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**Hours:** T,Th 10-12 PM and by appointment

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**Office:** Dale Hall Tower 612  
**Hours:** M, F 10:30-12:00 pm

### Course Description

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Philosophy is, at bottom, the exercise of identifying and explaining good reasons for believing true things, while noticing and resisting bad reasons for believing false things. This can be very difficult, for two reasons:

- It is often hard to determine what is true and what is false
- The human mind is in many ways disposed to be irrational

In this class, we are going to explore what it means to be rational, how to put this understanding into practice, and how to resist common tendencies toward irrationality.

The course has four units:

- Logic: What is the structure of good reasoning vs. bad reasoning?
- Epistemology: How do we form beliefs in responsible ways?
- Metaphysics: What should we believe exists, and how do we decide?
- Ethics: How should we choose what to do and what to value?

The unifying feature here is the concept “should”: What/how should we think and act?

The main goal of this course is to help make you better at reasoning, both in the sense of knowing what the rational thing is, and in the sense of putting that knowledge into practice. We will give special attention to the many fallacies, biases, and unreliable heuristics that can interfere with or undermine our rationality.

In addition to these big-picture concerns, we will also focus on developing the following more practical philosophical skills:

- Reading and understanding conceptually difficult texts
- Critically evaluating arguments and assumptions
- Communicating complex ideas clearly and efficiently

In other words, this course will be like a boot camp for learning to think and communicate clearly.

### Course Materials

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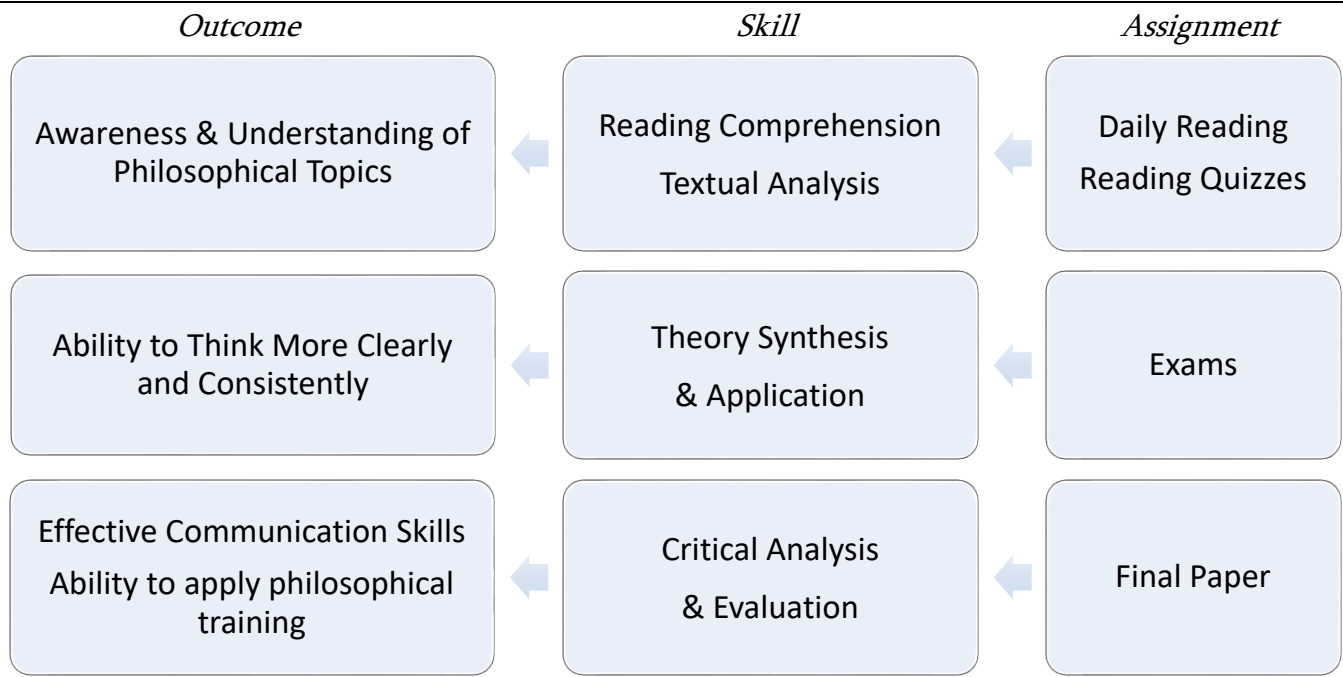
There are no required books for this course, because books are expensive. Instead, I’ve collected readings from a variety of sources (books, scholarly journals, blogs, etc), and posted them all to [Canvas](#). You should print out each reading assignment, so you can easily read it, write on it, refer to it, and bring it with you to class.

#### *Other Resources*

[Guide for Reading Philosophy](#) (Jim Pryor, NYU) [Guide for the Perplexed](#) (Dan Bonevac, UT Austin)  
[Guide for Writing Philosophy](#) (Jim Pryor, NYU) [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) (various)

## Learning Outcomes

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## Assignments

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### *Reading*

You'll have 30-50 pages of reading per week in this course, usually around 10 pages per day. This material can be difficult, and will typically require multiple read-throughs to fully grasp. On the plus side, I've tried to keep the assignments short and wholly relevant, so you won't have to waste your time reading pages that don't matter.

### *Daily Reading Quizzes*

We will have low-stakes reading comprehension quizzes in class almost every day. These quizzes will use a variety of short-answer questions (multiple choice, True/False, etc). They will mainly test whether you're keeping up with the reading and paying attention in class. These should be easy points that you earn simply by doing the minimally required work. Conversely, if you're doing poorly on these quizzes, this shows that you need to change your study habits. If you find yourself in this position, come talk to me about study strategies: it is not obvious how to study well.

### *Exams<sup>1</sup>*

We will have three exams in this class. The first will have a short-answer format similar to the daily reading quizzes, and will be used to test your grasp of critical thinking and logic. The second and third exams will involve longer written answers (from a few sentences to one-page), and concentrate on synthesis and application of epistemic and metaphysical ideas.

### *Final Paper<sup>2</sup>*

Instead of a final exam, you'll be asked to write a short paper (4-6 pp.) focusing on a topic of your choice from the final units of the course. We'll spend some time toward the end of class talking on advice for writing good papers. This paper will be due on the date of the final exam, but you'll turn it in online.

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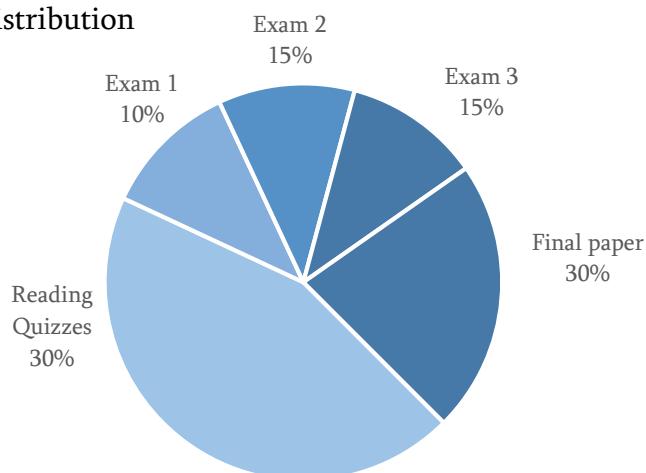
<sup>1</sup> I'll give you more info about these exams in a handout later.

<sup>2</sup> Ditto

## Grades

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### 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

**Quizzes:** There will be 35 class meetings when we have in-class quizzes. Each quiz will be worth 1 point total, which equals 1% of your total grade. I will only count your highest 30 quizzes, which means you can miss three quizzes with no penalty. Conversely, you can only get 30 possible points out of the 35 quizzes. If we have to cancel a class or I decide not to offer a quiz, everyone will get that day's points by default.

**Exams:** The first exam will be worth 10 pts = 10% of your total grade. The second and third exams will each be worth 15 pts = 15% of your total grade each.

**Final Paper:** Your paper will be worth 30 pts = 30% of your total grade.

**Extra Credit:** If you get less than an 80% on an exam that was turned in on time, you can revise and resubmit it to earn up to an 80%. To do this, you will have to write a report detailing, for each question you missed, (i) what your wrong answer was and why you chose it, and (ii) what the right answer is, and why it is right.<sup>3</sup>

**Rounding:** The letter grade cut off for, e.g. an A is 90.0, not 89.5 or 89.9. But I may choose to round up in exceptional cases, if (i) I feel you've done better or worked harder than your score suggests, and (ii) your grade is not due to excessive incomplete or missing assignments. This is a courtesy, not an entitlement.

### Late Work & Make-ups

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Most of your assignments will be in-class. Because there's a built-in curve for quiz grades, you may not make-up a missed quiz.

If you have to miss an exam, you must arrange a make-up time with me **in advance**. If you know you'll miss an exam, let me know ASAP! Otherwise, you forfeit your right to take the exam, and lose those points.

The final paper will be due on our final exam date (May 12). There is a 2 point late-penalty for each day after this. Any paper not submitted by May 15 gets zero points.

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<sup>3</sup> I'll give you handouts later with more info on how to do these revisions.

## Tech Policy

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Computers, tablets, e-readers, etc., will not be allowed during class time. I know it sounds lame, but computers in class do [much more harm than good](#).

Three main reasons for this:

- 1) You might think you can multi-task well. [You are incorrect](#). Even if you were miraculously among the 2% of good multi-taskers, you would still distract those around you.
- 2) Electronic texts are much [less effective](#) than paper for the kind of reading we'll be doing.
- 3) [It is well-documented that taking](#) notes by hand is much more effective than typing. If you want a digital version of your notes, scan them or, better, type them out after class.

So, unless you have an accommodation from DRC (see below), you may not use electronic devices in class. Instead, print out your texts and bring hard copies to class.

## Academic Integrity

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It is expected that any work you do in this course is the result of your academic efforts. University policies on academic dishonesty can be found [here](#). You are expected to be familiar with these policies; ignorance is not an excuse. In particular, you are required to:

- acknowledge the contributions of other sources to your scholastic efforts;
- complete your assignments independently unless expressly authorized to seek or obtain assistance in preparing them;
- follow instructions for assignments and exams, and observe the standards of your academic discipline; and
- avoid engaging in any form of academic dishonesty on behalf of yourself or another student.

Serious failures to maintain academic integrity in this course will result in the maximum possible penalty. At the very least, you will receive no credit for the assignment and be referred to the Academic Integrity Office for further review and possible sanction. Depending on the severity on the infraction, you could receive an F for the course, or be suspended or expelled from OU. Don't risk it.

Tl;dr: *Don't Cheat!* Ask for help instead.

## Reasonable Accommodation Policy

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Any student who needs extra time or resources to do their best work due to a physical, cognitive or emotional condition may qualify for academic accommodations. You should consult the Disability Resource Center for further information: <http://www.ou.edu/drc/home.html>, (405) 325-3852 or TDD: (405) 325-4173. The DRC is in charge of assigning and providing accommodations, so you consult with them **immediately** if you think you qualify. I can only provide accommodations based on the DRC's recommendations.

A bit of advice: do not let shyness or embarrassment or pride stop you from getting the services you deserve. I've seen too many students allow their grades to suffer because they didn't speak up to claim the accommodations they were entitled to. I will do everything I can to make sure that your accommodations stay between you, me, the TA, and the DRC.

## **Title IX Resources and Reporting Requirement**

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For any concerns regarding gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating/domestic violence, or stalking, the University offers a variety of resources. To learn more or to report an incident, please contact the Sexual Misconduct Office at 405/325-2215 (8 to 5, M-F) or [smo@ou.edu](mailto:smo@ou.edu). Incidents can also be reported confidentially to OU Advocates at 405/615-0013 (phones are answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week). Also, please be advised that a professor/GA/TA is required to report instances of sexual harassment, sexual assault, or discrimination to the Sexual Misconduct Office. Inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies may be directed to: Bobby J. Mason, University Equal Opportunity Officer and Title IX Coordinator at 405/325-3546 or [bjm@ou.edu](mailto:bjm@ou.edu). For more information, visit <http://www.ou.edu/eoo.html>.

## **Adjustments for Pregnancy/Childbirth Related Issues**

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Should you need modifications or adjustments to your course requirements because of documented pregnancy-related or childbirth-related issues, please contact me or the Disability Resource Center at 405/325-3852 as soon as possible. Also, see [here](#) for answers to commonly asked questions.

## **Mental Health**

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College can be a very stressful time, emotionally, socially, and academically. You don't have to face these stresses alone. You have lots of resources available to you at the Goddard Counseling Center (<http://www.ou.edu/ucc.html>). Don't be shy about using them!

## **Tutoring and Writing Help**

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There are lots of resources available on campus for academic assistance:

<http://www.ou.edu/graduatesooner/resources/tutoring.html>

[http://www.ou.edu/univcoll/action\\_tutoring.html](http://www.ou.edu/univcoll/action_tutoring.html)

<http://www.ou.edu/writingcenter.html>

If you are having trouble in your classes, seek out help. You can talk to me, and/or make use of the many experts on campus who can help you out.

## **Religious Observance**

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It is the policy of the University to excuse the absences of students that result from religious observances and to reschedule examinations and additional required classwork that may fall on religious holidays, without penalty. [\[See Faculty Handbook 3.15.2\]](#)

If you have a religious holiday during the Spring semester, let me know **immediately** so we can schedule around it.

*\*\* If you take this course, you thereby agree to follow all course policies outlined here. \*\**

## Schedule [Subject to Revision]

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Jan	18	Syllabus & Canvas
	20	Williams (2016) "Post-Truth"; Lombrozo (2013) "Illusions of Understanding..."
		<b>CRITICAL THINKING &amp; LOGIC</b>
	23	Corvino (2015) "The Fact/Opinion Distinction"
	25	Kahneman (2011) <i>Thinking, Fast and Slow</i> I.1,3
	27	Kahneman (2011) <i>Thinking, Fast and Slow</i> I.5,7
	30	Dobelli (2011) <i>The Art of Thinking Clearly</i> , excerpts
Feb	01	McRaney (2011) <i>You Are Not So Smart</i> , excerpts
	03	Dobelli (2011) <i>The Art of Thinking Clearly</i> , excerpts
	06	Cottrell (2005) <i>Critical Thinking Skills</i> Ch. 1
	08	Bowell & Kemp (2015) <i>Critical Thinking: A Concise Guide</i> Ch. 3
	10	Lau (2011) <i>An Introduction to Critical Thinking and Creativity</i> Ch. 10
	13	<b>Exam 1</b>
		<b>EPISTEMOLOGY</b>
	15	Haack (2015) "Epistemology Who Needs It?"
	17	Zagzebski (2009) <i>On Epistemology</i> Ch.1.1-2
	20	Zagzebski (2009) <i>On Epistemology</i> Ch.1.3-4
	22	Sherman & Heath (2003) "Intellectual Virtue: Emotions, Luck, and the Ancients"
	24	Casam (2015) "The intellectual character of conspiracy theorists"
	27	Code (1984) Toward a 'Responsibilist' Epistemology §4
Mar	01-03	TBA
	06	Nagel (2006) <i>Epistemology: A Very Short Introduction</i> , Ch.6
	08	Lackey (2012) "What's the rational response to everyday disagreements?"
	10	Lenz (2014) "Fact-checking Grandma"
	[13-17]	<b>Spring Break</b> No Class
	20	<b>Exam 2</b>
		<b>METAPHYSICS</b>
	22	Thomasson (2010) "The Controversy of the Existence of Ordinary Objects"
	24	Chakravartty (2007) <i>A Metaphysics for Scientific Realism</i> 1.1-4
	27	Brown (2010) <i>How I Killed Pluto and Why It Had It Coming</i> Ch. 1, 10
	29	Bokulich (2010) Pluto and the 'Planet Problem' §1, 3-4
	31	Maddy (1990) <i>Realism in Mathematics</i> 1.1, 1.4
	03	Leng (2010) <i>Mathematics and Reality</i> , Ch. 7.0-7.1.1, 7.3
	05	Fausto-Terling (1993) "The Five Sexes"; Haslinger (2000) "Gender and Race"
	07	Witt (2011) <i>The Metaphysics of Gender</i> , 3-24
	10	<b>Exam 3</b>
		<b>ETHICS</b>
	12	Arendt (1971) "Thinking and Moral Considerations"; Butler (2011) "Arendt on Eichmann"
	14	Maphappy (2014) "The True Guide to Proper Airport Etiquette"
	17	Iyengar (2011) <i>The Art of Choosing</i> Prologue & Ch. 1
	19	McGonigal (2010) <i>The Willpower Instinct</i> Ch. 3
	21	Tavris & Aronson (2007) <i>Mistakes Were Made (But Not By Me)</i> , Introduction
	24	Binazir (2010) "Why Do Smart People Make Dumb Decisions?"
	26	Sharot (2011) <i>The Optimism Bias</i> Ch. 5
	28	Tiberius (2009) "The Reflective Life: Wisdom and Happiness for real people"
	01	Chang (2015) "Resolving to Create a New You"; Chang (2015) "Decision Time"
	03	Paul (2014) "The Transformative Experience"
	05	Evals & Review