

HURON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
Undergraduate Course Outline 2021-2022

Phil1350F: Reality & What We Can Know of It

Fall Term 2021
Tues/Thurs 1:30/12:30 – 2:30
Room: V214 (Huron)

Instructor: Emerson Doyle
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Office: Lucas House Annex (Wed, 2:00–4:00)

Course Description

In this age of fake news, climate change denial, global pandemics, anti-vaxxers, and our political and social leaders becoming ever-more willing to stretch the truth or deny facts outright, the study of epistemology and metaphysics is ever-more relevant. Many of these issues, and much of what we take ourselves to “know” about reality in general, depend upon fundamental but often unexamined philosophical assumptions. Should we trust an expert’s testimony or predictions? Can we trust our memories and perceptions? Our intuitions? Logic and mathematics? Science or faith? Can we be sure beliefs formed by these methods correspond to reality? Just what is real? Perhaps this is all a dream? From where do logical and ethical truths arise? We assume we have free will, that there are other minds, scientific facts, an external world—but how can we be sure? Such assumptions help us to make sense of our lives, but quickly evaporate upon philosophical reflection.

In this course we will examine some of these questions and the philosophical issues at their foundations. Our goal is to equip ourselves with tools and conceptual frameworks useful for navigating these issues, that we may attentively confront the realities of our modern age.

Course Objectives & Methods

Students should finish the course with an appreciation of just how much our daily affairs are underpinned by philosophical convictions, as well as the means to critically evaluate those convictions. You will also have the opportunity to improve your writing, critical analysis, and argumentative abilities. These are extremely valuable skills not just for success in academia, but also within the personal and professional spheres more generally.

Although this course will consist primarily of lectures, class discussion will be of key importance throughout. Students will be expected to attend **every** class having done **all** of the readings, and to regularly make contributions to the discussion. *I encourage you to see me with any questions or to recommend alternate approaches; while I will do my best to encourage a safe and positive atmosphere in the classroom.* In my experience courses are successful when everyone is engaged and comfortable making contributions—you must be an **active participant** in your education.



Schedule

*Please be advised that the reading list is tentative.

- Week 1 (Sept 9) **The First Philosophical Puzzles**
- Lindberg, “The Greeks & the Cosmos”
 - Salmon, “A Contemporary Exposition of Zeno’s Paradoxes”
- Week 2 (Sept 14/16) **What is Knowledge?**
- Plato, selections from *Theaetetus*
 - Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”
- Week 3 (Sept 21/23) **How are Beliefs Justified?**
- Descartes, *First & Second Meditations*
 - Locke, “No Innate Principles in the Mind”
 - J. Nagel, “Rationalism & Empiricism”
- Week 4 (Sept 28/30) **Let’s Hear What the Experts Say... (which experts? why believe them?)**
- J. Nagel, “Testimony”
 - Anderson, “Democracy, Public Policy, and Lay Assessments of Scientific Testimony”
- Week 5 (Oct 05/07) **Switch Topics! — Metaphysics: Is There An External World?**
- Berkeley, “Reality Consists of Ideas”
 - Russell, “The Existence of Matter”
- First Writing Assignment (essay) due October 07th — 12%**
- Week 6 (Oct 12/14) **Why do we Assume the Universe is Made of *Things*?**
- Guttinger, “A Virus is Not a Thing: The Case for a Process View of Viruses”
 - Bickhard, “Issues in Process Metaphysics”
- Week 7 (Oct 19/21) **But Don’t Things Cause Other Things?**
- Hume, “Of the Idea of Necessary Connexion”
 - Mumford, “What is a Cause?”
- Week 8 (Oct 26/28) **So What of Science!?**
- Whewell, “Against Pure Empiricism”
 - Whewell, “The Causes Behind the Phenomena”
 - Popper, “Science: Conjectures and Refutations”
- Second Writing Assignment (reflection) due October 28th — 10%**
- Week ☹ (Nov 02/04) **No Class — Reading Week!! (whew!)**
- Week 10 (Nov 09/11) **Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?**
- Turing, selections from “Computing Machinery & Intelligence”
 - Searle, “Can Computers Think?”
- *Drop Date Nov. 12

Week 11 (Nov 16/18)

What of Conscious Experience?

- Russell, “On Analogy”
- T. Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”
- Chalmers, introduction to “The Puzzle of Conscious Experience”

Third Writing Assignment due November 18th — 14%

Week 12 (Nov 23/25)

But There Must Be a Self... Descartes & Locke Said So!

- Hume, “Of Personal Identity”
- Mumford, “What is a Person?”

Week 13 (Nov 30/
Dec 02)

Is Philosophy Important?

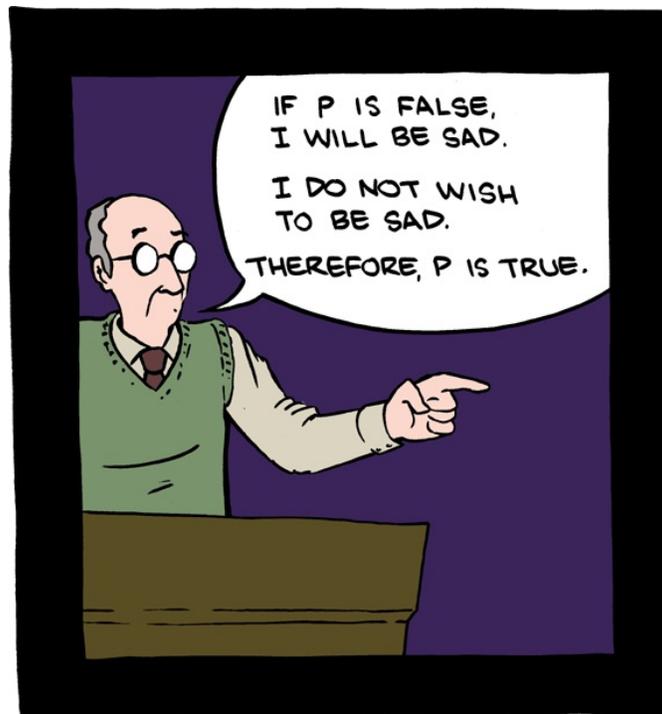
- Goldhill, “Why are so many smart people such idiots about philosophy?”
- Goldhill, “Bill Nye, the science guy, says I convinced him that philosophy is not just a load of self-indulgent crap”
- Russell, “The Value of Philosophy”

Week 14 (Dec 07)

Review & Overflow

Final Paper due December 07th — 24%

Final Exam during Fall Exam Period — 30%



There. Now you can skip 99% of philosophical debates.

Appendix to Course Outlines: Academic Policies & Regulations 2021 - 2022

Prerequisite and Antirequisite Information

Students are responsible for ensuring that they have successfully completed all course prerequisites and that they have not completed any course antirequisites. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Pandemic Contingency

In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, all remaining course content will be delivered entirely online, typically using a combination of synchronous instruction (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) and asynchronous material (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online at the discretion of the course instructor. In the unlikely event that changes to the grading scheme are necessary, these changes will be clearly communicated as soon as possible.

Student Code of Conduct

Membership in the community of Huron University College and Western University implies acceptance by every student of the principle of respect for the rights, responsibilities, dignity and well-being of others and a readiness to support an environment conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of all who study, work and live within it. Upon registration, students assume the responsibilities that such registration entails. While in the physical or online classroom, students are expected to behave in a manner that supports the learning environment of others. Please review the Student Code of Conduct at: <https://huronatwestern.ca/sites/default/files/Res%20Life/Student%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20-%20Revised%20September%202019.pdf>.

Attendance Regulations for Examinations

A student is entitled to be examined in courses in which registration is maintained, subject to the following limitations:

- 1) A student may be debarred from writing the final examination for failure to maintain satisfactory academic standing throughout the year.
- 2) Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the Department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course. The Dean of the Faculty offering the course will communicate that decision to the Dean of the Faculty of registration.

Review the policy on Attendance Regulations for Examinations here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/attendance.pdf.

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf. The appeals process is also outlined in this policy as well as more generally at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/appealsundergrad.pdf.

Turnitin.com

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

It is not appropriate to use electronic devices (such as, but not limited to, laptops, cell phones) in the classroom for non-classroom activities. Such activity is disruptive and distracting to other students and to the instructor, and can inhibit learning. Students are expected to respect the classroom environment and to refrain from inappropriate use of technology and other electronic devices in class.

Statement on Use of Personal Response Systems (“Clickers”)

Personal Response Systems (“clickers”) may be used in some classes. If clickers are to be used in a class, it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the device is activated and functional. Students must see their instructor if they have any concerns about whether the clicker is malfunctioning. Students must use only their own clicker. If clicker records are used to compute a portion of the course grade:

- the use of somebody else’s clicker in class constitutes a scholastic offence
- the possession of a clicker belonging to another student will be interpreted as an attempt to commit a scholastic offence.

Academic Consideration for Missed Work

Students who are seeking academic consideration for missed work during the semester may submit a self-reported absence form online provided that the absence is **48 hours or less** and the other conditions specified in the Senate policy at

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_illness.pdf are met.

Students whose absences are expected to last **longer than 48 hours**, or where the other conditions detailed in the policy are not met (e.g., work is worth more than 30% of the final grade, the student has already used 2 self-reported absences, the absence is during the final exam period), may receive academic consideration by submitting a Student Medical Certificate (for illness) or other appropriate documentation (for compassionate grounds). The Student Medical Certificate is available online at https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

All students pursuing academic consideration, regardless of type, must contact their instructors no less than 24 hours following the end of the period of absence to clarify how they will be expected to fulfill the academic responsibilities missed during their absence. **Students are reminded that they should consider carefully the implications of postponing tests or midterm exams or delaying submission of work, and are encouraged to make appropriate decisions based on their specific circumstances.**

Students who have conditions for which academic accommodation is appropriate, such as disabilities or ongoing or chronic health conditions, should work with Accessible Education Services to determine appropriate forms of accommodation. Further details concerning policies and procedures may be found at: <http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/>.

Policy on Academic Consideration for a Medical/ Non-Medical Absence

(a) Consideration on Medical Grounds for assignments worth *less than 10%* of final grade: Consult Instructor Directly and Contact Academic Advising

When seeking consideration on **medical grounds** for assignments worth *less than 10%* of the final course grade, and if the student has exceeded the maximum number of permissible Self-Reported absences, the student should contact the instructor directly. The student need only share broad outlines of the medical situation. The instructor **may** require the student to submit documentation to the academic advisors, in which case she or he will advise the student and inform the academic advisors to expect documentation. If documentation is requested, the student will need to complete and submit the [Student Medical Certificate](#). The instructor may **not** collect medical documentation. The advisors will contact the instructor when the medical documentation is received, and will outline the severity and duration of the medical challenge as expressed on the Student Medical Certificate and in any other supporting documentation. The student will be informed that the instructor has been notified of the presence of medical documentation, and will be instructed to work as quickly as possible with the instructor on an agreement for accommodation.

(b) Consideration on Non-Medical Grounds: Consult Huron Support Services/Academic Advising, or email huronsss@uwo.ca.

Students seeking academic consideration for a **non-medical** absence (e.g. varsity sports, religious, compassionate, or bereavement) will be required to provide appropriate documentation where the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence have not been met, including where the student has exceeded the maximum number of permissible Self-Reported. All consideration requests must include a completed [Consideration Request Form](#). Late penalties may apply at the discretion of the instructor.

Please review the full policy on Academic Consideration for medical and non-medical absence at: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_illness.pdf. Consult [Huron Academic Advising](#) at huronsss@uwo.ca for any further questions or information.

Support Services

For advice on course selections, degree requirements, and for assistance with requests for medical accommodation, students should email an Academic Advisor in Huron's Student Support Services at huronsss@uwo.ca. An outline of the range of services offered is found on the Huron website at: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/>.

Department Chairs, Program Directors and Coordinators are also able to answer questions about individual programs. Contact information can be found on the Huron website at: <https://huronatwestern.ca/contact/faculty-staff-directory/>.

If you think that you are too far behind to catch up or that your workload is not manageable, you should consult your Academic Advisor. If you are considering reducing your workload by dropping one or more courses, this must be done by the appropriate deadlines. Please refer to the Advising website, <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/academic-advising/> or review the list of official Sessional Dates on the Academic Calendar, available here: <http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/SessionalDates.cfm>.

You should consult with the course instructor and the Academic Advisor who can help you consider alternatives to dropping one or more courses. Note that dropping a course may affect OSAP and/or Scholarship/Bursary eligibility.

Huron Student Support Services: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/>

Office of the Registrar: <https://registrar.uwo.ca/>

Student Quick Reference Guide: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/#1>

Academic Support & Engagement: <http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/>

Huron University College Student Council: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/beyond-classroom/hucsc/>

Western USC: <http://westernusc.ca/your-services/#studentservices>

Mental Health & Wellness Support at Huron and Western

University students may encounter setbacks from time to time that can impact academic performance. Huron offers a variety of services that are here to support your success and wellbeing. Please visit <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life-campus/student-services/wellness-safety> for more information or contact staff directly:

Wellness Services: huronwellness@huron.uwo.ca

Community Safety Office: safety@huron.uwo.ca

Chaplaincy: gthorne@huron.uwo.ca

Additional supports for Health and Wellness may be found and accessed at Western through, <https://www.uwo.ca/health/>.