

**COURSE OUTLINE**  
**INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY: BASIC PROBLEMS PHIL 1050-01**  
**FALL 2014**

**Lectures:**  
**8:30-9:20 AM Monday/Wednesday, Rozanski (ROZH) 102**

**Seminar Meetings**

Please, check your registration and attend the seminar for which you registered:

Section 01-01: Thursday, 10:30AM - 11:20AM, Mackinnon ([MACK](#)), Room 119A

Section 01-02: Thursday, 11:30AM - 12:20PM, Mackinnon ([MACK](#)), Room 309

Section 01-03: Thursday, 12:30PM - 1:20PM, Mackinnon ([MACK](#)), Room 309

Section 01-04: Thursday, 1:30 PM - 2:20PM, Mackinnon ([MACK](#)), Room 311

Section 01-05: Friday, 11:30AM - 12:20PM, Mackinnon ([MACK](#)), Room 315

Section 01-06: Friday, 12:30PM - 1:20PM, Mackinnon ([MACK](#)), Room 316

**Lead Instructor:**  
**John Hacker-Wright, Ph.D.**  
**Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy**

**Email: [jhackerw@uoguelph.ca](mailto:jhackerw@uoguelph.ca)**

**Phone: (519)824-4120 x 56765**

**Office: 330 Mackinnon**

### **Office Hours: Monday, 9:30-10:30 and by appointment**

All philosophy department offices are located in the office wing of the old Mackinnon. To access them, take the stairs across from the Mackinnon Café to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor. You will walk out into the hallway where all of our offices are located.

### **Seminar Leaders:**

Daniel Griffin

Email: [griffind@uoguelph.ca](mailto:griffind@uoguelph.ca)

Office Hours: Monday, 10am-12pm, Mackinnon 361

Veronica Majewski

Email: [majewski@uoguelph.ca](mailto:majewski@uoguelph.ca)

Office Hours: Thursday, 12pm-1pm, Mackinnon 368

Bryan Richard,

Email: [brichard09@uoguelph.ca](mailto:brichard09@uoguelph.ca)

Office Hours: Tuesday, 2pm-3pm, Mackinnon 360

## A Letter to the Student:

Welcome to Philosophy 1050! I assume that this is your first course in philosophy. As you will soon see, philosophers ask deep, probing questions about fundamental issues such as: What can we know about the natural world? What is fundamentally real? What is the best way to live? I believe everyone asks these questions, and in fact, I believe that everyone has a burning need to arrive at convincing answers to them. When we don't get convincing answers, a sort of despair sets in; we give up asking the questions and we live a life that is in some way shallow and unsatisfying: we don't know what is going on or why we are living. I agree with Socrates, who said in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE: "An unexamined life is not worth living."

In this course, we will be addressing two basic questions that are representative of philosophical inquiry: "Is there any purpose to human life?" and "What is the mind?" These might seem to you impossible questions to answer. Indeed, they are very difficult to answer, and we won't arrive at definitive answers to them by the end of the semester. Instead, we will outline some of the basic possible positions that can be supported using good reasons. I will ask you to try to think through your own answers to these questions. My goal is not to persuade you to accept specific answers to these questions, but to help you to develop strategies for thinking clearly about the issues; that includes considering a wider range of possible answers than you might have considered before and developing skills for evaluating arguments supporting them.

You may be wondering: what will we be doing in here? You will be doing what philosophers do. We read, write, discuss, and, above all, think! I have selected texts that I believe to be clear, thoughtful, and provocative. Unlike other course texts, you are not expected to simply agree with what you read and absorb information from it. Instead, you are expected to think about what you read. That requires reading critical and asking yourself: What does it mean? Do I agree? And most importantly: Why do I agree or disagree? Reading in philosophy usually requires time, patience, and re-reading! But the result is that you do more than merely acquire information: you grow as a thoughtful human being by becoming more articulate about the fundamental questions that philosophers raise.

When I took my first philosophy course, I must admit I didn't really understand what was going on through the first half of the course, but then, suddenly, things fell into place, and after a few more philosophy courses, I decided to make writing and teaching philosophy my life's work. Drawing on the expertise of a team of philosophers who are assembled here to help you learn, and in talking about these issues until late in the night with your friends, you will soon find out about the exhilaration of philosophical insight.

Sincerely,

John Hacker-Wright

## Professor's Contact Information and When to Contact the Professor

John Hacker-Wright, Ph.D.

Email: [jhackerw@uoguelph.ca](mailto:jhackerw@uoguelph.ca)

Phone: (519)824-4120 x 56765

Office: 330 Mackinnon

Office Hours: Monday 9:30-10:30 and by appointment

The best way to reach me is by email, which I check regularly; you can also leave voice-mail on my phone, but I check that less regularly. If you send an email, expect a reply within 48 hours, and if you haven't heard back by then, something's probably gone wrong with the message.

My main role here is to help you learn. So, you are always welcome to contact me to discuss philosophy.

Some other reasons you might want to contact me:

- Concerns about understanding an assignment
- Concerns about grading (how you will be evaluated, fairness of a grade, etc.)
- Concerns about distracting behaviour or disrespectful treatment from other members of the class
- Concerns about study habits and preparation for the exam.
- If you feel you may have grounds for academic consideration to hand in an assignment late.
- If you think there is something that I or your seminar leader could be doing better to help you learn.

Note that I am one part of your instructional team. I will work with your seminar leader to help you learn and succeed in this course; it is through your initiative in coming to us that we will be of most help to you.

# Course Information and Policies

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## Course Description

This course will introduce you to the field of philosophy through reading, reflecting, and writing on two central philosophical questions: 1) Is there any purpose to human life? 2) What is the mind?

Broadly speaking, philosophy is a systematic endeavor to arrive at *reasoned* answers to questions about nature and our ability to know it. The aim of philosophy is to produce a *rational worldview*. A rational worldview is one that is coherent and supported by our best available evidence. In this broad sense, philosophy encompasses the sciences. Many of our present academic disciplines can be viewed as divisions of philosophy, and in fact they historically emerged by branching off from what was formerly treated by philosophers. Today, philosophers in philosophy departments tend to work primarily on conceptual issues rather than doing empirical investigations (e.g., experimenting and taking measurements in laboratories); we ask, “Are we thinking about this in the right way, and might there be better ways of thinking about things, that would help resolve apparently irresolvable issues?” Another crucial role of philosophy is questioning what we think we already know. This might seem counterproductive, but in fact many of the most important advances in human knowledge have occurred through such skeptical questioning.

## Learning Goals

This course is designed to help you learn in three different dimensions

It will help...

1. To learn how to make and assess arguments. Arguments, in this context, are not verbal fights but rather a set of statements (called ‘premises’) that provide evidence for a further claim (called ‘the conclusion’). Making and assessing arguments is essential to every discipline (all of the sciences and even fine arts!) but philosophy treats issues about what makes an argument cogent in a sub-discipline called logic. We will learn the basics of logic as it is used in ordinary language, mostly through practice at making arguments and discussing them.

2. To acquire the ability to think about issues from the standpoint of different conceptual frameworks. In this course, you will encounter some very different ways of thinking about the world. Some of these views may be close to your own current way of thinking, but many will be quite different. Through understanding these different ways of thinking, you will become a more creative, flexible thinker.

3. To learn about the intellectual history of the Western world. You will also acquire some knowledge of the development of ideas about nature, science, and the human condition. These ideas are hugely influential on present day science as well as everyday thought, so in learning about this history you will gain a more critical and appreciative grasp of some of the ideas that you will use in your life and work.

4. To read and write more effectively. We tend to think of reading as a skill that is acquired in elementary school, but in fact, it is a skill that can develop throughout life, as can skill at writing. Philosophy emphasizes reading for argumentative structure rather than, say, trying to understand metaphor and character as one might in a literature course. In writing, philosophy emphasizes clarity and cogency of argument. These are skills that transfer into many other areas of life.

### **Required texts**

The following texts are required for the course. I have also put them on reserve in the library, so that you can consult them there, but ideally you will purchase them and bring them to class with you.

- 1.) John Cottingham, *The Meaning of Life*, Routledge.
- 2.) Eric Matthews, *Key Concepts in Philosophy: Mind*, Continuum/Bloomsbury

### **Assignments and Evaluation**

Your grade will have the following three components:

1. There will be 2 writing assignments; see Reading Schedule for due dates. These papers will ask you to develop a statement of different aspects of your worldview in response to issues in the readings. Each paper will be worth 20%, so that the writing will comprise 40% of your final grade. For each paper, you will be able to find the assignment and a rubric on our Courselink website. In addition, we will discuss writing strategies for philosophy in class and in your seminars.

2. Reading questions. These questions are designed to help you to grapple with the reading in a deeper and more systematic manner, which you need to do in order to develop philosophical views in response to them. They will also prepare you for the style of writing that I will be asking you to do in the papers. I will provide a set of questions for each reading assignment and your seminar leader will assign one of the questions to be collected and graded. These will contribute 30% to your grade.

3. A comprehensive final exam at the end of the course. This will be a combination of multiple choice question and short answer questions that will challenge you to undertake

an overview of the material we have learned over the semester. We will conduct a review session at the end of the semester with sample test questions to ensure that are well prepared and that you have a good idea of the style of question that I will be asking. This will contribute the remaining 30% of your grade.

## **Late Policy**

Please let your seminar leader know if you will not get your work handed in on time and arrange for the delivery of your work. Note that this is your responsibility. For all written assignments, you will have a 24 hour grace period during which there will be no deduction. After the grace period, each 24 hour period will result in a 5% reduction on your final mark for that assignment, unless you can demonstrate grounds for academic consideration as defined in the Undergraduate Calendar (click [here](#)).

For reading questions, I will forgive one missed week, but otherwise the same late policy applies as with papers.

The final exam must be taken at the appointed time, unless you can demonstrate grounds for academic consideration as defined in the Undergraduate Calendar (click [here](#)).

## **Academic Misconduct**

All work submitted must be your own: your own words and your own thoughts. Otherwise, you wouldn't be learning this material, and we wouldn't be evaluating you! If you feel that it would be important to use the words of one of the texts we are using, or some other text, you must put quotation marks around the words that are not your own and put a citation to the text you are using telling us the author, title, and page number. Failure to do so will result in a charge of academic misconduct, which has serious consequences for your outcome in this course.

For further information on the University's Academic Misconduct policies, click [here](#).

## **Classroom Environment**

To reduce distraction from thinking about philosophy, this will be a technology free classroom. This means that before class begins you must turn off and put away all laptops, tablets, cell-phones, pagers, or other electronic devices. For use in class, please bring only paper, pen or pencil, and the text. Be prepared to listen and take notes.

For students registered with the Centre for Students with Disabilities who may have been counting on using a laptop in class, I will happily arrange for a note-taker.



Hopefully you will all see the rationale for this policy and comply with it voluntarily, but I do reserve the right to remove a student from the classroom for not complying with this policy.

### **E-mail Communication**

University regulations specify that all students are required to check their <uoguelph.ca> e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the university and its students.

### **Drop Date**

The last date to drop one-semester Fall 2014 courses without academic penalty is **October 31**. For regulations and procedures for Dropping Courses, see the Undergraduate Calendar [here](#).

### **Copies of out-of-class assignments**

Please keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

### **Student Rights and Responsibilities**

Each student at the University of Guelph has rights which carry commensurate responsibilities that involve, broadly, being a civil and respectful member of the University community. The Rights and Responsibilities are detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar: [here](#).

### **Recording of Materials**

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded in any electronic media without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer.

### **Resources**

The Undergraduate Calendar is an essential source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies, and regulations which apply to undergraduate programs. It can be found [here](#).

If you find yourself in difficulty, contact the undergraduate advisor in your program, or the [BA Counselling Office](#).

You should also be aware that the library has a [Writing Services](#) program, which can help you revise your writing prior to submission. There are staff trained in philosophy; they should be looked at as an additional resource along with your professor and seminar leader.

## How to Succeed in this Course

This course is centred on the texts. When we meet, I will be talking about the texts. Sometimes I will be laying out important background information that will help you situate what is going on in them. Sometimes I will be talking about what I view as the important ideas, and in many cases, I will be inviting you to discuss them with me. The writing assignments will require you to have a good understanding of the texts. So, **the key to success in this course is ensuring that you have a thorough understanding of the assigned readings.**

Here's how I advise you to study:

1. Read the assignment for that class period over before class. You need not try to catch every detail. Try to be able to articulate to yourself the main points you got from that reading. Try to write them down.
2. Attend class, taking notes. Bring your text to class. Check your understanding of the text with the one that we arrive at in class. Are there discrepancies between what you found and what the professor or others found in the text? If so, speak up; ask questions!
3. As soon as possible after that class meeting, re-read the assignment with careful attention. Now are there passages that still don't make sense to you? If so, bring these up in seminar.

Another tip: read and write with a dictionary! Philosophers are usually quite precise about their use of words. If you see an unfamiliar word or a familiar word used in an unfamiliar way, look it up. It will surely enhance your understanding. I also recommend using a paper dictionary rather than the internet, simply because the internet can be quite distracting!

## A Note on Time Management

With philosophy especially, it is absolutely crucial not to leave readings and writing assignments to the last minute. You won't be able to do the kind of deep thinking that philosophy requires in a rush. You must give it time. Therefore, the best way to manage your time for this course is to give it a little bit each day. An hour a day over six days will be much better than six hours all-at-once just before an assignment is due.