clear during the first week of class, there are only two ways to rationally undermine an argument. One of them is to find some flaw in the reasoning. For this assignment, you will apply this skill by preparing and recording a presentation in which you summarize an argument for an ethical conclusion and then explain why the reasoning behind that argument is flawed. You will find your target argument on the subreddit [Am I the Asshole? \(AITA\)](#).
- This is meant to be a fun opportunity for you to apply the concepts and skills from this course outside of the classroom. I will provide more information about the assignment during Week 2.
- Students who prefer to present to an audience will have the option to deliver their presentation live on Zoom outside of class hours. Students who prefer to avoid presentations will have the option to complete this assignment in a writing format, but to take advantage of this option, they will need to get my approval by a specific deadline.
- The assignment will be worth a total of **15 points**, or 15% of your final grade.

FOUR PART PAPER PROPOSAL / PAPER – 35 points

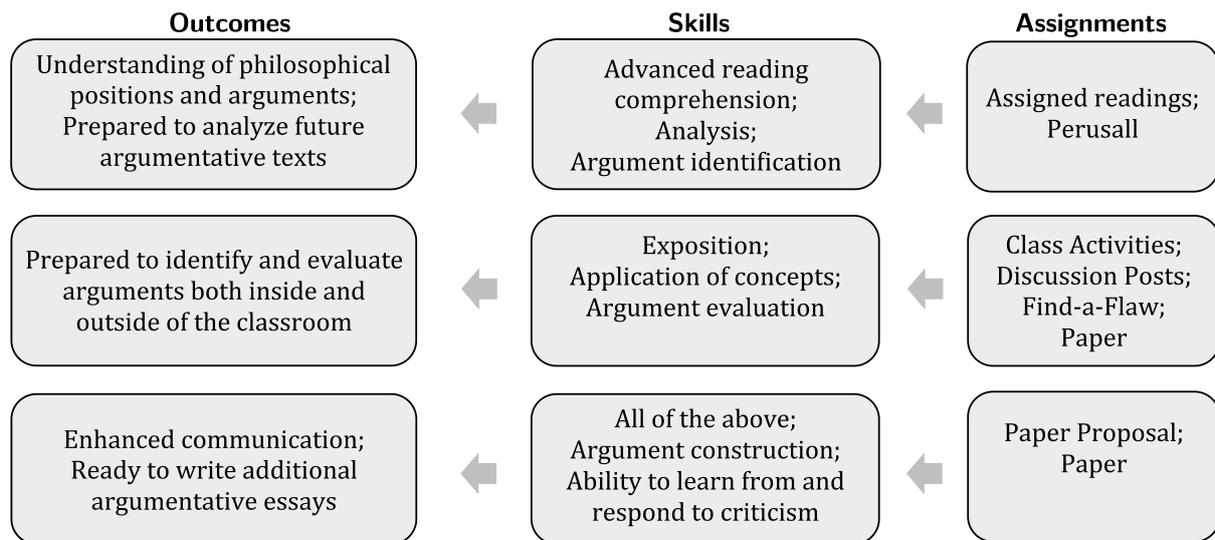
Instead of taking a final exam, you will write a **1,600–2,000 word** paper (roughly 6–8 double-spaced pages) in response to a preassigned prompt. The [prompts and corresponding reading materials](#) are already available on Blackboard. You will complete your paper in two or three stages:

1. You will pick a prompt and then write a Four Part Paper Proposal. This will involve filling in the blanks in the following four incomplete sentences: (i) “The author argues for [blank] by [blank]”; (ii) “I maintain that [blank] because [blank]”; (iii) “The best objection to my thesis or argument is [blank]”; (iv) “I reply to this objection by arguing [blank].” This assignment is worth **15 points**, or 15% of your final grade, but will be graded as Pass (15 points), Half-Credit (7.5 points), or Fail (0 points). I will provide detailed feedback on these submissions. Students who receive Half-Credit may revise their submission for the chance to receive a Pass. However, to take advantage of this

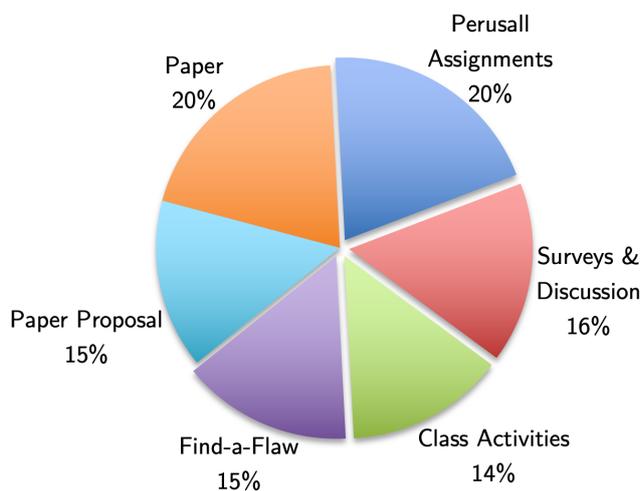
privilege, students must contact me within 24 hours of receiving their grade, schedule a meeting to discuss their assignment, and then revise and resubmit their assignment **within 48 hours** of our meeting.

2. If you choose to do so, you may submit a draft of your paper for preliminary grading and feedback with the option to revise and resubmit for regrading. Tuesday, November 8 at 11:59 PM is the current hard deadline for taking advantage of this option. I strongly recommend doing this.
3. You will submit a final draft of your paper for final grading at the end of the semester. Your final draft is worth **20 points**, or 20% of your final grade. I will not provide feedback on final drafts.

COURSE OBJECTIVES



GRADE DISTRIBUTION



GRADE SCALE

100.0–90.0	= A
89.9–80.0	= B
79.9–70.0	= C
69.9–60.0	= D
59.9–0.0	= F

GRADE CALCULATOR

You can access a Grade Calculator from the left-hand menu on Blackboard (beneath “My Grades”) or by clicking [here](#). Click “Use Template” to copy the file to your Google Sheets account. Enter the points for the assignments you’ve already completed. Next, enter different numbers for the remaining assignments to figure out the minimum scores you need to earn a specific final grade.

GRADE CUTOFFS

To get an A, you must earn a 90.0 or up. In other words, even an 89.9 is insufficient for an A. And so on for the other letter grades. However, in exceptional cases, I may choose to round up borderline grades. Such cases may include (but are not limited to): you actively participated in class and frequently visited virtual office hours to discuss the readings and course content; you received poor grades early in the semester but demonstrated noticeable improvements later in the semester; your grade is not due to excessive absences or failed assignments; and/or I feel you've done better or worked harder than your score suggests. This is a courtesy, not an entitlement.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Each student is allotted a total of **96 "late hours"** to use on most assignments. These allow students to submit a given assignment up to 96 hours after an assignment deadline without penalty and without independent excuse. For example, you might spend all 96 of your allotted late hours by submitting your Paper Proposal 96 hours late without penalty; or you might spend half of your allotted late hours on your Find-a-Flaw assignment by submitting it 48 hours late without penalty and then spend the remainder of your allotted late hours on your Paper Proposal by submitting it up to 48 hours late without penalty; and so on. **This policy does not apply to surveys, class activities, or any assignments due the final week of class.**

In order to take advantage of this policy, **students must include a note with their assignment submission indicating how many allotted late hours they have left and how many they're spending on their late submission. Otherwise, I will simply assume that the assignment is late and apply a grade reduction.** Since the future is often hard to predict, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, I strongly encourage students to save their allotted late hours for major assignments that are worth a significant portion of their final grade.

If a student fails to inform me that they wish to use their late hours on an assignment or they have no late hours left to use, then their failure to meet an assignment deadline will result in a 25% grade reduction (or in the case of Pass/Half-credit/Fail or a completion grade, a drop to the next lowest score) from the assignment per 24 hours late. Late submissions due to extenuating circumstances (e.g., serious illness or unforeseen emergency) will be handled on a case-by-case basis, but you must provide me with proper documentation (e.g., a doctor's note). I reserve the right to cap grade reductions on late submissions at a certain number on a case-by-case basis, but in general, students should expect a grade reduction per 24 hours late, which may result in a 0 for the late submission.

INCOMPLETES

I will approve requests for an Incomplete grade (grade of "I") only in extenuating circumstances and with proper documentation corroborating a student's claim to be in such a circumstance. In order to be eligible for an Incomplete, students must have completed at least 60% of their assignments by the corresponding deadlines. They'll also need to contact me as soon as they suspect that their circumstances warrant an Incomplete. In other words, if a student stops participating in the course, drops communication with me, and then decides to request an Incomplete at the end of the semester, I will deny their request.

Eligible students must follow the following process in order to receive an Incomplete:

1. Prior to the end of the Fall 2022 semester, the student must meet with me to determine the assignments that must be completed prior to the deadline date and to discuss the details of the [Report of Incomplete Grade](#) form.
2. I will complete the form (including all requirements to complete the course and the due date), sign it (by typing in name), and email it to the student. The student will then complete their section,

sign it (by typing in name), return the completed form to me, and email me to acknowledge the terms of the form. I will email the fully completed form to the the department chair.

3. The student must complete all remaining work by the date specified on the above form. I will determine this date in collaboration with the student, but it may not be later than the final withdrawal deadline in the subsequent long semester (April 24, 2023).
4. Students will retain access to the course Blackboard page through the subsequent semester in order to submit work and complete the course. Students will be able to log on to Blackboard and have access to the course section materials, assignments, and grades from the course and semester in which the Incomplete was awarded.
5. When the student completes the required work by the Incomplete deadline, I will submit an electronic Grade Change Form to change the student's performance grade from an "I" to the earned grade of A, B, C, D, or F.

If an Incomplete is not resolved by the deadline, the grade automatically converts to an "F." Approval to carry an Incomplete for longer than the following semester or session deadline is not frequently granted.

WITHDRAWALS

It is the responsibility of each student to ensure that their name is removed from the rolls should they decide to withdraw from the class. However, I reserve the right to drop a student should I feel it is necessary. If a student decides to withdraw, they should also verify that the withdrawal is recorded before the Final Withdrawal Date. **The Final Withdrawal Date for this semester is Thursday, November 17.** The student is also strongly encouraged to keep any paperwork in case a problem arises.

Students are responsible for understanding the impact that withdrawal from a course may have on their financial aid, veterans' benefits, and international student status. Per state law, students enrolling for the first time in Fall 2007 or later at any public Texas college or university may not withdraw (receive a W) from more than six courses during their undergraduate college education. Some exemptions for good cause could allow a student to withdraw from a course without having it count toward this limit. Students are strongly encouraged to meet with an advisor when making decisions about course selection, course loads, and course withdrawals.

Academic Integrity

Austin Community College values academic integrity in the educational process. Acts of academic dishonesty/misconduct undermine the learning process, present a disadvantage to students who earn credit honestly, and subvert the academic mission of the institution. The potential consequences of fraudulent credentials raise additional concerns for individuals and communities beyond campus who rely on institutions of higher learning to certify students' academic achievements, and expect to benefit from the claimed knowledge and skills of their graduates. Students must follow all instructions given by faculty or designated college representatives when taking examinations, placement assessments, tests, quizzes, and evaluations. Actions constituting scholastic dishonesty include but are not limited to: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, collusion, falsifying documents, or the inappropriate use of the College's information technology resources.

For the purposes of this course, academic misconduct includes: submitting plagiarized work for an academic assignment or requirement; serving as, or enlisting the assistance of, a substitute for a student in any assignment, quiz, or course requirement; or co-authoring with a classmate for a writing assignment without my prior permission. **Students may plagiarize without realizing it. If you are unsure what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, I strongly encourage you to meet with me.**

All members of the College community are bound to report suspected violations of academic dishonesty to a college official, such as the instructor, department chair, instructional dean, or the campus Dean of Student Affairs (formerly Dean of Student Services). If the complaint is received by an official other than the instructor, the official who receives the complaint should forward the complaint to the instructor as soon as possible.

Instructors will thoroughly investigate all suspicious submissions. When an instructor suspects or witnesses a violation of academic integrity, or receives a report of an alleged violation, the instructor shall notify the department chair, and meet privately and individually with the accused student(s) to discuss the allegations and review the supporting evidence. The student may not withdraw from the course or the College during the disciplinary review process.

For more information on ACC's Academic Integrity Process, visit the following webpage: <https://www.austincc.edu/about-acc/academic-integrity-and-disciplinary-process>

Content Advisory

Throughout the semester, we will explore a number of controversial ethical issues. You may have a personal connection to some of these issues, and certain positions on these issues may conflict with your deepest held beliefs and values. I will also show a number of video clips throughout the semester to illustrate certain philosophical concepts and issues. Some students may find some of this content to be disturbing or offensive. These uncomfortable experiences can be valuable components of a student's education. As artist Edward Gorey put it, "I think we should all be as uneasy as possible, because that's what the world is like." However, when a student is already overcoming past trauma, these experiences can also be harmful. While I am not easily disturbed or offended, I will try my best to warn students about potentially disturbing or offensive material in advance. But if you suspect that a specific assigned reading or class meeting is likely to be emotionally challenging for you, I'm happy to discuss the situation with you in advance so that we can find a solution that works best for you. If at any time you feel extremely distressed by a classroom topic or discussion, feel free to leave the Zoom room until you are ready to continue with the class meeting.

Student Accessibility Services

Austin Community College (ACC) is committed to providing a supportive, accessible, and inclusive learning environment for all students. Each campus offers support services for students with documented disabilities. Students with disabilities who need classroom, academic or other accommodations must request them through Student Accessibility Services (SAS).

Students are encouraged to request accommodations when they register for courses or at least three weeks before the start of each semester they are enrolled, otherwise the provision of accommodations may be delayed. Students who have received approval for accommodations from SAS for this course must provide the instructor with the legal document titled "Notice of Approved Accommodations (NAA)" from SAS.

Until the instructor receives the NAA from the student accommodations should not be provided. Once the NAA is received, accommodations must be provided. Accommodations are not retroactive, so it is in the student's best interest to deliver the NAA on the first day of class.

I understand that some students might be reluctant to request or take advantage of approved accommodations, but keep in mind that they exist to ensure that students are afforded equal educational opportunities. In general, I am committed to ensuring that students get the most out of this course; providing all the appropriate accommodations is an important part of that. While no student is required to personally discuss the details of their disability with me, I strongly encourage

students to meet with me the first week of class to discuss what I can do to ensure that their learning needs are met in this course. For example, for students who are entitled to extra time on assignments, we can discuss extensions. We can also discuss options for keeping your accommodations private.

Contact SAS@austincc.edu for more information.

Mental Health

College can be extremely stressful, not only academically but also socially, emotionally, and physically. Mental health counseling services are available throughout the ACC Student Services District to address personal and/or mental health concerns. Visit the following webpage for more information: <https://www.austincc.edu/students/counseling>

Senate Bill 212 and Title IX Reporting Requirements

Under Senate Bill 212 (SB 212), the faculty and all College employees are required to report any information concerning incidents of **sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking** committed by or against an ACC student or employee. Federal Title IX law and College policy require reporting incidents of **sex- and gender-based discrimination and sexual misconduct**. **This means faculty and non-clinical counseling staff cannot keep confidential information about any such incidents that you share with them.**

Pregnant and parenting students are also protected from discrimination and guaranteed equal educational opportunities under Title IX; they can contact the ACC Compliance Office to learn more about their rights as pregnant or parenting students.

If you would like to talk with someone confidentiality, please contact the District Clinical Counseling Team who can connect you with a clinical counselor on any ACC campus: (512) 223-2616, or to schedule online: <https://www.austincc.edu/students/counseling>

While students are not required to report, they are encouraged to contact the Compliance Office for resources and options: Charlene Buckley, District Title IX Officer, (512) 223-7964, compliance@austincc.edu

If a student makes a report to a faculty member, the faculty member will contact the District Title IX Officer for follow-up.

Names & Pronouns

I once asked Derek Parfit, a renowned and [saintly philosopher who passed away in 2017](#), to sign his book for me. Even though I was in Parfit's class and had interacted with him for months, he responded, "Sure! But you shall have to remind me of your name, because I simply cannot remember them. I much wish people would consider names like they do phone numbers—no one would fault you for not remembering their phone number." I later told this story to [Ruth Chang](#), a philosopher at Rutgers University, and she told me that, despite knowing Parfit for years, he still had no idea what her name is.

I may not be as bad as Parfit, but I am very bad with names, in terms of both pronouncing them and remembering them. Having said that, I recognize that this is no excuse, and I will make my best effort to remember and properly pronounce your name.

Note that I go by "Zach" and use "he/him" pronouns in English. I encourage you all to edit your Zoom profile to display the name and pronouns that you use ([instructions included above](#)). I always appreciate information on how to properly pronounce names.

Academic Support

This is a writing intensive course, because philosophy is a writing intensive discipline. I am here to help you all become better writers. But if you need extra help, ACC offers academic support services on all of its campuses. These services, which include online tutoring, academic coaching, and supplemental instruction, are free to enrolled ACC students. Tutors are available in a variety of subjects ranging from accounting to pharmacology. Students may receive these services on both a drop-in and referral basis.

An online tutor request can be made here: <https://instruction.austincc.edu/students/online-tutoring-request>

Additional tutoring information can be found here: <https://www.austincc.edu/students/tutoring/online>

I may include recommendations for specific tutors on the Blackboard course site.

Problem Resolution

If you are having a problem related to this course or related to me as your professor, your first step generally should be to speak with your professor. If I cannot resolve the problem or satisfy your concern, or, if for some reason you would prefer not to address the issue with your professor, you may contact the Chair of the Department, Grant Potts, for help. Email: gpotts@austincc.edu. Office: HLC 4.2310.36. Phone: 512-223-7153.

Other College Policies

For the complete list of ACC's College Policies, visit the following webpage: <https://www.austincc.edu/offices/academic-outcomes-assessment/master-syllabi/college-policies>

Additional Resources

Philosophy Department:	https://liberalarts.austincc.edu/philosophy-religion-humanities
ACC Philosophy Club:	https://philosophyclubacc.wixsite.com
ACC Library Resources:	https://library.austincc.edu
ACC movie streaming:	https://austincc.kanopy.com
Philosophy resources:	https://philpapers.org http://www.iep.utm.edu http://plato.stanford.edu http://philosophy.hku.hk/think https://aeon.co/philosophy https://www.wi-phi.com https://www.youtube.com/c/thephilosophytube https://www.closetotruth.com https://www.apaonline.org
Philosophy news & events:	https://dailynous.com https://philevents.org
Philosophy podcasts:	https://hiphination.org https://philosophybites.com https://anchor.fm/kieran-setiya https://www.youtube.com/c/MindChat
Philosophy humor:	https://existentialcomics.com https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3rtDR2yLuVfaIFDKIp9KCQ

Course Schedule (subject to revision!)		
WEEK/UNIT	READING	DEADLINES/NOTES
Week 1 (Aug. 22–26) Tools of the trade – ARGUMENTS – NECESSARY & SUFFICIENT CONDITIONS	Howell and Kemp, “Introducing Arguments” John Corvino on the Principle of Charity (2-minute YouTube video)	Due: Introduction and Entry survey
Week 2 (Aug. 29–Sept. 2) – DEDUCTIVE ARGUMENTS – INDUCTIVE / ABDUCTIVE ARGUMENTS	Lau, “Valid and Sound Arguments” Lau, “Inductive Reasoning”	
Week 3 (Sept. 5–9) – EPISTEMIC BUBBLES & ECHO CHAMBERS	Pryor, “Guidelines on Reading Philosophy” Nguyen, “Why it’s as hard to escape an echo chamber as it is to flee a cult”	Mon., Sept. 5: Labor Day Holiday (College closed) Wed., Sept. 7: Deadline to certify attendance Due: Perusall assignments
Week 4 (Sept. 12–16) Metaethics – DIVINE COMMAND THEORY & THE EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA – MORAL REALISM	Handout on identity Excerpt from Plato’s <i>Euthyphro</i> Enoch, “Why I Am an Objectivist about Ethics (And Why You Are, Too)” (pp. 192–200)	Mon., Sept. 9: Last day to request 70 percent refund for fall 16-week session Due: Perusall assignments
Week 5 (Sept. 19–23) – MORAL REALISM (CONT.) – MORAL NATURALISM VS. NON-NATURALISM – MORAL RELATIVISM	Excerpts on moral realism from Schafer-Landau and Smith Boghossian, “The Maze of Moral Relativism”	Mon., Sept. 19: Last day to request 25 percent refund for fall 16-week session; no refund after this date Due: Perusall assignments; Find-a-Flaw / AITA Assignment
Week 6 (Sept. 26–30) – MORAL ERROR THEORY AND FICTIONALISM – EMOTIVISM	Excerpt from Mackie’s <i>Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong</i> Streumer, “The Unbelievable Truth About Morality” Excerpt from Ayer’s <i>Language, Truth, and Logic</i>	Due: Perusall assignments; Discussion Assignment 1
Week 7 (Oct. 3–7) Normative ethics – MORAL EPISTEMOLOGY & ETHICAL THEORY-BUILDING – CONSEQUENTIALISM	McMahan, “Moral Intuition” (pp. 103–15) Kagan, “Moral Methodology” Excerpts from Schafer-Landau and Mill on utilitarianism Excerpts from Nozick’s <i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i> on the experience machine	Due: Perusall assignments
Week 8 (Oct. 10–14) – DEONTOLOGY – THE THEORY OF PRIMA FACIE DUTIES – MORAL PARTICULARISM	Excerpts from Schafer-Landau, Kant, and Nozick on deontological ethics Dancy, “An Ethic of Prima Facie Duties”	Due: Perusall assignments; Mid-Semester Survey; Discussion Assignment 2

Course Schedule (continued)		
WEEK/UNIT	READING	DEADLINES/NOTES
Week 9 (Oct. 17–21) Applied ethics – THE CONCEPT OF SPECIESISM – ARGUMENTS FOR & AGAINST ETHICAL VEGANISM – CONSUMER ETHICS	Shelly Kagan on Speciesism (Philosophy Bites podcast) McPherson, “Why I Am a Vegan (and You Should Be One Too)” Budolfson, “Consumer Ethics, Food Ethics, and Beyond”	Due: Perusal assignments; Four Part Paper Proposal
Week 10 (Oct. 24–28) – ABORTION & MORAL STATUS	Pruss, “I Was Once a Fetus: That Is Why Abortion Is Wrong” (pp. 19–31) Jeff McMahan on Moral Status (Philosophy Bites podcast)	Due: Perusal assignments; Discussion Assignment 3
Week 11 (Oct. 31–Nov. 1) – ABORTION & BODILY RIGHTS	Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”	Due: Perusal assignments
Week 12 (Nov. 7–11) – NORMATIVE ISSUES OF PROCREATION – ANTI-NATALISM	Overall, “Think Before You Breed” Benatar, “Kids? Just say no!”	Fri., Nov. 11: Veterans Day Holiday (College closed) Due: Perusal assignments; Discussion Assignment 4; hard deadline to submit a draft of your paper for preliminary grading and feedback with the option to revise and resubmit for regrading.
Week 13 (Nov. 14–18) – OBLIGATIONS TO THE POOR	Singer, “Famine, Affluence and Morality” Timmerman, “Sometimes there is nothing wrong with letting a child drown”	Thur., Nov. 17: Last day to withdraw from fall semester 16-week, 14-week, and 12-week sessions Due: Perusal assignments; Discussion Assignment 5
Week 14 (Nov. 21–25)	This class won’t meet on Tuesday or Thursday. Take a break!	Thurs., Nov. 24 – Sun., Nov. 27: Thanksgiving Holiday (College closed)
Week 15 (Nov. 28–Dec. 2) – CONSENT, COERCION, AND DECEPTION	Dougherty, “Sex, Lies, and Consent”	Due: Perusal assignments
Week 16 (Dec. 5–9)	TBD	Due: Exit Survey; Discussion Assignment 6; Paper

The Mind–Body Problem

[semester]

[meeting times]

Zach Blaes (instructor)

zach.blaesi@austincc.edu

[office address]

[office hours]

Course Description

Recall the last time you stubbed your bare toe on a piece of furniture. Millions of insentient neurons came together to generate the subjective feeling of a sharp flash of pain in your foot—*and it hurt!* But how could that be? In 1896, English biologist Thomas Henry Huxley wrote, “[H]ow it is that anything so remarkable as a state of consciousness comes about as a result of irritating nervous tissue, is just as unaccountable as the appearance of the djinn when Aladdin rubbed his lamp.” Many philosophers and scientists agree that consciousness is a mystery. But in what sense is consciousness a mystery, and if it is, how do we solve it?

In this course, we will aim to make progress on these questions by exploring some influential positions on the place of consciousness in the physical world. Along the way, we will consider issues such as the following: What is consciousness? Is consciousness a physical phenomenon? What can the empirical sciences tell us about consciousness? Do our conscious experiences ever cause our behavior? Or are our conscious experiences mere “epiphenomena,” which are correlated with causes of our behavior but that have no causal powers of their own? Are electrons conscious? How might thought experiments involving zombies or a brilliant color scientist trapped inside a black-and-white room help us answer these questions?

We will also work toward cultivating a number of practical philosophical skills, such as:

- Understanding and expositing philosophical positions
- Critically evaluating arguments and viewpoints
- Assessing the philosophical significance of scientific research
- Communicating complex ideas in a clear and economical manner
- Presenting works-in-progress in a way that stimulates discussion and generates constructive feedback

Course Materials

You are not required to purchase a textbook for this course. Instead, the readings for each week will be made available for download via Canvas under “Course Files” or the corresponding “Weekly Checklist” from the left-hand menu. This course is meant to introduce you to competing positions on a wide range of issues in the philosophy of mind. **As a result, it is a reading intensive course.** Many of the readings will also be dense and require multiple read-throughs to fully grasp. In some cases, we will only have time to focus on the big picture in class, leaving out some of the more subtle details for your personal reflection or to bring up during class discussions.

Instructional Methodology

For most of our class meetings, I will deliver structured PowerPoint lectures on the course content. However, there will be several opportunities for student interaction through polling, Q&A, class discussion, and group activities. For example, we will occasionally work on in-class “think/pair/share” activities for which we will reflect or write on a prompt in private before sharing our thoughts in small groups and then having a larger classroom discussion.

To facilitate in-class reflection and discussion, I'm currently planning to use [Poll Everywhere](#). This software is free, but you will need to bring a laptop, tablet, or smart phone to class to use it. Students who do not have access to a suitable electronic device during class will have the option to participate by writing on paper. Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with Poll Everywhere in advance by watching the following YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFrBVKgcS68>

Assignments & Grading

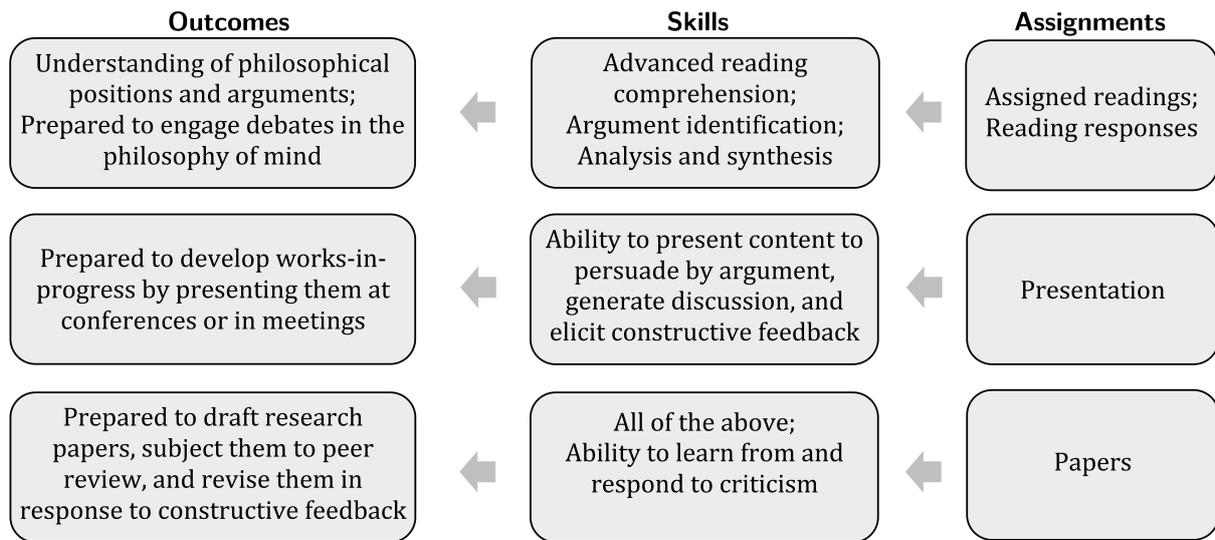
READING RESPONSES

- The course is divided into several units. You are required to submit one reading response per unit until you have completed a total of 5.
- Each reading response should be **500–700 words** in length (roughly one single-spaced page) and is worth **2%** of your final grade. However, they will be graded as Pass, Half-credit, or Fail.
- To receive credit, you must post your response to the corresponding discussion board thread on Canvas no later than 5:00 PM two days before the lecture for the assigned reading discussed in your assignment. For example, if you wrote on a reading assigned for Wednesday, September 7, you should upload your assignment no later than 5:00 PM on Monday, September 5.
- Everyone is encouraged to read and respond to each other's submissions prior to class. I may reference them during class discussions and invite students to discuss their submissions in class.

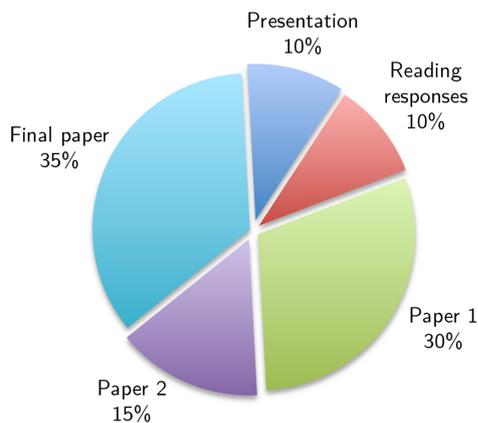
PAPERS & PRESENTATION

- You will write a total of three papers throughout the semester in response to pre-assigned prompts. The prompts (together with a grading rubric) will be administered through Canvas and discussed in class.
- Papers 1 and 2 should be **1,500–1,800 words** in length (roughly 5–6 double-spaced pages).
- You will complete Paper 1 in two stages by (i) writing and submitting a rough draft for feedback and grading and (ii) revising and resubmitting your paper as a final draft together with a cover letter explaining where, how, and why you revised it. You are required to revise your paper even if you receive an A on the rough draft. The final draft will be held to a higher standard than the rough draft. Each stage is worth **15%** of your final grade.
- You will write and submit Paper 2 in one stage for final grading. Feedback will be available upon request during office hours. Paper 2 is worth **15%** of your final grade.
- During Week 14, you will give a **7–10 minute presentation** in which you will introduce the central thesis of your final paper and discuss how you plan to support it. Your classmates and I will provide you with constructive feedback during a Q&A period. The presentation is worth **10%** of your final grade.
- Your final paper should be **2,000–2,500 words** in length (roughly 7–10 double-spaced pages). It is worth **35%** of your final grade.

COURSE OBJECTIVES



GRADE DISTRIBUTION



GRADE SCALE

100.0–93.0	= A
92.9–90.0	= A–
89.9–87.0	= B+
86.9–83.0	= B
82.9–80.0	= B–
79.9–77.0	= C+
76.9–73.0	= C
72.9–70.0	= C–
69.9–67.0	= D+
66.9–63.0	= D
62.9–60.0	= D–
59.9–0.0	= F

GRADE CALCULATOR

You can access a Grade Calculator from the left-hand menu on Canvas. Click “Use Template” to copy the file to your Google Sheets account. Enter the points for the assignments you’ve already completed. Next, enter different numbers for the remaining assignments to figure out the minimum scores you need to earn a specific final grade.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Each student is allotted a total of **96 “late hours”** to use on most assignments. These allow students to submit a given assignment up to 96 hours after an assignment deadline without penalty and without independent excuse. For example, you might spend all 96 of your allotted late hours by submitting your first paper 96 hours late without penalty; or you might spend half of your allotted late hours on Paper 1 by submitting it 48 hours late without penalty and then spend the remainder of your allotted late hours on Paper 2 by submitting it up to 48 hours late without penalty; and so on. **This policy does not apply to your Final Paper Presentation or assignments due the final week of class.**

In order to take advantage of this policy, **students must include a note with their assignment submission indicating how many allotted late hours they have left and how many they’re spending on their late submission. Otherwise, I will simply assume that the assignment is**

late and apply a grade reduction. Since the future is often hard to predict, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, I strongly encourage students to save their allotted late hours for major assignments that are worth a significant portion of their final grade.

If a student fails to inform me that they wish to use their late hours on an assignment or they have no late hours left to use, then their failure to meet an assignment deadline will result in a 25% grade reduction (or in the case of Pass/Half-credit/Fail or a completion grade, a drop to the next lowest score) from the assignment per 24 hours late. Late submissions due to extenuating circumstances (e.g., serious illness or unforeseen emergency) will be handled on a case-by-case basis, but you must provide me with proper documentation (e.g., a doctor's note). I reserve the right to cap grade reductions on late submissions at a certain number on a case-by-case basis, but in general, students should expect a grade reduction per 24 hours late, which may result in a 0 for the late submission.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Any assignment that exhibits plagiarism or any form of academic dishonesty whatsoever will be given an automatic 0, and the student will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students. **For the purposes of this course, co-authoring with or copying from a classmate counts as academic dishonesty.** Students who are uncertain as to what constitutes academic dishonesty are encouraged to meet with me. **All suspicious submissions will be thoroughly investigated.**

For general information on plagiarism, visit the following webpage:

<http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/learningmodules/plagiarism>

Expectations

In this course, you are expected to:

- be responsible for your own education by completing the required readings, keeping track of your assignment deadlines and grades, requesting outside help when you need it, and not waiting until the last minute to ask assignment-related questions;
- be on time and stay for the entirety of each class meeting (except to maintain one's health or avoid extreme distress—see [Content Advisory](#) below);
- prepare yourself to demonstrate your understanding of the course content, ask questions, move into groups, and/or participate in classroom discussions and activities;
- show respect to your instructor and classmates;
- and be sensitive to the viewpoints and experiences of your peers.

Content Advisory

Throughout the semester, we will explore a number of controversial issues in the philosophy of mind. You may have a personal connection to some of these issues, and certain positions on these issues may conflict with your deepest held beliefs and values. I will also show a number of video clips throughout the semester to illustrate certain philosophical concepts and issues. Some students may find some of this content to be disturbing or offensive. These uncomfortable experiences can be valuable components of a student's education. As artist Edward Gorey put it, "I think we should all be as uneasy as possible, because that's what the world is like." However, when a student is already overcoming past trauma, these experiences can also be harmful. While I am not easily disturbed or offended, I will try my best to warn students about potentially disturbing or offensive material in advance. But if you suspect that a specific assigned reading or class meeting is likely to be emotionally challenging for you, I'm happy to discuss the situation with you in advance so that we can find a

solution that works best for you. If at any time you feel extremely distressed by a classroom topic or discussion, feel free to leave the Zoom room until you are ready to continue with the class meeting.

Policy on Electronic Devices

Students are **prohibited** from using electronic devices in class, **except** for the purposes of taking notes or to participate in a classroom activity for which I've given students permission to use electronic devices. I will be watching. **If you are caught using electronic devices for any purpose other than taking notes or completing in-class activities, you will receive a warning, and future offenses will result in a 10% reduction of your final grade in the course.**

Note that there is empirical evidence that laptops, tablets, and other electronic devices are not effective learning tools in the classroom (see <https://tinyurl.com/y8puxjl4>). More importantly, the point of this class is not to memorize a bunch of information for exams, but rather to critically engage with the material and enter into philosophical dialogues. So, rather than attempting to copy down everything I say verbatim, you should instead ready yourself to ask questions, draw connections, and share your thoughts.

Contacting Me

I am happy to respond to emails to answer any questions you might have. I am also happy to discuss philosophy or even just have a casual chat during office hours. However, before asking questions concerning course material, assignments, or grades, double-check the syllabus to make sure that I haven't already answered them. Finally, while I will try my best to respond to emails in a timely manner, **I may not respond to emails received after 10:00 PM and/or over the weekend until the next business day.** If you do have assignment-related questions, contact me **at least three days in advance** of the assignment due date; in general, I will not respond to last-minute emails to answer assignment-related questions.

Special Accommodations

Accommodations need to be formally approved by the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), and students with accommodations will need to provide me with a letter of verification from the SSD. While no student is required to provide me with any details concerning their disability, students are encouraged to meet with me the first week of class to discuss what I can do to ensure that their learning needs are met throughout the semester. For example, for students who are entitled to extra time on assignments/exams or who anticipate that their disability may cause them to miss a number of classes, I am happy to discuss the possibility of extensions and/or strategies for staying up to date with the course. We can also discuss options for keeping your accommodations private. I understand that some students might be reluctant to take advantage of these accommodations, but please keep in mind that they exist to ensure that students are afforded equal educational opportunities. In general, I am committed to ensuring that students get the most out of this course; providing all the appropriate accommodations is an important part of that.

For information on UT Austin's guidelines for students with disabilities and accommodations, visit the following webpage: <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/accommodations-and-services>

Mental Health

College can be extremely stressful, not only academically but also socially, emotionally, and physically. The UT Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) has a number of resources designed to help you cope with these stresses, from groups, classes, and workshops to short-term individual counseling.

You can learn more about these resources by visiting the CMHC's website: <https://cmhc.utexas.edu>

Title IX

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is a federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education. Prohibited conduct includes sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual misconduct, relationship (dating or domestic) violence, and/or stalking. Pregnant and parenting students are also protected from discrimination and guaranteed equal educational opportunities under Title IX; it is advised that they contact a Title IX coordinator (titleix@austin.utexas.edu) to learn more about their rights as pregnant or parenting students. As a Responsible Employee of UT Austin, I am required to support any individual who comes to me to report an alleged violation of the Title IX policy, offer that individual options and resources, and accurately report the alleged misconduct to the correct people in a timely fashion. Students can also report possible misconduct directly to Title IX Training and Investigations, either online, in person, or by phone.

For more information on Title IX or to report possible misconduct, please visit the following website: <https://titleix.utexas.edu>

Names & Pronouns

I once asked Derek Parfit, a renowned and [saintly](#) philosopher [who passed away in 2017](#), to sign his book for me. Even though I was in Parfit's class and had interacted with him for months, he responded, "Sure! But you shall have to remind me of your name, because I simply cannot remember them. I much wish people would consider names like they do phone numbers—no one would fault you for not remembering their phone number." I later told this story to [Ruth Chang](#), a philosopher at Rutgers University, and she told me that, despite knowing Parfit for years, he still had no idea what her name is.

I may not be as bad as Parfit, but I am very bad with names, in terms of both pronouncing them and remembering them. Having said that, I recognize that this is no excuse, and I will make my best effort to remember and properly pronounce your name.

Note that I go by "Zach" and use "he/him" pronouns in English. I encourage you all to meet with me the first week of class to let me know how the other students and I should refer to you—for example, by a nickname or specific gender pronouns. I also appreciate information on how to properly pronounce names. I will be sure to make note of this information to ensure that it is respected in class. I will independently ask everyone to provide this information for an icebreaker activity during the first week of class.

Additional Resources

Philosophy Undergrad Advising:	https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/philosophy/undergraduate-program
Center for Teaching & Learning:	http://ctl.utexas.edu
Division of Student Affairs:	http://www.utexas.edu/students
UT's guidelines for attendance:	http://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/academic-policies-and-procedures/attendance
UT movie streaming:	https://utexas.kanopystreaming.com/frontpage
Philosophy resources:	https://philpapers.org http://www.iep.utm.edu http://plato.stanford.edu http://philosophy.hku.hk/think https://aeon.co/philosophy https://www.wi-phi.com https://www.youtube.com/c/thephilosophytube https://www.closetotruth.com https://www.apaonline.org
Philosophy news & events:	https://dailynous.com https://philevents.org
Philosophy podcasts:	https://hiphination.org https://philosophybites.com https://anchor.fm/kieran-setiya https://www.youtube.com/c/MindChat
Philosophy humor:	https://existentialcomics.com https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3rtDR2yIuVfaIFDKIp9KCQ

Course Schedule (subject to revision!)		
WEEK/UNIT	READING	DEADLINES/NOTES
Week 1 (Aug. 29–31) Introduction	Pryor, “Guidelines on Reading Philosophy”	
Week 2 (Sep. 5–7) What mystery? – PHENOMENAL CONSCIOUSNESS – INTENTIONALITY	Blackmore, “Why the mystery?” Siewert, “Consciousness and Intentionality”	Mon., Sept. 3: No class, Labor Day Holiday
Week 3 (Sep. 10–14) What is physicalism? – CHARACTERIZING THE PHYSICAL – FORMULATING PHYSICALISM	Ney, “Defining Physicalism”	Fri., Sept. 14: Last day to drop a class for a possible refund
Week 4 (Sept. 17–21) – LOGICAL BEHAVIORISM	Putnam, “Brains and Behavior”	
Week 5 (Sept. 24–28) – THE MIND–BRAIN IDENTITY THEORY – THE MULTIPLE REALIZABILITY THESIS	Smart, “Sensations and Brain Processes” Putnam, “Psychological Predicates”	
Week 6 (Oct. 1–5) – FUNCTIONALISM – THE CHINA–BODY PROBLEM	Levin, “Functionalism” Excerpts from Block, “Troubles with Functionalism”	Due: Paper 1 (rough draft)
Week 7 (Oct. 8–12) What is dualism? – SUBSTANCE DUALISM – PROPERTY DUALISM	Excerpts from Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> McWeeny, “Princess Elisabeth and the Mind–Body Problem” Gertler, “In Defense of Mind–Body Dualism”	

Course Schedule (continued)		
WEEK/UNIT	READING	DEADLINES/NOTES
Week 8 (Oct. 15–19) Is the mind physical? – THE CAUSAL ARGUMENT	Papineau, “The Case for Materialism”	
Week 9 (Oct. 22–26) – CONCEIVABILITY ARGUMENTS	Excerpts from Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> Kind, “Chalmers’ Zombie Argument”	Due: Paper 1 (final draft)
Week 10 (Oct. 29–Nov. 2) – THE KNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT	Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia” Nida-Rümelin, “What Mary Couldn’t Know: Belief About Phenomenal States”	
Week 11 (Nov. 5–9) – THE EXPLANATORY GAP – THE PHENOMENAL CONCEPT STRATEGY	Levine, “Materialism and Qualia: The Explanatory Gap” Balog, “Phenomenal Concepts”	
Week 12 (Nov. 12–16) Is everything fundamentally mental? – PANPSYCHISM – RUSSELLIAN PHYSICALISM	Strawson, “Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism” Montero, “Russellian Physicalism”	Due: Paper 2
Week 13 (Nov. 19–23)		Thanksgiving holidays, no class
Week 14 (Nov. 26–30) Presenting in philosophy	Workshop on how to present works-in-progress in the field of philosophy	
Week 15 (Dec. 3–7)	Student presentations	
Last class day (Dec. 10)	Paper workshop	Final paper due Dec. 13 at 11:59 PM

Introduction to Philosophy

[Have a Nice Life](#), a post-punk band from Connecticut, open a song from their album *Deathconsciousness* with the following lyrics: “Everything you do is planned out in advance / the stars push their dark wills down on you. . . . We are machines that breathe and weep and look really good / trained to kill. Send me back in time and I’ll bring us back in line / just tell me whose mother I have to kill.” These lyrics express views about the kind of world we inhabit, and if you find yourself questioning them, you’re already doing philosophy.

In this course, students will be introduced to various significant philosophical issues and thinkers and to the practice of philosophical analysis. We will focus specifically on epistemology (a branch of philosophy dedicated to questions about knowledge, evidence, and rationality) and metaphysics (a branch of philosophy dedicated to questions about what there is and how everything hangs together). We will consider questions such as the following: Do you know anything? When are you rationally entitled to your opinion? Are you trapped in an echo chamber, and if so, how can you escape? What kind of thing are you? Are you a machine that breathes and weeps, or something else? Is consciousness a mystery, and if so, how do we solve it? Is everything you do determined in advance, and are you free to make your own decisions? Is it logically possible to send someone back in time?

We will also work toward cultivating a number of practical philosophical skills, such as:

- Understanding and expositing philosophical positions
- Critically evaluating arguments and viewpoints
- Communicating complex ideas in a clear and economical manner

Course Schedule	
WEEK/UNIT	READING
Week 1 Introduction	Bowell and Kemp, “Introducing Arguments”
Week 2 Tools of the trade – ARGUMENTS – NECESSARY & SUFFICIENT CONDITIONS – DEDUCTIVE ARGUMENTS – INDUCTIVE/ABDUCTIVE ARGUMENTS	Lau, “Valid and Sound Arguments” & “Inductive Reasoning” Pryor, “Guidelines on Reading Philosophy”
Week 3 Knowledge and justification – EXTERNAL WORLD SKEPTICISM – THEORIES OF JUSTIFICATION	Excerpt from <i>Zhuangzi</i> Excerpt from Descartes’ <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i>
Week 4 – RESPONSES TO SKEPTICISM – DOGMATISM	Moore, “Proof of the External World” (excerpt) Ranalli, “Moore’s Proof of an External World: Responding to External World Skepticism”

Course Schedule (continued)	
WEEK/UNIT	READING
Week 5 Echo chambers and testimony – EPISTEMIC BUBBLES AND ECHO CHAMBERS	Nguyen, “Why it’s as hard to escape an echo chamber as it is to flee a cult”
Week 6 – THEORIES OF TESTIMONIAL JUSTIFICATION – TESTIMONIAL INJUSTICE	Can You Trust Testimony? (Philosophy Tube video) Miranda Fricker on Epistemic Injustice (Philosophy Bites podcast)
Week 7 The metaphysics of time – TIME TRAVEL	Lewis, “The Paradoxes of Time Travel” The Man of Many Worlds I (Hi-Phi Nation podcast)
Week 8 – THE A-THEORY – THE B-THEORY	Zimmerman, “The Privileged Present: Defending an ‘A-Theory’ of Time” Smart, “The Tenseless Theory of Time”
Week 9 Personal ontology – ELIMINATIVISM – ANIMALISM	Olson, “What Are We?”
Week 10 – THE BRAIN VIEW – IMMATERIALISM	Olson, “Brains” “Mind–Body Dualism” (Wireless Philosophy YouTube video)
Week 11 The mind–body problem – THE THESIS OF PHYSICALISM – THE CAUSAL ARGUMENT	Blackmore, “Why the mystery?” Papineau, “The Case for Materialism”
Week 12 – THE KNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT – THE CONCEIVABILITY ARGUMENT – PANPSYCHISM	Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia” (only pp. 127–132 are required) Kind, “Chalmers’ Zombie Argument” Goff, “The Case for Panpsychism”
Week 13 The metaphysics of race and gender – REALIST THEORIES – ELIMINATIVISM	Ney and Hazlett, “The Metaphysics of Race” Barnes, “The Metaphysics of Gender”
Week 14 Problems of free will – HARD DETERMINISM VS. WEAK DETERMINISM – LIBERTARIANISM – MORAL IMPLICATIONS	Chiang, “What’s expected of us” van Inwagen, “The Powers of Rational Beings” “Justice and Retribution” (Hi-Phi Nation podcast)

Introduction to Aesthetics

While some of us may never have seen a play, attended a classical concert, or stepped foot inside a museum, it's likely that almost all of us have seen a movie in the last year alone. But how many of us have stopped to think about the medium of film from a philosophical perspective? What *is* a philosophical perspective, anyway?

The purpose of this course is to get you asking philosophical questions and help you develop the skills needed to address them. To this end, we will look at a number of central issues in aesthetics and the philosophy of art, with special focus on the medium of film. Can a film be a work of art? Is a film aesthetically worse off in virtue of being morally flawed? Do Hollywood films implicate a "male gaze"? Is it possible to genuinely fear characters in horror movies, and if so, can we *enjoy* such horrifying experiences? Can a film *do* philosophy?

In asking these questions, we will investigate a number of substantive works in aesthetics and the philosophy of art as well as statements from philosophically inclined filmmakers and film theorists. By examining philosophical positions, we will both come to grasp what it is to do philosophy and learn how to do philosophy ourselves.

We will also work toward cultivating a number of practical philosophical skills, such as:

- Understanding and expositing philosophical positions
- Critically evaluating arguments and viewpoints
- Communicating complex ideas in a clear and economical manner

You can also expect to develop self-awareness for the movies you love, the movies you hate, and why you bother watching movies in the first place.

Course Schedule	
WEEK/UNIT	READING
Week 1 Tools of the trade – ARGUMENTS – NECESSARY & SUFFICIENT CONDITIONS	Pryor, "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy" Howell and Kemp, "Introducing Arguments"
Week 2 – DEDUCTIVE ARGUMENTS – INDUCTIVE/ABDUCTIVE ARGUMENTS	Lau, "Valid and Sound Arguments" & "Inductive Reasoning" Pryor, "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy"
Week 3 Film as an art form – ARGUMENTS FOR & AGAINST	Carroll, "Film as Art"
Week 4 – FILM, FREEDOM, AND CREATIVITY	Levinson, "Elster on Artistic Creativity" Hjort, "Dogme 95: A Small Nation's Response to Globalization" Screening: <i>The Five Obstructions</i>
Week 5 – CLASSICAL FILM THEORY, REPRESENTATION, AND CINEMATIC REALISM	Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" Tarkovsky, <i>Sculpting in Time</i> (excerpts)
Week 6	Walton, "Transparent Pictures"

Course Schedule (continued)	
WEEK/UNIT	READING
Week 7 Art and aesthetics – FORMALISM VS. ANTI-FORMALISM	Walton, "Categories of Art"
Week 8 – THE (UN)ETHICAL FILM(MAKER)	Gaut, "Art and Ethics" Eaton, "Robust Immoralism"
Week 9 – FEMINIST AESTHETICS & THE MALE GAZE	Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Carroll, "The Image of Women in Film"
Week 10	Eaton, "What's Wrong with the (Female) Nude?"
Week 11 Puzzles of fiction – THE PARADOX OF HORROR	Gaut, "The Paradox of Horror" Carroll, "Enjoying Horror Fictions"
Week 12 – FICTION AND THE EMOTIONS	Walton, "Fearing Fictions"
Week 13 – THE METAPHYSICS OF FICTION	Van Inwagen, "Creatures of Fiction"
Week 14 Film as philosophy	Smuts, "In Defense of a Bold Thesis" Wartenberg, "Film as Philosophy"

Philosophy and Film

This course is part philosophy *of* film, part philosophy *through* film. For much of the course, we will consider a number of philosophical questions about the cinematic medium in particular and art more generally, such as: What is the relationship between the objects that appear on screen and those that appear in front of the camera? Can we literally see things in films, even though those things may no longer exist? What are the ethical implications of different approaches to filmmaking, and are films ever aesthetically worse off in virtue of being morally flawed? Do Hollywood films implicate a “male gaze”? Is it possible to genuinely fear characters in horror movies, and if so, can we *enjoy* such horrifying experiences?

Another question that we will consider is whether, as some have claimed, films can genuinely *do* philosophy. We will examine this question both in isolation and by attempting to treat particular films as philosophical “texts,” discussing the philosophical questions they raise and considering how far they manage to address them. In the process, we will gain a deeper appreciation of what it is to do philosophy and learn how to do philosophy ourselves.

We will also work toward cultivating a number of philosophical and academic skills, such as:

- Understanding and expositing philosophical positions
- Articulating and defending philosophical analyses of particular films
- Critically evaluating arguments and viewpoints
- Communicating complex ideas in a clear and economical manner

You can also expect to develop self-awareness for the movies you love, the movies you hate, and why you bother watching movies in the first place.

Course Schedule	
WEEK/UNIT	READING
Week 1 Tools of the trade – ARGUMENT	Bowell and Kemp, “Introducing Arguments”
Week 2 – NECESSARY & SUFFICIENT CONDITIONS – DEDUCTIVE ARGUMENTS – INDUCTIVE/ABDUCTIVE ARGUMENTS	Lau, “Valid and Sound Arguments” & “Inductive Reasoning” Pryor, “Guidelines on Reading Philosophy”
Week 3 Film as philosophy – THE PROBLEM OF PARAPHRASE	Livingston, “Theses on Cinema as Philosophy”
Week 4 – DEFENSES OF FILM AS PHILOSOPHY	Smuts, “In Defense of a Bold Thesis” Assigned films: <i>October: Ten Days That Shook the World</i> (excerpt); “The Little People,” <i>The Twilight Zone</i> (Season 3, Episode 28)
Week 5 Representation / realism – CINEMATIC REPRESENTATION	Assigned film: <i>Blade Runner: The Final Cut</i> Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”

Course Schedule (continued)	
WEEK/UNIT	READING
Week 6 – CINEMATIC REPRESENTATION (CONT.) – PHOTOGRAPHIC TRANSPARENCY	Walton, “Transparent Pictures” Tarkovsky, <i>Sculpting in Time</i> (excerpts) Assigned film: <i>The Sacrifice</i>
Week 7 – PHOTOGRAPHIC TRANSPARENCY (CONT.) – MEDIUM SPECIFICITY Film, fiction, and the attitudes – GAMES OF MAKE-BELIEVE	Carroll, “Forget the Medium!” Walton, “Fearing Fictions”
Week 8 – THE PARADOX OF HORROR	Gaut, “The Paradox of Horror” Carroll, “Enjoying Horror Fictions” Assigned film: TBD (maybe <i>The Babadook</i> or <i>The Wailing</i>)
Week 9 Film and ethics – AUTONOMISM – ETHICISM – IMMORALISM Ethics through film – VIOLENCE AND SPECTATORSHIP	Gaut, “Art and Ethics” Eaton, “Robust Immoralism” McGettigan, “A Bleak Burlesque: Michael Haneke’s <i>Funny Games</i> as a Study in Violence” Assigned films: “College,” <i>The Sopranos</i> (Season 1, Episode 5); <i>Funny Games</i> (2007)
Week 10 – THE MALE GAZE	Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” Keane, “A Closer Look at Scopophilia: Mulvey, Hitchcock, and <i>Vertigo</i> ” Assigned film: <i>Vertigo</i>
Week 11 – VALUE THEORY – CONSEQUENTIALISM – DEONTOLOGY – APPLIED ETHICS	Nozick, “The Experience Machine” Grau, “Bad Dreams, Evil Demons, and the Experience Machine” Vaughn, “Truth-Telling and Confidentiality” Assigned films: <i>The Matrix</i> ; <i>The Farewell</i>
Week 12 Metaphysics of mind and gender through film – THE MIND–BODY PROBLEM – THE METAPHYSICS OF GENDER	Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia” (only pp. 127–30 are required) Papineau, “The Case for Materialism” Barnes, “The Metaphysics of Gender” Assigned film: <i>Ex Machina</i>
Week 13 Creativity through film – CONSTRAINT AND CREATIVITY	Levinson, “Elster on Artistic Creativity” Hjort, “Dogme 95: A Small Nation’s Response to Globalization” Assigned film: <i>The Five Obstructions</i>

Discussion Assignment: Ethical Theory (Ethics)

Part 1 – opening post

Watch the following two YouTube videos, which introduce an ethical issue that comes up in the movie *The Farewell*:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RofpAjqwMa8>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qt75g-Bh5iw>

Based on the life experiences of writer/director Lulu Wang, *The Farewell* tells the story of Billi, an aspiring Chinese-American writer who learns that her grandmother (“Nai Nai”) has been diagnosed with terminal cancer and likely has only a few months left to live. Her family has made the decision to conceal this information from Nai Nai, a decision that the film represents as being both legal and widely encouraged in China. As the film progresses, Billi witnesses various acts of deception aimed at preventing Nai Nai from learning the truth about her medical condition.

Pick an ethical theory: act utilitarianism, Kantianism, Ross’s theory of prima facie duties, or Dancy’s moral particularism. Does that theory imply that it is wrong for Billi’s family to deceive Nai Nai about the nature of her medical condition, or does it imply that it is morally permissible or even morally required for Billi’s family to deceive Nai Nai about the nature of her medical condition? Do you think that the theory is plausible in this case? Why or why not? Address these questions in at least two paragraphs of grammatical, complete sentences with minimal spelling mistakes.

Part 2 – responding to classmates (due a few days after Part 1)

In at least one paragraph of grammatical, complete sentences with minimal spelling mistakes, respond to another student in one of the following four ways:

1. If you don’t understand something they said in their post, politely suggest an interpretation and request clarification on whether your interpretation is accurate.
2. Provide additional support for their answer (e.g., if you agree with them, explain *why* you agree with them).
3. Raise an objection to their answer (e.g., if you disagree with them, explain *why* you disagree with them).
4. If they responded to one of your posts, then respond to them in one of the above ways.

Find-a-Flaw / AITA Assignment (Ethics)

Main Tasks

The question “Am I the asshole?” appears to be a question that is traceable back to at least [Aristotle](#), who would have put it like this: “In the circumstances, did I do what a vicious (as opposed to a virtuous) person would have done?” Sometimes we argue about whether someone was, in fact, an asshole in a situation.

As we discussed during the first week of class, there are only two ways to rationally undermine an argument: point to some flaw in the reasoning or provide reasons to reject one or more of the premises. For this assignment, you will apply the **first** of these skills by summarizing an argument for a position on an ethical issue that you’ve encountered outside of class and then explaining why the reasoning behind that argument is flawed.

You will base your **target argument**—the argument that you will evaluate—on a post from the subreddit [Am I the Asshole? \(AITA\)](#). There are three ways to do this:

1. Reconstruct the argument from one or more of the original poster’s (OP’s) comments. Some OPs may provide reasons to believe that they are (or aren’t) the asshole in their opening post. Others may provide reasons to believe that they are (or aren’t) the asshole in the comments section. You may need to read between the lines in interpreting them.
2. Reconstruct the argument from a redditor’s comments on the OP’s post. In commenting on the OP’s post, a particular redditor may provide reasons to believe that the OP is (or isn’t) the asshole. Again, you may need to read between the lines in interpreting them.
3. I strongly encourage you to keep searching until you find a post that is suitable for the assignment. However, you may find a post that you’d like to use but struggle to extract an argument from it. Here is a backup option. Describe the OP’s situation to a friend or family member. Ask them whether the OP is the asshole in the situation and why they think that. Reconstruct an argument from *their* answers.

If you find a suitable post, screenshot it! Redditors sometimes delete their posts.

If you would prefer to avoid Reddit completely and use some other source for your assignment, such as an opinion piece, I may allow this, but you need to get my approval ASAP.

Once you find a target argument, there are **three main tasks** of the assignment:

1. Explain the Redditor’s situation. Why are they posting on AITA? What happened? What did they do? What is the context of their post?
2. Summarize your target argument. What is the main conclusion? What are the main premises? How does the source reason from those premises to that conclusion?
3. Explain why their reasoning is flawed.

Note that the third task of the assignment is to explain why the **reasoning** behind the argument is flawed, **not** to explain why the main premises or conclusion are **false**. In other words, your goal is to persuade the class that **even on the assumption that the premises are true**, they do not give us **good reasons** to accept the main position of your target argument. There are several different ways to do this, but here are some questions to keep in mind:

- Is their argument logically valid? Is it inductively strong? Is it neither?

- Do they commit any fallacies? (See Lau's "Fallacies" reading on Blackboard.)
- Do they **equivocate** with their terminology by misleadingly using the same words to express different ideas in different premises?
- Do they utilize **circular reasoning**, assuming the very conclusion to be established?
- Do they attempt to raise problems for competing positions? If so, have they charitably understood those competing positions, or do they attack "**straw man**" positions?
- If they draw an analogy between two different things, are those things relevantly similar?
- Do they face any obvious counterexamples?
- Do they provide sufficient support for their main premises?
- Do they appeal to a moral principle or theory, or does their argument seem to presuppose a moral principle or theory? If so, does the moral principle or theory really apply to the case under consideration, or is it irrelevant to the case under consideration?
- Do they rest their reasoning on any problematic philosophical assumptions without acknowledging or defending those assumptions?

Assignment Options & Instructions

You will complete this assignment in four stages: (i) use Google Slides to prepare a slideshow presentation, (ii) use Zoom to deliver and record a 5–7-minute presentation based on your slideshow (for in-person sections of this course, deliver your presentation in class during your assigned time slot), (iii) upload the recording to YouTube (not applicable for in-person sections of this course), and then (iv) submit your materials to Blackboard. Your materials must include the following:

1. an accessible link to your YouTube video (not applicable for in-person sections of this course);
2. an accessible link to your Google Slides slideshow;
3. a link to your AITA post; and
4. a separate screenshot of your AITA post.

Avoid cluttering individual slides with excessive written information. I recommend including explanations of each slide in the "speaker notes" section of Google Slides. That way, if you struggle to explain a slide in your presentation, I can still give you some points for a given category of the Blackboard grading rubric.

Here is an instructional video on how to create, record, and upload your presentation: <https://youtu.be/z92necWgipM>

Here is a sample Google slideshow for inspiration:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ddiY6Bc-3gdrCajNQDUTjXoSV7-_vvy4up-x9C4HMOg/template/preview

Here is a sample YouTube presentation for inspiration: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0IDh7YJhy0>

It can be awkward presenting to an empty room—I know from personal experience. As a result, for students taking this course online, there will be an option to deliver your presentation live on Zoom outside of class hours. For those taking an in-person section of this course, everyone will present live unless they have special permission to complete the assignment in an alternative format.

If you are extremely uncomfortable recording or delivering a presentation, then let me know ASAP. I may approve you to complete the assignment in a writing format:

Write a **600–900 word** essay (roughly 2–3 double-spaced pages) in which you complete the main tasks of the assignment. Written submissions need to be typed, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins all around, with page numbers in the header aligned to the right, and exported as a PDF.

If I approve you to complete the assignment in a writing format, then your materials must include:

1. a PDF of your writing assignment;
2. a link to your AITA post; and
3. a separate screenshot of your AITA post.

Grading Rubric

Presentations and writing assignments will be graded on the basis of the following rubric:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| <u>4.5 points</u> | By the deadline, the student (a) submits an accessible link to their YouTube video (if applicable), (b) submits an accessible link to their own slideshow based on the Google Slides template (or a completed assignment in an alternative format with my prior approval), (c) includes a link to the AITA post they chose for their assignment, and (d) includes a screenshot of the AITA post they chose for their assignment. |
| <u>4.5 points</u> | The student provides a clear explanation of the redditor's situation. Their presentation (or alternative media submission) contains clear answers to questions such as: Why did the redditor post on AITA? What happened? What did they do? What is the context of their post? |
| <u>3.5 points</u> | The student summarizes their target argument. Their summary contains clear answers to questions such as: What is the main conclusion? What are the main premises? How does the source reason from those premises to that conclusion? |
| <u>2.5 points</u> | The student builds a plausible case for why the reasoning of their target argument is flawed and explains why the premises of that argument fail to adequately support its conclusion (even if those premises are true). In doing so, the student stays neutral on whether the original poster is an asshole. |

= 15 points

A more detailed grading rubric is connected to the assignment on Blackboard.

Four Part Paper Proposal (Ethics)

This assignment is meant to help prepare you for the paper assignment. The first step is to pick a paper prompt from the [list](#). Your submission must clearly indicate the specific prompt on which you plan to write your paper. For example, if you simply write “animal ethics,” you won’t receive full credit; you need to indicate whether you plan to write on prompt 3a or 3b.

The second step of the assignment is to fill in the following blanks:

1. The author argues [blank] by [blank].
2. I maintain [blank] because [blank]. (The first “blank” will be the thesis of your paper.)
3. The best objection to my thesis or argument is [blank].
4. I reply to this objection by [blank].

Your submission should devote one short paragraph per incomplete statement. For each incomplete statement, it may take more than one sentence to clearly fill in the blanks. The more details you include, the more feedback I will provide, which will ultimately help you write a better paper.

See below for a very high-quality sample submission. (Note that there is no prompt 8a. I made that up for illustrative purposes.)

Do not include your name on your assignment document. Written assignments will be graded anonymously. This is meant to help mitigate the effects of potential [implicit bias](#).

Upload your assignment as a **PDF** (not .pages, .doc, etc.).

Sample Paper Proposal

For my paper, I plan to write on prompt 8a.

The author argues that animalism is false by claiming that it is incompatible with our intuitions about brain transplant cases. In these hypothetical cases, many have the intuition that the person who wakes up is identical to the original person whose brain is transplanted from one body to another. Yet, the person who wakes up isn’t the organism with which the original person is associated. This suggests that the person isn’t an organism, contrary to animalism.

I maintain that the author’s argument is successful by defending it against the objection that in brain transplant cases, the organism with which the original person is associated is transplanted from one body to another, contrary to the usual interpretation of brain transplant cases. I argue that this objection is unable to explain why transplanting other parts of one organism to the body of another organism does not amount to transplanting the whole organism to a new body.

The best objection to me is that the brain of an organism is special: it is the “central processing unit” of the organism. That is why transplanting the brain of an organism to the body of a different organism amounts to transplanting the whole organism to a new body, while transplanting other parts of an organism to the body of a different organism does not.

My reply is that the original argument can be revised to avoid the objection. Consider a brain transplant case in which a person’s cerebrum is transplanted to the body of a different organism, while their brain stem is kept in their original body on life support. Intuitively, the original person goes with their cerebrum, even though the “central processing unit” of the original organism remains with that organism. The objection does not apply to this revised example.

Final Paper Prompts (Ethics)

Each of the following prompts is based on the same basic format. First, you will be asked to consider a reading. Next, you will be asked to adopt a stance on whether the author's argument for their main conclusion succeeds. Finally, you will use your answer to the previous question to develop and defend a thesis statement. Your thesis statement should be similar to one of these four sentences:

Form 1

- (a) Since the objection to it fails, the author's argument for their conclusion likely succeeds.
- (b) The author's argument (or position) suffers from an important problem, but this problem can be satisfactorily resolved.

Form 2

- (a) The author's argument for their conclusion fails for the following reasons . . .
- (b) The author's argument (or position) suffers from an important problem, namely . . .

While Form 1 mentions "objections" (plural), you are strongly encouraged to focus on *one* objection (or objections that suffer from a *common* problem). Similarly, while Form 2 mentions "reasons" (plural), you are strongly encouraged to develop a *main* argument for your thesis. **In general, less is more:** it is better to make fewer points but in persuasive detail than to make many points but without the space to sufficiently develop or substantiate them.

No matter what your thesis is, you should anticipate and counter at least one objection to your own argument or position toward the end of your paper. For example, if your paper focuses on refuting the best objections to an argument or position (Form 1), you should anticipate and counter at least one attempt to revive one of those objections. Similarly, if your paper focuses on criticizing the author's argument or position (Form 2), you should anticipate and counter at least one attempt to defend the author's argument or position against your criticisms.

Keep in mind that you don't have to personally accept whatever thesis you decide to defend in your paper. There are other legitimate reasons to defend a thesis. Maybe developing a powerful argument for a problematic position is the best way to refute that position later—by showing that the strongest argument for it fails. Or maybe the thesis you personally reject is the one that will be the most interesting to defend. Or maybe you want to use your paper as an exercise in open-mindedness.

Except in special circumstances, your paper should have a structure along the following lines:

- STEP 1: Briefly introduce the reader to the issue, clearly state your thesis, and provide the reader with a brief preview of how you will support your thesis. (Usually 1 paragraph.)
- STEP 2: Clarify any technical terminology that you will use; **carefully summarize the argument(s) or position(s) that you will defend or criticize**; and, if applicable, apply the principle of charity to bolster them into their strongest form(s). (Several paragraphs.)
- STEP 3: Give your own argument(s) for your thesis. (Several paragraphs.)
- STEP 4: Consider and respond to objections. (Usually at least 1 paragraph to explain the objection and at least 1 paragraph to give your response.)
- STEP 5: Conclude by summarizing what your paper has established and how. (Usually 1 paragraph.)

Pick one of the following prompts for your paper assignment (e.g., Prompt 2a).

1. **Metaethics** (Weeks 4–6)

(a) In “Moral Realism,” Michael Smith summarizes G. E. Moore’s famous open question argument against naturalistic moral realism, the view that moral properties are “naturalistic features – features which are themselves posits, or composites of posits, of empirical science” (26). What is naturalistic moral realism, and what is the open question argument against naturalistic moral realism? Does Moore’s open question argument succeed? If you maintain that Moore’s argument succeeds, what is (in your view) the best objection to it, and why does that objection fail? If you maintain that Moore’s argument fails, what are your reasons for maintaining that it fails? (**Note:** feel free to draw on one of the objections that Smith discusses in “Moral Realism.” However, you’ll need to do more than simply summarize a preexisting objection—for example, you might anticipate and counter a response to that objection that Smith does not discuss. You may also find it helpful to read Moore’s original argument, which I will make available on Blackboard.)

(b) In “The Unbelievable Truth About Morality,” Bart Streumer lays out two arguments for moral error theory, the view that all moral judgments and statements are false. The first is the argument from queerness, which begins with the premise that if moral properties were to exist, then they would be “queer.” The second is the argument from relativity, which starts with the premise that members of different societies often make conflicting moral judgements. Pick one of these arguments. Explain how the argument is supposed to support moral error theory. Does the argument succeed? If you maintain that the argument succeeds, what is (in your view) the best objection to it, and why does that objection fail? If you maintain that the argument fails, what are your reasons for maintaining that it fails? (**Note:** it may be helpful to consult J. L. Mackie’s chapters on these arguments in *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. I will upload these chapters to Blackboard. For an advanced discussion of the argument from relativity, you might want to read Richard Joyce’s “Arguments From Moral Disagreement to Moral Skepticism,” which I will make available on Blackboard.)

2. **Normative Ethics** (Weeks 7–8)

(a) Classical utilitarians endorse hedonism about *value*; they also seem to endorse hedonism about *welfare*. Conversely, they hold that beauty, truth, knowledge, autonomy, virtue, contact with reality, etc. are only valuable (or *conducive to how well one’s life is going for them*) to the extent that they promote one’s pleasure. Robert Nozick uses the example of an “experience machine” to argue against classical (hedonistic) utilitarianism. What exactly is classical (hedonistic) utilitarianism, and how can Nozick’s example be used to argue against it? Does that argument succeed? If you maintain that the argument succeeds, what is (in your view) the best objection to it, and why does that objection fail? If you maintain that the argument fails, what are your reasons for maintaining that it fails? Does your discussion suggest that it is in our own best interest to permanently enter an experience machine if given the choice, or does it suggest that it is not in our own best interest to do that? (**Note:** if you’d like to focus specifically on the welfare aspect of this debate, you may find it helpful to read Chris Heathwood’s “Hedonism,” which I will make available on Blackboard.)

(b) Act utilitarians posit a single moral principle that is meant to explain why any possible action is morally required. John Stuart Mill calls this the “greatest happiness principle.” Explain Mill’s greatest happiness principle and discuss some reasons to accept Mill’s act utilitarianism. Is Mill’s act utilitarianism true? If you maintain that Mill’s act utilitarianism is true, what is (in your view) the best objection to it, and why does that objection fail? If you maintain that Mill’s act utilitarianism is false, what are your reasons for maintaining that it is false? If you think that Mill’s act utilitarianism confronts a potential counterexample, can that potential counterexample be avoided by reinterpreting

or tweaking the greatest happiness principle (say, by understanding it in terms of what is *reasonably expected* to have certain consequences instead of what will *in fact* have certain consequences)? Why or why not? (**Note:** you may want to consult the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy's entry on utilitarianism. Ben Eggleston's "Act Utilitarianism" is also a good resource, though it is more advanced. Chris Heathwood's "Hedonism" may also be helpful. I'll upload these to Blackboard.)

(c) Kantianism holds that there is a single moral principle—the categorical imperative—that explains why any possible action is morally permissible or morally wrong. Immanuel Kant provides two different formulations of the categorical imperative—the *principle of universalizability* and the *principle of humanity*—that are meant to deliver the same verdicts about specific cases. Focus on one or both formulations of the categorical imperative. Clearly explain the principle of universalizability (and/or the principle of humanity) and discuss some reasons to accept Kantianism. Is Kantianism true? If you maintain that Kantianism is true, what is (in your view) the best objection to it, and why does that objection fail? If you maintain that Kantianism is false, what are your reasons for maintaining that it is false? If you think that the principle of universalizability (and/or the principle of humanity) confronts a potential counterexample, can that potential counterexample be avoided by reinterpreting or tweaking the principle? Why or why not? (**Note:** feel free to draw on Christine Korsgaard's "Kant's Formula of Universal Law" or Robert Nozick's "The Rationality of Side Constraints" when explaining the principle of universalizability and/or the principle of humanity.)

3. Animal Ethics (Week 9)

(a) In "Why I Am a Vegan (and You Should Be One Too)," Tristram McPherson argues for *Modest Ethical Veganism*, the view that it is typically wrong to purchase or otherwise use animal products. He argues for this thesis by laying out a main argument and then providing several sub-arguments for the premises of that main argument. As McPherson points out, "the [main] argument is valid: if the premises of the argument are true, then the conclusion must be true. This means that anyone wishing to reasonably reject my conclusion must explain which premise they wish to reject, and how my argument for that premise is flawed" (26–27). Focus on one (or two) of the premises from McPherson's main argument and one (or two) of his sub-arguments for that premise. Do McPherson's sub-arguments for that premise (or those premises) succeed? If you maintain that McPherson's sub-arguments succeed, what is (in your view) the best objection to those sub-arguments, and why does that objection fail? If you maintain that McPherson's sub-arguments fail, what are your reasons for maintaining that they fail? Based on your discussion, what is the most reasonable conclusion to draw about Modest Ethical Veganism? Why?

(b) In "Consumer Ethics, Food Ethics, and Beyond," Mark Budolfson lays out the *inefficacy argument*, which can be adapted to argue that it is typically morally permissible to purchase or otherwise use factory farmed animal products. He also considers several objections to the inefficacy argument. Focus on the inefficacy argument for the conclusion that it is morally permissible to purchase or otherwise use factory farmed animal products. Does that argument succeed? If you maintain that the argument succeeds, what is (in your view) the best objection to it, and why does that objection fail? If you maintain that the argument fails, what are your reasons for maintaining that it fails? Based on your discussion, is it most reasonable to conclude that it is typically morally permissible to purchase or otherwise use factory farmed animal products, or is it most reasonable to conclude that it is typically morally wrong to purchase or otherwise use factory farmed animal products? Why? (You may find it helpful to read Budolfson's other paper, "Is It Wrong to Eat Meat from Factory Farms?" I will make it available on Blackboard.)

4. The Ethics of Abortion (Weeks 10–11)

(a) In “I Was Once a Fetus: That Is Why Abortion Is Wrong,” Alexander Pruss argues for the following conclusion: “abortion is wrong in exactly the same circumstances in which it is wrong to kill an adult” (169). His argument has three main steps. In the first step, he argues for the subsidiary conclusions that (i) he—the individual named “Alexander Pruss”—is a biological organism and (ii) the biological organism to which he is identical was once a fetus. His argument for conclusion (i) involves a process of elimination: he isn’t an immaterial soul, or a brain, or a process of thought; therefore, he must be a biological organism. In the second step, he argues that it would have been wrong to kill the fetus that he once was for the same reason(s) that it would be wrong to kill him now. Finally, in the third step, he argues that his conclusions generalize to most other human fetuses. Focusing on one (or two) of these steps, critically examine Pruss’s main argument. Does Pruss’s main argument succeed? If you maintain that his argument succeeds, what is (in your view) the best objection to it, and why does that objection fail? If you maintain that his main argument fails, what are your reasons for maintaining that it fails? (**Note:** feel free to draw on one of the optional readings for potential objections. However, you’ll need to do more than simply *summarize* a preexisting objection—for example, you might anticipate and counter a response to it.)

(b) In “A Defense of Abortion,” Judith Jarvis Thomson argues that even if the typical human fetus is a person who has a right to life, the typical abortion is still morally permissible. In arguing for this conclusion, she provides a thought experiment in which you are captured by the Society of Music Lovers and hooked up to a famous violinist who is suffering from a fatal kidney ailment. The director of the hospital then explains to you: “To unplug you would be to kill him. But never mind, it’s only for nine months. By then he will have recovered from his ailment, and can safely be unplugged from you” (49). Thomson argues that since it would be morally permissible for you to unplug yourself from the violinist in such a situation, and ordinary cases of pregnancy are relevantly similar to this situation, it follows that ordinary abortions are also morally permissible. She also argues that careful reflection on this and other thought experiments reveals several morally important distinctions that we can use to explain why this is so. Does Thomson’s main argument succeed? If you maintain that her argument succeeds, what is (in your view) the best objection to it, and why does that objection fail? If you maintain that her argument fails, what are your reasons for maintaining that it fails? (**Note:** feel free to draw on Michael Tooley’s objection in “Abortion and Infanticide.” However, you’ll need to do more than simply *summarize* a preexisting objection—for example, you might anticipate and counter a response to Tooley’s argument that Tooley does not consider.)

5. Obligations to the needy (Week 13)

In “Famine, Affluence and Morality,” “The Singer Solution To World Poverty,” and *The Life You Can Save*, Peter Singer argues that most people in affluent societies are morally obligated to stop spending their money on luxuries (clothes they don’t need to keep warm, cars they don’t need for transportation, houses they don’t need for shelter, etc.) and instead donate that money to effective aid agencies. He argues that this conclusion follows from plausible premises that most people find intuitive (at least until they notice that an extremely demanding conclusion follows from them!). To motivate these principles, he provides the example of a child drowning in a pond, who can be saved at the cost of ruining one’s new shoes and nice suit. Describe Singer’s example, summarize how he uses it to argue for his main conclusion, and explain the implications of his main conclusion for the average U.S. citizen (e.g., approximately how much money they are morally obligated to donate per year and where they are morally obligated to donate). Does Singer’s argument succeed? If you maintain that his argument succeeds, what is (in your view) the best objection to it, and why does that objection fail? If you maintain that his argument fails, what are your reasons for maintaining that it fails? (**Note:** feel free to draw on Travis Timmerman’s “Sometimes there is nothing wrong with letting a child drown.” However, you’ll need to do more than simply *summarize* Timmerman’s

article—for example, you might anticipate and counter a response to Timmerman’s argument that Timmerman does not consider.)

6. Consent (Week 15)

In “Sex, Lies, and Consent,” Tom Dougherty defines the *Lenient Thesis* as follows: “It is only a minor wrong to deceive another person into sex by misleading her or him about certain personal features such as natural hair color, occupation, or romantic intentions” (719). As Dougherty observes, some find this thesis to be intuitively plausible. Yet, according to Dougherty, the Lenient Thesis is *false*. He concludes that it is *seriously wrong* to deceive another person into sex by misleading that person about seemingly trivial aspects of oneself when those aspects “would be a deal breaker for the victim of the deception” (717). Dougherty attempts to establish this conclusion by arguing that such “deception vitiates the victim’s sexual consent, and it is seriously wrong to have sex with someone while lacking his or her consent” (717). Does Dougherty’s main argument succeed? If you maintain that his argument succeeds, what is (in your view) the best objection to it, and why does that objection fail? If you maintain that his argument fails, what are your reasons for maintaining that it fails?

7. Choose your own topic

Write a philosophy paper on an ethical issue of your choice, including one of the issues listed on the syllabus that is not covered by the above prompts. In order to pick this option, you must meet with me during virtual office hours to discuss your topic and the thesis for which you intend to argue. If I decide that your thesis is appropriate for the assignment, I will approve you to write the paper.

Final Paper Rubric

	LEVEL 1 1.25%	LEVEL 2 5%	LEVEL 3 10%	LEVEL 4 15%
<p>INTRODUCTION</p> <p>The writer (a) introduces the reader to the topic, (b) lays out an appropriate thesis, and (c) briefly informs the reader as to how they will support their thesis.</p>	<p>None of the three elements were provided.</p>	<p>One of the three elements was provided.</p>	<p>Two of the three elements were provided.</p>	<p>All of the elements were provided.</p>
<p>FOCUS</p> <p>The writer clearly directs their writing toward supporting the thesis laid out in their introduction.</p>	<p>1.25%</p> <p>The writer never identifies a clear position/perspective with respect to the material/issue.</p>	<p>5%</p> <p>The writer identifies a clear position/perspective with respect to the material/issue, but in general, the writing is not directed towards supporting that position/perspective.</p>	<p>10%</p> <p>The writer identifies a clear position/perspective with respect to the material/issue, and the writing is somewhat directed towards supporting that position/perspective.</p>	<p>15%</p> <p>The writer identifies a clear position/perspective with respect to the material/issue, and in general, the writing is well directed towards supporting that position/perspective.</p>
<p>SUMMARY</p> <p>The writer shows a full grasp of the relevant philosophical concepts, issues, positions, or arguments; clarifies or defines key terminology and uses terminology consistently; accurately and charitably summarizes the relevant philosophical concepts, issues, positions, or arguments; and supports their interpretations of sources with quotations or parenthetical citations.</p>	<p>5%</p> <p>The writer does not demonstrate an understanding of the topic and never summarizes the information that is needed to fully understand their thesis. They jump right into the debate without summarizing any of the background information that an outsider needs to understand the debate.</p>	<p>10%</p> <p>The writer rarely demonstrates an understanding of the relevant philosophical concepts, issues, positions, or arguments; they rarely clarify or define key terminology and often use terminology inconsistently; they do very little to summarize the background information that an outsider needs to understand the debate; or their summaries are often unclear, uncharitable, or unsupported.</p>	<p>15%</p> <p>The writer demonstrates an understanding of most of the relevant philosophical concepts, issues, positions, or arguments, but they do not clarify or define some key terminology (and sometimes use terminology inconsistently) and their summaries are sometimes unclear, uncharitable, or unsupported.</p>	<p>20%</p> <p>The writer demonstrates an understanding of most of the relevant philosophical concepts, issues, positions, or arguments; they often clarify or define key terminology and use terminology consistently; their summaries are often clear, accurate, and charitable; and they often support their interpretations of sources with quotations or parenthetical citations.</p>
<p>STRUCTURE</p> <p>Structure: The paper is well-structured as an orderly presentation of related ideas (either through a well-employed paragraph structure and order of presentation, or through any other mechanism that effectively reveals the structure/ordering of the progression of ideas); clearly indicates the connections between different parts of the paper (e.g., how an early discussion is relevant to a later argument); and uses "sign posts" to indicate which claims have been established within a given stage of the paper and how those claims relate to earlier or later stages of the paper.</p>	<p>0.75%</p> <p>The progression of discussion of ideas in the paper fundamentally lacks organization; the writer does not indicate how different parts of the paper are meant to be connected; or the writer does not indicate which claims have been established within a given stage of the paper.</p>	<p>5%</p> <p>The progression of discussion of ideas in the paper is significantly flawed; the writer rarely clearly indicates how different parts of the paper are meant to be connected; or the writer rarely clearly indicates which claims have been established within a given stage of the paper or how those claims relate to earlier or later claims in the paper.</p>	<p>7.5%</p> <p>The progression of discussion of ideas in the paper is generally well-structured/orderly; the writer is generally clear about how different parts of the paper are meant to be connected; and the writer occasionally uses "sign posts" to indicate which claims have been established within a given stage of the paper or how those claims relate to earlier or later claims in the paper.</p>	<p>10%</p> <p>The progression of discussion of ideas in the paper is consistently well-structured/orderly; the writer is consistently clear about how different parts of the paper are meant to be connected; and the writer appropriately uses "sign posts" to help guide the reader to their main conclusion.</p>

	LEVEL 1 1.25%	LEVEL 2 5%	LEVEL 3 10%	LEVEL 4 15%
<p>ARGUMENT (BROAD)</p> <p>The writer provides plausible support for their position and charitably anticipates/counters objections.</p>	<p>The writer doesn't provide any support for their position.</p>	<p>The writer provides some support for their position, but much of what the writer says in support of their position is implausible and/or they do not anticipate and counter objections.</p>	<p>The writer provides some support for their position and anticipates objections on behalf of alternative views, but some of what the writer says in support of their position is implausible, they do not charitably present those objections (e.g., they focus on "straw man" objections), and/or they do not provide plausible responses to those objections.</p>	<p>The writer provides plausible support for their thesis, charitably considers objections, and provides plausible responses to those objections.</p>
<p>ARGUMENT (NARROW)</p> <p>In at least one argument from reasonably defensible premises to a reasonably clear conclusion, the writer employs good reasoning—for example, by laying out a logically valid argument; laying out an inductively strong argument (such as an argument by analogy or inference to the best explanation); assessing a theory for simplicity, power, coherence, or explanatory power; describing a vivid example to provide empirical or intuitive support for a premise; describing a vivid example to develop a counterexample to a position or argument; or showing that an alternative view is based on some mistake in reasoning.</p>	<p>There is no apparent attempt to employ reasoning to support a conclusion from premises.</p>	<p>There are one or more such attempts, but no clearly demonstrates good reasoning.</p>	<p>There are multiple such attempts, and at least one clearly demonstrates good reasoning.</p>	<p>There are multiple such attempts, and the majority clearly demonstrate good reasoning.</p>
<p>FORMATTING</p> <p>The writer (a) satisfies the minimum word limit, (b) meets the formatting requirements, and (c) properly cites their sources and includes a reference list in a recognized citation style, such as MLA, APA, or Chicago Author-Date.</p>	<p>None of the three elements were provided.</p>	<p>One of the three elements was provided.</p>	<p>Two of the three elements were provided.</p>	<p>All of the elements were provided.</p>

<p>CLARITY AND STYLE</p> <p>The writer's meaning is consistently discernible throughout the paper; the paper does not waste words (sentences are clearly dedicated to supporting a thesis, explaining a concept, introducing or responding to an objection, or doing other important philosophical work); the writer uses paragraph breaks effectively (to avoid overwhelming the reader with huge blocks of text or to indicate a transition from one task to another); and the writer uses quotations only when absolutely necessary (e.g., to support their interpretation of a text) and explains their sources in their own words.</p>	<p>0%</p> <p>The writer's meaning is indiscernible throughout the paper; the paper wastes words and relies on verbose sentences that are difficult to understand; the writer does not use paragraph breaks effectively; or the writer relies too much on quotations and does not explain their sources in their own words.</p>	<p>1.25%</p> <p>The writer's meaning is often indiscernible throughout the paper; the paper often wastes words and relies on verbose sentences that are difficult to understand; the writer rarely uses paragraph breaks effectively; or the writer often relies too much on quotations and rarely explains their sources in their own words.</p>	<p>2.5%</p> <p>The writer's meaning is discernible throughout the paper; the paper rarely wastes words or relies on verbose sentences that are difficult to understand; the writer generally uses paragraph breaks effectively; and the writer rarely uses quotations unnecessarily and often explains their sources in their own words.</p>	<p>5%</p> <p>The writer's meaning is consistently discernible throughout the paper; the paper consistently uses words with a clear purpose; the writer consistently uses paragraph breaks effectively; and the writer consistently uses quotations appropriately and explains their sources in their own words.</p>
--	---	--	---	--

Reading Response Assignment (Introduction to Aesthetics)

Prompt

Use these two closely related questions as the basis for your reading response:

1. Can we literally see past objects, places, and events through photographs?
2. Suppose that you literally see a particular event unfold—for example, a loved-one's waving to you in the distance at the airport—and immediately store that event to memory. Exactly one week later, you recall that event in vivid visual detail and with almost complete accuracy. Your experience involves a "memory image" of your loved-one. Do you literally see your loved-one through this memory image?

Your task is to persuade your reader of your theses (answers yes/no) by providing **reasons** to accept those theses.

Reading Response Rubric

	PASS	HALF-CREDIT	FAIL
CONTENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reading response satisfies the 500–700 word requirement and demonstrates full engagement with the prompt. For example, if the prompt asks more than one question, it shows an attempt to answer all of them. It exhibits a grasp of the relevant philosophical concepts, and the ideas that it expresses are sufficiently detailed and well-developed. The student is appropriately charitable and accurate in interpreting, analyzing, and/or presenting the readings or media. It is noticeable that the student examined the readings or media carefully before crafting his or her response. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An otherwise “Pass” reading response was submitted a day late. It falls short of the 500–700 word requirement or does not demonstrate full engagement with the prompt. For example, if the prompt asks more than one question, it is difficult to detect an answer to at least one of those questions. It exhibits only a partial grasp of the relevant philosophical concepts, and the ideas that it expresses are not detailed or sufficiently developed. The student is not appropriately charitable or accurate in interpreting, analyzing, and/or presenting the readings or media. Instead, the reading response shows signs of having been written at the last minute. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reading response was submitted more than two days late, or an otherwise “Half-credit” reading response was submitted a day late. It does not meet the 500–700 word requirement at all or demonstrates almost no engagement with the prompt. It does not exhibit any grasp of the relevant philosophical concepts, and the ideas that it expresses come across as confused or muddled. The student does not attempt to interpret, analyze, or present the readings or media with any accuracy.
CRITICAL THINKING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reading response successfully breaks the argument, issue, or problem into relevant parts and clearly indicates the connections between those parts. It provides vivid and interesting examples to illustrate its points or support its conclusions. It demonstrates at least some awareness of the kind of reasoning that it is employing or expediting, and when appropriate, it utilizes effective argumentative strategies, such as arguing by analogy, inferring to the best explanation, or providing counterexamples to opposing positions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reading response does not clearly break the argument, issue, or problem into relevant parts or indicate the connections between those parts. It provides examples to illustrate its points or support its conclusions, but they are unclear or irrelevant. It does not show any awareness of the kind of reasoning that it is employing or expediting, and it does not utilize effective argumentative strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reading response does not break the argument, issue, or problem into relevant parts at all. It provides little to no examples to illustrate its points or support its conclusions. It does not clearly reason through the argument, issue, or problem at all.
CLARITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reading response is well thought out and easy to follow. Overall, it is focused; its sentences are logical and fully explicated; and its paragraphs are cohesive and fit into a coherent structure. It contains a clear statement of the conclusion/position it is meant to explore, clearly lays out the premises that are meant to support that conclusion/position, and explains how those premises are supposed to support that conclusion/position. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reading response is not well thought out and is hard to follow. Overall, it is not focused and prone to irrelevant digressions; its sentences are illogical and/or not fully explicated; and its paragraphs are lacking in cohesion or do not fit into a coherent structure. It does not contain a clear statement of the conclusion/position it is meant to explore, or otherwise fails to clearly identify the premises that are meant to support that conclusion/position and/or explain how those premises are supposed to support that conclusion/position. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reading response is incoherent and confusing. It does not contain any statement of the conclusion/position or premises and/or does not attempt to explain how the premises are meant to support the conclusion/position.
STYLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The writing style is concise and clear. Sentences are complete and grammatical. The student uses words precisely and makes the meanings of technical terms clear. Paragraph breaks are appropriate and serve a purpose within the overall structure of the reading response. The student expresses the ideas from any assigned sources in his or her own words and employs quotations only when it is absolutely necessary. If the student decided to take the unnecessary step to confer with any sources other than those mentioned in the prompt, they are appropriately cited in the reading response in a clear and logical manner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The writing style is neither concise nor clear, but instead comes off as “purple prose” or as a series of unconnected bullet points that do not flow well together. Some sentences are incomplete, awkward, and/or ungrammatical. The student does not use words precisely and fails to make the meanings of technical terms clear. Paragraphs tend to drag on or do not flow well together. The student expresses the ideas from any assigned sources in his or her own words, but relies too heavily on quotations. If the student decided to take the unnecessary step to confer with any sources other than those mentioned in the prompt, they are cited in the reading response but not in a clear and logical manner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reading response shows signs of having been put together at the very last minute. Typos and ungrammatical/awkward sentences are abundant. Paragraph breaks are nonexistent or completely illogical. The student copies from the assigned sources without indicating that he or she is quoting from those sources, or shows signs of having plagiarized outside sources. This is a possible ground for reporting the student to the Office of the Dean of Students.

Philosophy Application Project (Introduction to Philosophy)

So far, our philosophical discussions have been confined to Blackboard and the classroom. This assignment is meant to be a fun opportunity for you to (i) demonstrate your understanding of a philosophical concept, issue, argument, or position (“philosophical topic” for short) that you learned about in this course and (ii) make something that has the potential to bring philosophy to people outside of the classroom. There are several ways to complete this project, and I am open to suggestions (see the final option below).

Option 1 (video): Create a TikTok or YouTube video

Make a TikTok video (1 minute minimum) explaining a philosophical topic that you learned about in this course. Some ideas:

- Act out a conversation between Descartes and an evil demon to explain skepticism about the external world
- Play the part of G. E. Moore to lay out his “here is one hand” argument
- Act out a conversation between two characters to explain the concept of an echo chamber
- Use preexisting video clips (or act out your own scene) to illustrate and explain Fricker’s concept of epistemic injustice
- Use actors or props to explain the thinking animal problem, the brain transplant objection to animalism, or some other concept related to personal ontology
- Play the part of Mary or Fred to lay out Jackson’s knowledge argument
- Enlist an actor to play the part of a philosophical zombie and explain the implications of philosophical zombies for physicalism

To complete this option, you should do the following:

1. Familiarize yourself with TikTok. (There are many tutorials on YouTube.)
2. Prepare a short “script” (this could be a few bullet points outlining your video) and a short (2–3 paragraph) explanation of how your video will illustrate the philosophical topic that you learned about in this course.
3. Make the video and submit it to TikTok or YouTube. (If don’t want anyone else to see your video, you can set it to “friends only” and add me as friend, or you can export it from TikTok and upload it to YouTube as “unlisted.”)
4. Upload your “script”/explanation and submit your video link through Blackboard.

If you don’t want to use TikTok, you should do the following:

1. Prepare a short “script” (this could be a few bullet points outlining your video) and a short (2–3 paragraph) explanation of how your video will illustrate the philosophical topic that you learned about in this course.
2. Make the video and upload it to YouTube. (If don’t want anyone else to see your video, you can set it to “unlisted.”)
3. Upload your “script”/explanation and submit your video link through Blackboard.

Option 2 (audio): Create an interview, short podcast episode, or song

The first way to complete this option is to record an interview (at least 5 minutes long) in which you engage someone with the “Socratic method” about a philosophical topic of your choice. For example:

- Ask someone how they can know things about the external world. Listen to their answer. Ask them follow-up questions to raise problems for their answer. Tell them about radical skepticism. Ask them how they respond to it. Get them to clarify their response.
- Ask someone to tell you what they know about the idea of an echo chamber. Listen to their answer. Are they confusing an echo chamber with an epistemic bubble? If so, explain the distinction to them. Ask them how they could escape from an echo chamber. Listen to their answer. Ask them follow-up questions to raise problems for their answer.
- Ask someone to tell you about their favorite time travel movie. Listen to their answer. Ask them how time travel would have to work in that movie. Ask follow-up questions to determine whether their answers lead to contradictions.
- Ask someone what they are. If they don't understand the question, tell them about personal ontology. Ask them the question again. Listen to their answer. Ask them follow-up questions to raise problems for their answer. For example, if they say that they are a human being, ask them if they can survive the destruction of their body.
- Ask them if they have free will. Listen to their answer. Ask them questions about determinism and indeterminism. Why do they think their answer is compatible with determinism and/or indeterminism? Get them to appreciate the mysteries of free will and then ask them questions about the implications of this for morality, moral responsibility, punishment and reward, and emotions such as anger, resentment, and guilt.

The goal is to use your questions to challenge someone to think carefully about a philosophical question they may not have given careful attention in the past and get them to notice problems associated with different answers to the question.

To complete this option, you should do the following:

1. Find someone to interview. They can be a family member, friend, roommate, classmate from another course, or another professor. Get their permission to record an interview with them and share the recording in a classroom context.
2. Prepare a list of questions to structure your interview and write a short (2–3 paragraph) explanation of how your questions are meant to introduce your interviewee to a philosophical topic that you learned about in this course.
3. Record the interview. Begin by asking the interviewee to introduce themselves and describe their familiarity with philosophy.
4. Upload your recording along with your original list of questions and short explanation to Blackboard.

The second way is to make a short podcast episode (at least 3 minute long) demonstrating your understanding of a philosophical topic from this course. You can also combine this option with the previous one (using an interview as the foundation for your podcast episode). To complete this option, you should do the following:

1. Remind yourself of Hi-Phi Nation as a model for how to make a philosophy podcast.
2. Prepare a short “script” (this could be a few bullet points outlining your episode) and a short

(2–3 paragraph) explanation of how your episode will illustrate the philosophical topic that you learned about in this course.

3. Record/host an episode in which you tell a story (fictional or based on real events) to demonstrate your understanding of your chosen philosophical topic. Feel free to use an editing tool to join different recordings together.
4. Upload your “script”/explanation and your audio file to Blackboard.

The third way is to record a short song (at least 2 minutes long) demonstrating your understanding of a philosophical topic from this course. For example, on the first page of the syllabus, I included lyrics from a song that covers themes related to time travel, free will, and personal ontology. There are also several “rap battle” videos on YouTube about philosophy. See the Google Drive folder for a student example from another professor’s course.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxiHjf5KGtw>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QDLEn5tE3c>
- <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1C95Dd-eVIPN8511PyLTCdHaNbSDgfPtY>

To complete this option, you should do the following:

1. Write lyrics for your song and a short (2–3 paragraph) explanation of how those lyrics illustrate the philosophical topic that you learned about in this course.
2. Record the song. (You can record the audio, or video a live a performance of it.)
3. Upload your lyrics, short explanation, and audio/video file to Blackboard.

Option 3 (interactive): Design an interactive game

Design a game to illustrate a philosophical topic that you learned about in this course. For example, Alice Zhang, a student at the University of Toronto, used JavaScript, HTML, and CSS to create a web-based game designed to illustrate the idea that robots warrant moral consideration: <https://social-robots.herokuapp.com>

But you could also approach this option by creating a role-playing game, tabletop game, board game, card game, conversation game, guessing game, or any kind of game you’d like.

To complete this option, you should do the following:

1. Devise clearly defined aims, rules, and tools for your game.
2. Use these aims, rules, and tools to create a playable game, and write a short (2–3 paragraph) explanation of how the game works and why it illustrates a philosophical topic that you learned about in this course.
3. Upload your explanation to Blackboard and submit your game in the appropriate format. (If your game is made from non-digital tools, you’ll need to give it to me in class.)

Option 4: Propose your own creative assignment

If the above options do not appeal to you, but you have an idea for demonstrating your understanding of a philosophical topic in a creative way, I am open to your suggestions. But to take advantage of this option, you need to get my approval at least one week prior to the deadline.