PHIL 1002W: Introduction to Philosophy || Fall 2026

Lectures
Tues/Thurs 11:15 am - 12:30 pm | Blegen 255

Discussion Section 002
Mon 10:10 - 11 am | Blegen 260

Discussion Section 003
Mon 11:15 am - 12:05 pm | Blegen 115

Instructors:

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Course Description:

Knowledge, Minds, and Reality: An Introduction to Philosophy

How do you know you're not dreaming? Is there an external world before us as it appears to our senses, populated with trees, desks, and human beings? Or do our senses deceive us about the true nature of reality? Are we currently living in a computer simulation, and is there any way for us to know?

Philosophers who reflect on these questions tend to conclude that the only things we can be sure of are the contents of our own minds, such as our conscious experiences. But what is consciousness? Is there any way of explaining how a mind could arise from a body? Could I transfer my consciousness onto a digital computer and make myself immortal, or is that incompatible with the true nature of my self or soul?

Even supposing I have various conscious experiences, what is the "I" that has these experiences? Is there a subject that persists through time? Or are we just a loose and disconnected series of thoughts and feelings with no stronger foundation that binds our experiences together as persons? Could I ever know that anyone else exists besides myself, that anyone else has a mind like I do?

And speaking of persons, there is all this talk lately about artificial agents like Claude, ChatGPT, and the like. Are these artificial systems persons? Do they have feelings? Are they conscious? If not, could they be someday, and how would we know?

This course will be dedicated to exploring these questions and, inevitably, many others along the way.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Students in the course **can identify, define, and solve problems.**

Addressing the outcome
In this course, students will grapple with major problems in philosophy concerning knowledge, minds, and reality. By studying a wide variety of philosophical perspectives, students will investigate these problems, critically evaluate proposed solutions, and develop solutions of their own.

Assessment of learning related to the outcome
This learning outcome will be assessed through written exams, in-class philosophical reflection assignments, critical interview assignments, and lively participation in class discussion. These assignments will require students to identify and explain philosophical problems and arguments, critically evaluate proposed solutions, and develop and defend their own philosophical positions.

Required Texts:

All students are required to purchase the following textbook, which is available in our bookstore.

- ***The Norton Introduction to Philosophy, Third Edition***
  Edited by Gideon Rosen, Alex Byrne, Joshua Cohen, Elizabeth Harman, Seana Shiffrin

Course Requirements

1. Philosophical Reflections (12 total) 10%
2. In-class Written Exam 1 15%
3. In-class Written Exam 2 20%
4. In-class Written Exam 3 20%
5. Critical Interview 1 10%
6. Critical Interview 2 10%
7. Participation 15%
    a. Attendance
    b. Discussion in lectures and section

Exam Dates and Deadlines:

Exam 1	Thurs Oct 1
Critical Interview 1	Thurs Oct 22 by midnight
Exam 2	Tues Nov 10
Critical Interview 2	Thurs Dec 3 by midnight
Exam 3	Tues Dec 15

Description of Requirements

Philosophical Reflections (10%): Written responses to philosophical prompts, completed during lectures. Twelve will be assigned randomly throughout the semester. Students are allowed to miss two.

In-class Written Exams (15%, 20%, 20%): In-class exams will include the following components. Five quotations from our readings will be provided on the exam. Students will be required to identify the author and text from which each quotation was taken (2 pts. each). Students will then select two of the quotations and write two short essays. For each, students must first clearly explain the quotation in their own words (10 pts. each) and then critically evaluate the argument or viewpoint contained in the quotation (10 pts. each). (50 pts. in total.)

Points will be deducted for work that is illegible or otherwise difficult for your instructor to read. Please write clearly and legibly. Practice writing by hand outside of class if needed.

Students are required to complete their exams on the dates they are proctored. Makeup exams will be provided for excused absences in accordance with University policy. Students should notify the instructor of an absence in advance whenever possible, or as soon as reasonably possible in the case of an emergency. Students who miss an exam without an excused absence may be permitted to take a makeup exam at the instructor's discretion, with a 15-point deduction.

In exceptional circumstances where a makeup exam must be completed electronically, the student's work will be submitted to Pangram for AI detection. If Pangram detects AI usage, the student will be asked to complete the exam again in their own words. If Pangram detects AI usage again, the student will fail the exam.

Critical Interviews (10%, 10%): Students will conduct an interview with someone who is not enrolled in the course. During the interview, they will ask a philosophical question and engage critically with the interviewee's response. Students must submit a recording of the interview.

Participation (15%): Attendance will be taken in discussion sections, and Philosophical Reflections will serve to track attendance in lectures. Students are expected to be lively participants in both lectures and discussion sections.

Electronic devices are not permitted in class unless the student has received special permission from the University and the instructor has been formally notified. You must bring a notebook and writing utensil to every lecture and discussion section.

Course Schedule

Note: The following schedule is subject to change. Students must complete readings or film viewings prior to class. Follow the Canvas page for updates to readings, links to films, and access to reading assignments not included in our textbook.

Below I use the acronym *NIP* for *The Norton Introduction to Philosophy*.

Introduction

Tues Sep 8

- Course Syllabus

Unit 1: Skepticism About the External World

Thurs Sep 10

- René Descartes, "Meditation I: What Can Be Called Into Doubt," from *Meditations on First Philosophy* [***NIP*, pp. 287–291**]
- David Hume, "Of Scepticism with Regard to the Senses," from *A Treatise of Human Nature* [***NIP*, pp. 292–301**]

- Optional: "How Can We Know about the External World?" [***NIP*, pp. 282–286**]

Tues Sep 15

- G. E. Moore, "Proof of an External World" [***NIP*, pp. 301–307**]

Thurs Sep 17

- George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* [***NIP*, pp. 439–451**]
- Optional: "Are Things as They Appear?" [***NIP*, pp. 428–432**]

Tues Sep 22

- Rae Langton, "Ignorance of Things in Themselves" [***NIP*, pp. 315–324**]

Thurs Sep 24

- David Chalmers, "Are We Living in a Simulation?" [***NIP*, pp. 465–474**]

Tues Sep 29

- *The Matrix* [**film available on Canvas**]
- Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine" [**reading available on Canvas**]

Thurs Oct 1

- IN-CLASS WRITTEN EXAM 1

Unit 2: The Mind-Body Problem

Tues Oct 6

- René Descartes, "Meditation II: The Nature of the Human Mind, and How It Is Better Known than the Body" and "Meditation VI: . . . The Real Distinction between Mind and Body," from *Meditations on First Philosophy* [***NIP*, pp. 334–341**]
- Optional: "Is Mind Material?" [***NIP*, pp. 329–333**]

Thurs Oct 8

- Elisabeth of Bohemia, "Correspondence with Descartes" [***NIP*, pp. 342–343**]
- Antoine Arnauld, "Fourth Set of Objections" [***NIP*, pp. 344–347**]

Tues Oct 13

- Gilbert Ryle, "Descartes' Myth," from *The Concept of Mind* [***NIP*, pp. 347–355**]

Unit 3: Consciousness

Thurs Oct 15

- Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" [***NIP*, pp. 378–387**]
- Optional: "What Is Consciousness?" [***NIP*, pp. 373–377**]

Tues Oct 20

- Patricia Churchland, "Are Mental States Irreducible to Neurobiological States?", from *Neurophilosophy: A Unified Science of the Mind/Brain* [***NIP*, pp. 398–405**]

Thurs Oct 22

- David Chalmers, "The Hard Problem of Consciousness" [***NIP*, p. 406**]
- Optional: Philip Bold, "Do I Know That I Am Conscious?" [**reading available on Canvas**]
- CRITICAL INTERVIEW 1 DUE BY MIDNIGHT

Unit 4: The Problem of Other Minds

Tues Oct 27

- Bertrand Russell, "The Argument from Analogy," from *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* [***NIP*, pp. 249–253**]
- Optional: "How Can You Know Your Own Mind or the Mind of Another?" [***NIP*, pp. 243–248**]

Thurs Oct 29

- Ludwig Wittgenstein, "The Private Language Arguments," from *Philosophical Investigations* [**reading available on Canvas**]

Tues Nov 3

- Sarah K. Paul, "John Doe and Richard Roe" [***NIP*, pp. 261–268**]

Thurs Nov 5

- *Blade Runner* [film available on Canvas]
- Optional: Alex Byrne, "Animal and Artificial Minds" [***NIP*, pp. 269–278**]

Tues Nov 10

- IN-CLASS WRITTEN EXAM 2

Unit 5: Personal Identity and the Self

Thurs Nov 12

- John Locke, "Of Identity and Diversity," from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [***NIP*, pp. 527–534**]
- Optional: "What Is Personal Identity?" [***NIP*, pp. 521–526**]

Tues Nov 17

- *Memento* [**film available on Canvas**]

Thurs Nov 19

- Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity," from *Reasons and Persons* [***NIP*, pp. 542–554**]

Tues Nov 24: No class

Thurs Nov 26: No class

Tues Dec 1

- Bernard Williams, "The Self and the Future" [***NIP*, pp. 555–561**]

Unit 6: Artificial Minds

Thurs Dec 3

- *Ex Machina* [**film available on Canvas**]
- CRITICAL INTERVIEW 2 DUE BY MIDNIGHT

Tues Dec 8

- John Searle, "Can Computers Think?", from *Minds, Brains, and Science* [***NIP*, pp. 355–361**]
- Anil Seth, "Why AI Isn't Going to Become Conscious" [**video available on Canvas**]

Thurs Dec 10

- Terry Bisson, "They're Made Out of Meat" [reading available on Canvas]
- Barbara Montero, "AI Is on Its Way to Something Even More Remarkable Than Intelligence" [**reading available on Canvas**]
- Optional: Philip Bold, "Wittgenstein and the Question of Conscious AI" [**reading available on Canvas**]

Tues Dec 15

- IN-CLASS WRITTEN EXAM 3

Course Policies

1. **No Technology in Class:** Students may not use electronic devices during class unless they have received special permission from the University and the instructor has been formally notified.

2. **Late Work:** Late work will be penalized unless permission has been granted by the instructor.

3. **Makeup Exams:** See the Description of Requirements above.

4. **Grading:** Final grades will be calculated as follows.

Letter Grades are translated to the following numerical scores.

A+ = 100	**C+** = 78
A = 95	**C** = 75
A- = 92	**C-** = 72
B+ = 88	**D+** = 68
B = 85	**D** = 65
B- = 82	**F** = 50

Final letter grades will be calculated using the following scale.

97-100 = **A+**	77-79 = **C+**
93-96 = **A**	73-76 = **C**
90-92 = **A-**	70-72 = **C-**
87-89 = **B+**	67-69 = **D+**
83-86 = **B**	60-66 = **D**
80-82 = **B-**	50 = **F**

5. **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism will result in a final grade of F for the course. If you have any questions about plagiarism or how to properly cite sources, do not hesitate to ask. According to the UMN Student Conduct Code: "Plagiarism shall mean representing the words, creative work, or ideas of another person as one's own without providing proper documentation of source."

6. **Use of AI:** Unless explicitly permitted by the instructor, the use of generative AI in completing coursework is prohibited. Students are welcome to use generative AI outside of class as a study aid, for example, to explore philosophical questions, review course material, or think through philosophical problems. However, work submitted for evaluation must be the student's own.

7. **Disability Accommodations:** If you have, or think you have, a disability that may affect your performance in this course, please contact the University of Minnesota Disability Resource Center (DRC) to discuss equitable access and reasonable accommodations.

8. **Sexual Misconduct.** Sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, and relationship violence) includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors,

and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such behavior is prohibited in the University setting.

Per the U of M policy on sexual harassment, *I am required to share information that I learn about possible sexual misconduct* with the campus Title IX office. Within the requirements of my job, I will be as responsive as possible to your requests for confidentiality and support. You can also, or alternately, choose to talk with a confidential resource that will not share information that they learn about sexual misconduct. Confidential resources include:

- The Aurora Center 24hr Helpline (612-626-9111)
- Boynton Mental Health (612-624-1444)
- Student Counseling Services (612-624-3323)

9. Other Useful Resources:

- University Policies: https://policy.umn.edu/
- Student Writing Support: http://writing.umn.edu/sws/
- Disability Resource Center: https://disability.umn.edu/
- Student Counseling Center: https://counseling.umn.edu/
- The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: https://plato.stanford.edu