

THE BIG QUESTIONS (PHIL 1-002)

Monday & Wednesday, 10:10 am - 11:00 am; Business Bldg 110

Fall 2021

Course ID: 035256

Instructor: Ted Toadvine
Office Hours: Mondays 12:00 - 2:00 pm and by appointment, 127 Sparks Building
Email and Office Phone: tat30@psu.edu; 814-867-0471

TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Michelle Meeks
Email: mlm7082@psu.edu
Office: 228 Sparks Bldg
Office Hours: Wednesdays & Fridays, 11:15-12:15
Discussions: Fridays, 9:05 - 9:55, Willard 251
Fridays, 10:10 - 11:00, Willard 169

Wouter Vijfhuizen
Email: wzv5020@psu.edu
Office: 228 Sparks Bldg
Office Hours: Fridays, 1:00 - 3:00
Discussions: Fridays, 10:10 - 11:00, Ford 201
Fridays, 11:15 - 12:05, Tyson 015

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Intended for all majors, this course plunges students into the deepest philosophical questions: Who am I? What is real? Can I ever be certain about anything? What should I believe? Students will meet a range of historical and contemporary formulations of these questions, study responses from a variety of cultural perspectives, and acquire the analytical and expository skills to reflect on and develop their own perspectives. The course proceeds through reading, discussion, and writing.

This course meets the Bachelor of Arts: Humanities degree requirements and satisfies the General Education: Humanities (GH) requirement as well as the General Education Learning Objectives in Critical and Analytical Thinking and Key Literacies. It may be used to fulfill the major or minor requirements in Philosophy.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Students who successfully complete this course are expected to have gained the ability to:

- Engage in reflection on fundamental philosophical issues and develop their own perspective on these issues;
- Present and assess views that differ from their own, including perspectives related to race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and citizenship as these bear on the framing and interpretation of philosophical issues;
- Compare, contrast, and evaluate representative philosophical perspectives from a range of historical and cultural locations;
- Demonstrate critical thinking, reading, writing, and discussion skills relevant to philosophical inquiry.

COURSE TEXTBOOK

All readings for this course are from *Traversing Philosophical Boundaries*, 4th edition, edited by Max Hallman (Wadsworth 2012). The text is available from the university bookstore and may be rented or purchased online.

PARTICIPATION & DISCUSSION

Success in this course requires active participation, which includes attending all classes, reading all assigned material prior to class, and participating productively and respectfully in class discussions.

Discussion is crucial to this class, and I will do my best to make you feel at ease and welcome to contribute to the conversation. The best way to understand these sometimes difficult and controversial topics is to talk about them with each other, so please feel free to contribute any question, objection, or other thought about the topic at hand when such occurs to you. I expect you to follow these guidelines throughout our discussions:

- Be respectful. We are not debating but rather learning from each other's experiences and viewpoints. Be critical of ideas and facts, not your classmates.
- Be open-minded. You may be misinformed or lack perspective. Two different opinions may both be correct. Be open to changing your mind.
- Share the space. Do not dominate the discussion. Speak thoughtfully and listen carefully.
- Work to create and maintain a safe space for all. Build community!

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. participation in discussion sections | 10% |
| 2. weekly online reading assessments | 20% |
| 3. first essay | 15% |
| 4. midterm exam | 15% |
| 5. second essay | 20% |
| 6. final exam | 20% |
- **Participation in discussion sections:** You are expected to attend and actively participate in your designated discussion section. 10% of your final grade will reflect your participation as assessed by your discussion leader.
 - **Weekly online reading assessments:** You are expected to complete one online reading assessment each week, starting in the second week of the course. These timed assessments will consist of brief true/false or multiple choice questions based on the readings assigned for the next class meeting. Reading assessments are open book and open note (but NOT open internet or open classmates). The best way to prepare for these assessments is to read all assigned materials carefully and completely. In weeks where readings are assigned for both Monday and Wednesday classes, you may choose which assessment to complete. Assessments will be available until the start of the class when the readings are to be discussed. Only one assessment will be accepted for each week, and once an assessment has been started, you will receive the grade for that assessment for the week (i.e., once you begin an assessment, you cannot choose not to take it). No late or makeup assessments will be given. The average of your weekly reading assessments will count for 20% of your final grade.
 - **Essays:** You will complete two essays of 800 - 1000 words (about 3 double-spaced pages) in response to essay questions posted on Canvas. Each essay will ask you to develop your own perspective on a philosophical issue in dialogue with one or more of the authors discussed in class; outside research is not expected. Essays must be submitted through Canvas in a standard format (.doc, .docx, .pdf). Late essays will lose one full letter grade for each calendar day that they are late. The first essay will be worth 15% of your final grade, and the second essay will be worth 20% of your final grade.
 - Grading rubric for essays:
 - A (90% or above) = Excellent. No mistakes, well-written, and distinctive in some way or other.
 - B (80% or above) = Good. No significant mistakes, well-written, but not distinctive in any way.
 - C (70% or above) = Okay. Some errors, but a basic grasp of the material.
 - D (60% or above) = Poor. Significant errors. A tenuous grasp of the material.
 - F (below 60%) = Failing. Problematic on all fronts indicating either no real grasp of the material or a lack of appropriate effort.
 - **Midterm and Final Exams:** Midterm and final exams will both be conducted online. Exams will be timed for one hour, and they must be completed during the designated time period. It is recommended that you complete exams in a quiet location with reliable internet access. Exams are open book and open note (but NOT open internet or open classmates). The midterm exam will cover all material assigned as readings or discussed in class since the beginning of the course; the final exam will cover all material since the midterm exam. A list of terms and concepts for review will be posted on Canvas at least one week prior to the exam dates. Exams will include a mix of question formats that may include true/false, fill-in-the-blank, definitions, short answer questions, and essays. The midterm exam will be worth 15% of the final course grade, and the final exam will be worth 20% of the final course grade.
 - **Course Grading Scale:** Final course grades will be assigned according to the following scale. Grades will not be adjusted to fit a standard distribution curve, nor will “close” grades be rounded to a higher grade.

A	93% and above	C+	77% or higher but below 80%
A-	90% or higher but below 93%	C	70% or higher but below 77%
B+	87% or higher but below 90%	D	60% or higher but below 70%
B	83% or higher but below 87%	F	below 60%
B-	80% or higher but below 83%		

COURSE POLICIES & UNIVERSITY STATEMENTS

- **COVID-19 Statement**

We know from existing data that wearing a mask in public can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the community (Lyu & Wehby, 2020; CDC, 2020; Johns Hopkins Medicine, 2020). In accordance with PA Department of Health regulations and guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), The Pennsylvania State University has determined that everyone will be required to wear a face mask in university buildings, including classrooms. You **MUST** wear a mask appropriately (i.e., covering both your mouth and nose) in the building if you are attending class in person. Masks have been provided for students, instructors, and staff, and everyone is expected to wear one.

Students who choose not to wear a mask may not attend class in person. Students in this situation should not expect that they can complete this class remotely and may need to drop this course as this course requires in-person participation. This is to protect their health and safety as well as the health and safety of their classmates, instructor, and the university community. Anyone attending class in person without a mask will be asked to put one on or leave. Instructors will end class if anyone present refuses to appropriately wear a mask for the duration of class. Students who refuse to wear masks appropriately or adhere to other stated requirements may face disciplinary action for Code of Conduct violations.

On a case-by-case basis, students may consult with Student Disability Resources for accommodations if they cannot wear a mask. Students requiring such accommodations may be advised to take advantage of and participate in the course through synchronous remote learning, if available. Students requiring such accommodations should consult with academic advisors before the end of the drop/add period to locate alternative course offerings that will allow their participation through remote learning.

Finally, students who are experiencing COVID-19 related symptoms should not attend class in person and are encouraged to contact a health care provider.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, April 3) Recommendation Regarding the Use of Cloth Face Coverings, Especially in Areas of Significant Community-Based Transmission.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>

Johns Hopkins Medicine. (2020, June 17) Coronavirus Face Masks & Protection FAQs.

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-face-masks-what-you-need-to-know>

Lyu, W. and Wehby, G.L. (2020, June 16) Community Use Of Face Masks And COVID-19: Evidence From A Natural Experiment Of State Mandates In The US. Health Affairs.

https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.2020.00818?url_ver=Z39.88-2003&rfr_id=ori%3Arid%3Acrossref.org&rfr_dat=cr_pub++0pubmed&

- **Incompletes and extensions** will be given only in the event of documented illness or emergencies.
- **Classroom use of electronics:** Use of electronic equipment, including cell phones, tablets, and laptop computers, is prohibited during this class. Exceptions to this policy may be requested from the instructor and will be granted only for legitimate academic reasons. Any use of computers for academic reasons will be monitored throughout the term, and failure to restrict their use to this function will result in the revocation of any computer privileges.
- **Inclement Weather:** It is generally expected that class will meet unless the University is officially closed for inclement weather. If, however, it becomes necessary to cancel class while the University remains open, this will be announced on Canvas and through the Canvas email system.

- **Academic Integrity:** Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at The Pennsylvania State University, and all members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Consistent with this expectation, the University's Code of Conduct states that all students should act with personal integrity; respect other students' dignity, rights, and property; and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts.

Academic integrity includes a commitment by all members of the University community not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation, or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others.

Please review and familiarize yourself with the Code of Conduct and Academic Integrity policies. In accordance with these policies, violations of academic integrity will be met with disciplinary action consistent with the offense, ranging from a warning to failure of the course.

- University Code of Conduct:
<https://studentaffairs.psu.edu/support-safety-conduct/student-conduct/code-conduct>
- University Academic Integrity Policy: <http://undergrad.psu.edu/aappm/G-9-academic-integrity.html>
- College of the Liberal Arts Academic Integrity Policy:
<https://la.psu.edu/current-students/undergraduate-students/education/academic-integrity>

- **Disability Accommodation:** Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. Every Penn State campus has an office for students with disabilities. Student Disability Resources (SDR) website provides contact information for every Penn State campus (<http://equity.psu.edu/student-disability-resources/disability-coordinator>). For further information, please visit Student Disability Resources website (<http://equity.psu.edu/student-disability-resources/>).

In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation. See documentation guidelines at <http://equity.psu.edu/student-disability-resources/guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus disability services office will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations.

- **Counseling and Psychological Services:** Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.
 - Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park (CAPS): 814-863-0395,
<http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/counseling/>
 - Counseling and Psychological Services at Commonwealth Campuses
<http://senate.psu.edu/faculty/counseling-services-at-commonwealth-campuses/>
 - Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400
 - Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741
- **Educational Equity and Reporting Bias:** Penn State takes great pride to foster a diverse and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. Acts of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment due to age, ancestry, color, disability, gender, gender identity, national origin, race, religious belief, sexual orientation, or veteran status are not tolerated and can be reported through Educational Equity via the Report Bias webpage: <http://equity.psu.edu/reportbias/>

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

This schedule may be revised as the course proceeds, with any changes announced in class and on Canvas.

Week 1	8/23 - Introduction to the Big Questions Introduction to the course
	8/25 Discussion of the Big Questions
	8/27 Meet with discussion section
Week 2	8/30 - Who am I? Upanishads, <i>Dialogue with Death</i> Locke, <i>On Personal Identity</i>
	9/1 Buddhist Scriptures, <i>The Questions of King Melinda on the Self</i> Hume, <i>There is no Personal Identity</i>
	9/3 Meet with discussion section
Week 3	9/6 - No classes (Labor Day)
	9/8 Plato, <i>The Nature of the Soul and its Relation to the Body</i>
	9/10 Meet with discussion section
Week 4	9/13 Foucault, <i>Disciplining the Body</i> Dennett, <i>Where Am I?</i>
	9/15 Skinner, <i>The Illusion of Human Freedom</i> Sartre, <i>Existentialism is a Humanism</i>
	9/17 Meet with discussion section FIRST ESSAY DUE
Week 5	9/20 Beauvoir, <i>Woman as the Second Sex</i> Sheets-Johnstone, <i>Females as Docile Bodies</i>
	9/22 Zack, <i>An Autobiographical View of Mixed Race and Deracination</i>

	<p>9/24 Meet with discussion section</p>
Week 6	<p>9/27 - What is real? The Boshongo People, <i>An African Creation Story</i> The Cherokee, <i>How the World was Made and the Origin of Disease</i></p>
	<p>9/29 The Bible, <i>The Creation and the Fall</i></p>
	<p>10/1 Meet with discussion section</p>
Week 7	<p>10/4 Plato, <i>The Myth of the Cave</i> Lao-Tzu, <i>The Way of the Universe</i></p>
	<p>10/6 Review for Midterm Exam Midterm Course Evaluation</p>
	<p>10/8 Meet with discussion section</p>
Week 8	<p>10/11 No in-person class. MIDTERM EXAM to be completed online</p>
	<p>10/13 Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i> Leibniz, <i>The Monadology</i></p>
	<p>10/15 Meet with discussion section</p>
Week 9	<p>10/18 Bergson, <i>An Introduction to Metaphysics</i> Nishida, <i>The True Features of Reality</i></p>
	<p>10/20 Frye, <i>The Politics of Reality</i></p>
	<p>10/22 Meet with discussion section</p>

Week 10	10/25 - How can we know the truth? Descartes, <i>Meditations on the Nature of Knowledge</i> Locke, <i>The Source of Our Knowledge</i>
	10/27 Peirce, <i>The Fixation of Belief</i> James, <i>Pragmatism's Conception of Truth</i>
	10/29 Meet with discussion section
Week 11	11/1 Vasconcelos, <i>Methods and Modes of Knowing</i> Jaspers, <i>Truth and Existence</i>
	11/3 Benally, <i>Navajo Ways of Knowing</i> Valadez, <i>The Metaphysics of Oppression</i>
	11/5 Meet with discussion section SECOND ESSAY DUE
Week 12	11/8 - What should I believe? Augustinus, <i>Confessions on the Nature of God</i> Black Elk, <i>The Powers of the Bison and the Elk</i>
	11/10 Aquinas, <i>Proof that God Exists</i> Kierkegaard, <i>The Faith of Abraham</i>
	11/12 Meet with discussion section
Week 13	11/15 Buber, <i>I and Thou</i> Gutiérrez, <i>Involvement in the Liberation Process</i>
	11/17 Starhawk, <i>Witchcraft and Women's Culture</i> James, <i>The Will to Believe</i>
	11/19 Meet with discussion section
Week 14	11/22 & 11/24: No Classes (Fall Break)
Week 15	11/29 Campbell, <i>Myth and Society</i> Yutang, <i>Why I Am a Pagan</i>
	12/1 Whitehead, <i>Science and Religion</i> Flew, <i>Theology and Falsification</i>

	12/3 Meet with discussion section
Week 16	12/6 Russell, <i>Has Religion Made Useful Contributions to Civilization?</i>
	12/8 Closing discussion Review for Final Exam
	12/10 Meet with discussion section
Final Exam	TBA. No in-person meeting. Final exam to be completed online.