

Phil 297: Doing Philosophy

Instructor: Prof. Robin M. Muller

Date & Time: M/W 11:30—12:45

Location: EU 136

Office Hours: W/Th. 1pm–2pm

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Catalog Description: *Examination of the nature and practice of philosophy. Students will develop tools of philosophical reading, writing, reflection, analysis, and critique, and will use these tools to address a range of questions concerning the meaning of philosophy, the ethics of critique, and the distinctive character of philosophical reasoning.*

II. COURSE STRUCTURE AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Student Learning Outcomes (Course):

Students will:

1. Distinguish philosophy from other disciplines such as literature, the special sciences, or religious studies.
2. Identify, develop and apply skills central to philosophical practice, including tools of formal and informal logic, critical reading, historical analysis, philosophical imagination, and argumentative writing.
3. Define and cultivate a philosophical attitude, where this reflects a range of epistemic (and other) virtues such as open-mindedness, hermeneutic flexibility, and critical reasoning.
4. Recognize diverse styles of writing as philosophical.

III. REQUIRED TEXTS

You are required to purchase/maintain access to the following texts:

Joseph Harris, *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*, 2nd ed. Utah University Press (2007). [*electronic copy ok*]

René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Trans. Donald A. Cress. Hackett (1993) [*must have hard copy*]

The following text is *recommended*:

Martinich, A.P. *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*. 5th ed. Wiley Blackwell.

All other course materials will be made available on Canvas.

IV. COURSE ASSESSMENT AND GRADING SCHEME

This course will utilize the following grading scale:

A	B	C	D	F
100 – 94 = A	89 – 87 = B+	79 – 77 = C+	69 – 67 = D+	59 or < = F
93 – 90 = A-	86 – 83 = B	76 – 73 = C	66 – 63 = D	
	82 – 80 = B-	72 – 70 = C-	62 – 60 = D-	

Your grade will be based on the following assignments and assessment tools:

- (11) Annotations: 25% [*lowest annotation grade is dropped*]
- (3) Critical Reflections: 15%
- (3) Skill-building exercises: 20%
- (4) Miscellaneous low-stakes assignments: 5%
- (1) Final Project: 15%
- (1) Self-assessment: 20%

Note on Academic Integrity: The work you submit is the work that will be graded. Please consult the *Student Handbook* for definitions of plagiarism and academic dishonesty. If you are found to have engaged in plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic dishonesty (including violations of the AI policy below), you will automatically fail the assignment and possibly face further academic sanctions.

Note on use of Artificial Intelligence: The work you submit for this course must be your own.

- You are not permitted to use AI of any kind, including utilizing AI of any form (inclusive of Grammarly) for any of the following parts of the writing process: Brainstorming, outlining, drafting, writing, editing (including line-editing and rewording), revising (including revising for structure or sentence-clarity), or rewriting.
- *If you use AI as part of the research (as distinct from writing) process (e.g., to better understand key concepts or texts, you must include a record of your AI-interactions/conversation as part of your final submission).*
- Unless you have a specific recording/note-taking accommodation, you may not use AI to record class sessions or to take notes for you.
- You are not permitted to utilize AI tools to synthesize/summarize/organize original course materials, such as handouts or slides.

V. COURSE SCHEDULE

Introduction to the Course [8/24]

To do before class: Review the syllabus and course policies carefully.
No other work due.

Unit 1: Defining Philosophy [8/26–9/7]

8/26:

Read before class: Timothy Williamson, “Starting from Common Sense”
[NOTE: Before you begin, make sure you read the guidelines for annotation

assignments, accessible here]

Other work due: Annotations for Williamson [*hard copy due at end of class session*]

8/31:

Read before class: Mary Midgley, "Philosophical Plumbing"

Other work due: Annotations for Midgley [*hard copy due at end of class session*]

9/2:

Read before class: Maria Brickner, "What Is Philosophy and Why Does It Matter?: A Situated, Pluralist, Social, Caring—and Perhaps Rebellious Response."

Other work due: Annotations for Brickner [*hard copy due at end of class session*]

9/7:

Labor Day [*No Class*] but make sure you've reviewed this document and done any needed troubleshooting on configuring your Google Docs settings.

Unit 2: Philosophical Projects and Paradigms [9/9–9/14]

9/9:

Read before class: Janice Moulton, "The Adversary Paradigm"

Other work due: Annotations for Moulton [*hard copy due at end of class session*]

9/14:

Discussion topic: Envisioning building a philosophical project

Work due: Critical Reflection #1 [*Access assignment and submission guidelines here*]

Interlude: First skill-building exercise [9/16]

Work due before class:

Read: Joseph Harris, "Coming to Terms," chap. 1 of *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*.

Then: Following the strategy outlined in Harris' chapter "Coming to Terms," re-write the argument of any one of the readings from units 1 or 2 [*Access assignment and submission guidelines here*]

Unit 3: Building your Philosophical Toolkit [9/21–10/19]

2.1 The Tools of Logic [9/21–9/30]

9/21:

Read before class: Jason Rosenhouse, "Is Logic Boring and Pointless?"

No other work due.

9/23:

Read before class: Timothy Schlick, "Evidence and Inference: Proving your Point," in *Doing Philosophy: Philosophy through Thought Experiments*.

No other work due.

In class: *Logic Workshop*

9/28:

Read before class: A.J Martinich, “Logic and Argument for Writing,” in *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*

No other work due.

In class: Logic Workshop

9/30:

Read before class: David and Samantha Lewis, “Holes” [*don't forget to bring a hard copy to class with you!*]

Discussion Topic: Using logic in Philosophy

Other work due: Martinich exercises [*Access assignment and submission guidelines here*]

2.2: *The Tools of Imagination: Speculative and Futural Philosophies [10/5–10/7]*

10/5:

Listen before class: Science Fiction (feat. Helen De Cruz), *Overthink* Podcast. [Links to an external site.](#)

Read before class: Philosophical Fiction Assignment

Other work due: Come prepared to discuss your short story.

10/7:

Read before class: Peter Stillman, “Nothing Is, but What Is not: Utopias as practical Political Philosophy”

Other work due: Annotations on Stillman [*hard copy due at end of class session*]

2.3 *The Tools of History: Philosophizing with and Through the Past [10/12–10/19]*

10/12:

Read before class: Margaret Atherton, “My History: Becoming a Historian of Philosophy”

Other work due: Annotations on Atherton [*hard copy due at end of class session*]

10/14:

Read before class: Janosch Prinz and Paul Raekstad, “The value of genealogies for political philosophy”

Other work due: Annotations [*hard copy due at end of class session*]

10/19:

Discussion Topic: "Doing" the history of philosophy

No other work due.

Interlude: Second skill-building exercise [10/21]

Work due before class:

Read: Joseph Harris, “Forwarding,” chap. 2 of *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*.

Then: Choose one of the essays from §§2.2 or 2.3 and reconstruct its argument, following the “Forwarding” strategy described in the Harris chapter [*Access assignment and submission guidelines here*]

Unit 4: Finding your Philosophical Voice [10/26–10/28]

10/26:

Read before class: Helen De Cruz, “In the mood: Why vibes matter in reading and writing philosophy.”

Other work due: Annotations on De Cruz [*hard copy due at end of class session*]

10/28:

No additional reading. Come prepared to continue discussion of De Cruz.

Other work due: Critical Reflection #2 [*Access assignment and submission guidelines here*]

Unit 5: Cultivating Philosophical Virtues [11/2–11/16]

11/2:

Read before class: Rima Basu, “Risky Inquiry: Developing an Ethics for Philosophical Practice”

Other work due: Annotations on Basu [*hard copy due at end of class session*]

11/4:

No new work or reading. Come prepared to continue the discussion of Basu.

11/9:

Read before class: Emmalon Davis, “Challenging the Pursuit of Novelty”

Other work due: Annotations on Davis [*hard copy due at end of class session*]

11/11:

VETERAN'S DAY [No class]

11/16:

No new reading. Come prepared to continue the discussion of Davis.

Other work due: Critical Reflection #3 [*Access assignment and submission guidelines here*]

Unit 6: (Varieties of) Philosophical Reading [11/18–12/9]

6.1 First Method: Argument mapping and formal analysis

11/18:

Read before class: Descartes, *Meditation 1* & A.J Martinich, “How to Read a Philosophical Work,” in *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*

Other work due: Annotations on First Meditation [you must bring the annotated text with you to class, but you will not submit these annotations for a grade]

11/23:

Read before class: Descartes, *Meditations 1 & 2* [bring annotated hard copy of text to class; annotations are not graded]

Other work due: Outline or map of argument of first two meditations. [Access assignment and submission guidelines here]

Interlude: Third skill-building exercise [11/25]

NOTE: No class will be held in person today, but work is due and optional office hours are open during scheduled class time]

Work due by end of scheduled class time:

Read: Joseph Harris, “Countering,” chap. 3 of *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*.

Watch: Video on using PhilPapers for scholarly research in philosophy.

Then: Find a scholarly essay on Descartes that you think demonstrates the move that Harris calls “Countering” and create an outline of the argument of that text [Access assignment and submission guidelines here]

6.2 Second Method: Reading Contextually

11/30:

Re-read before class: Med. 1 & 2 [bring annotated hard copy of text to class; annotations are not graded]

No other work due.

12/2:

Read before class: Descartes, *Meditation 6* [bring hard copy with annotations to class; annotations are not graded]

Other work due: Identify a scholarly question about *Meditation 6*. [Access assignment and submission guidelines here]

6.3: Third Method: ‘Using’ Descartes for Social Critique

12/7:

Read before class: Leslie Heywood, “When Descartes Met the Fitness Babe: Academic Cartesianism and the Late Twentieth-Century Cult of the Body

Other work due: Annotations on Heywood [*hard copy due at end of class session*]; make sure you bring your copy of the *Meditations* to class as well.

12/9:

No additional reading. Come prepared to continue discussion of Heywood/Descartes.

Other work due: None, but bring your annotated hard copy of the *Meditations* to class.

Final Project [12/13]

Read: Joseph Harris, “Take an Approach,” chap. 4 of *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts* & A.J. Martinich, “The Structure of a Philosophical Essay” and “How to Select an Essay Topic,” in *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*.

Then: Write an abstract, outline, and annotated bibliography for a philosophy paper that would have the completed length of 8-10 pages (you do not have to write the paper!) [*Access assignment and submission guidelines here*]