

# Introduction to Philosophy

## I Instructor Information

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**Name:** Dr. Bradley Rettler

**Office:** Ross Hall 128

**Office Hours:** Tuesday 11-12, Wednesday 11-12, Thursday 1-2, and by appointment

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## II TA Information

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**Name:** Ryan Lynch

**Office:** Ross Hall 232

**Office Hours:** Monday 12-2, Tuesday 3-4, and by appointment

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## III Course Description

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Philosophy is distinguished both by its subject matter and by the methods with which it investigates its subject matter. Among its subject matter are those most basic and most important questions we can ask:

1. How should we live?
2. What is morality?
3. What do we know?
4. Are we free?
5. Is there a God?

Many other disciplines are also interested in answering these questions: theology, physics, biology, and literature, to name a few. But philosophy distinguishes itself from them by its method — logically valid arguments proceeding from things we already believe. In this class we will aim to answer the above questions by proceeding from things we believe via truth-preserving inferences. We will defend our premises with further valid arguments.

## IV Required Readings

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You are not required to purchase any books. All readings will be available on WyoCourses and the course website.

## V Evaluation

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**Participation:** 10% of your grade. This includes coming to class, having (i) carefully done the reading, (ii) prepared an outline of the argument, (iii) prepared questions about anything you didn't understand, and (iv) prepared objections to or arguments for the premises of the author's argument. It also includes being involved in class discussion by sharing your thoughts, and by listening to others' thoughts. More than three unexcused absences will result in a 5% deduction from your participation grade per absence, beginning with the fourth. To have an absence excused, ask the Dean's Office (for participation in a University-sponsored activity or for unusual circumstances such as a personal hardship) or the Student Health Service (for absences for medical reasons).

**Position Papers:** 20% of your grade (5% each). Four times during the semester you will write a one to two page paper and upload it *before* the class in which the relevant unit begins. The paper will begin with what you think is the right answer to the question at issue in that unit. Following that should be two arguments for your answer. That is, you should think about *why* you think that your answer is the right one, and state those reasons in the form of valid arguments. You should then consider one objection to your answer, and respond to it. Obviously you must write each paper on a different unit – how to live, what we know, the existence of God, right and wrong, the best life, and free will. My suggestion is to do the four papers on what we know, whether God exists, the nature of morality, and free will. But those who feel strongly about how to live or the best life can write on those.

**Responses to Others' Positions:** 20% of your grade. Four times during the semester you will read another student's position paper and write a response to it. Your response should be approximately one page, and should contain, for each of the two arguments of the other student, the best reason you can think of to deny a premise of that argument; then you should motivate that reason. The goal is to persuade the person that his or her reasons for his or her position are not good, either because they are false, or because they don't support the position the person holds.

**Apology, aka Manifesto, aka Philosophy of Life:** 30% of your grade. This paper is the integration of your four position papers. You will come to it by re-reading the position papers you wrote prior to doing any reading or discussion, and then revising them in light of (i) the readings regarding the issues, (ii) class discussion of those readings, (iii) the comments you get from your fellow students, (iv) the TA's comments, (v) the development of your own thinking on the issues, and in particular (vi) the way that your views on each issue influence your views on the other issues. You will state the connections between the views you have, and make a case for the conjunction of those views. The end result is the articulation of four aspects of your worldview in a systematic way.

**Final Exam:** 20% of your grade. You will have a final exam comprised of some true/false, some multiple choice, some short answer, and some short essay questions on the readings and class discussions. It will take place on the regularly scheduled exam day and time. There will be one additional exam period earlier than the regularly scheduled one, which we'll arrive at by consensus.

**Extra Credit:** If you change your mind after reading or discussion — by reversing your

position, or withholding belief about it, or by rejecting an argument you once accepted — you may write a one-page paper following up on your position paper. In it you should say why you no longer hold the position you used to hold — that is, which premise of each argument you now reject. And, if you have a new argument for your position, for the opposite position, or for withholding belief, give that argument. This will add 10 points to the grade of the original position paper. Though you are free to change your mind on every issue, it can only be used to raise your grade once.

## VI Grading Scale

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A: 92-100  
A-: 90-92  
B+: 88-90  
B: 82-88  
B-: 80-82  
C+: 78-80  
C: 72-78  
C-: 70-72  
D: 60-70  
F: Below 60

## VII Honor Code

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All students are expected to abide by the Academic Honor Code. Students are not allowed to write papers together, although verbal discussion of one's papers (with anyone) is not only permitted but encouraged. Any use of outside sources for specific ideas or arguments must be properly cited. Plagiarism is easily detectable and will absolutely not be tolerated. The University provides guidelines on what constitutes plagiarism here: [http://www.uwyo.edu/generalcounsel/\\_files/docs/uw-reg-6-802.pdf](http://www.uwyo.edu/generalcounsel/_files/docs/uw-reg-6-802.pdf). You are **strongly encouraged** to read that document. If you have any doubt about the appropriateness of any action, please check with me.

## VIII Students with Disabilities

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I am happy to accommodate students with disabilities. Students desiring accommodations on the basis of physical, learning, or psychological disability for this class should view their options at <http://www.uwyo.edu/udss/> and contact Disability Support Services. They are located at 128 Knight Hall, and can be reached by email at [udss@uwyo.edu](mailto:udss@uwyo.edu) or by phone at 307.766.3073.

## IX Title IX Office

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If you or someone you know would like help related to an experience of sexual violence including sexual assault, harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking or

other type of non-consensual sexual conduct, please contact Jim Osborn by phone at 307.766.5200 or by email at report-it@uwyo.edu . I am (along with nearly all faculty and staff members) a mandatory reporter; if I learn of any incident of sexual violence or misconduct, I am legally required to report it.

## X Support

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There are a variety of ways to get extra academic help at UW. You can drop-in to the STEP Tutoring Center at Coe Library, get e-tutoring on your writing, and visit the Writing Center in Coe Library.

## XI Classroom Conduct

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We are discussing topics in this class that are controversial, and may for some people be deeply personal. You have no idea how the people in the room may be personally connected to what we discuss. Because of this, we all need to be very careful how we conduct ourselves. Respect one another! Pay attention when people are speaking, listen carefully before jumping in, and speak in a respectful tone. You will almost certainly disagree with people. In this course, we will explore our disagreement *together* in a structured, collaborative atmosphere. Keep this in mind.

A note on phone/laptop usage. One way to disrespect people is to distract them from what's important. So, put your phones on silent or vibrate—texting or answering your phone in class is not acceptable. Keep your mobile devices out of sight – including your own sight! If you want to take notes on a laptop, you must approve it with me at the beginning of the semester.

Both the University of Wyoming and I value an educational environment that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive. The diversity that students and faculty bring to class including age, country of origin, culture, disability, economic class, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, linguistic capacity, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, worldview, and other social and cultural diversity is valued, respected, and considered a resource for learning.

## XII Expected Schedule

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The readings are to be done **by the day** for which they are scheduled.

Jan 28: Introduction: What is Philosophy?

### How should we live?

Jan 30: NO CLASS

Feb 4: Living Well – Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7 and II.1-4

Feb 6: Interlude: Logic and Reasoning

**Position papers due before class**

Feb 11: The Life of Questioning – Plato, *Apology*

Feb 13: Leaning on Tradition – *The Analects* of Confucius

## What Do We Know?

**Position papers due before class**

Feb 18: The Method of Doubt – *Meditations I and II* of Renee Descartes

Feb 20: Believing by Choice? – “The Will to Believe”, by William James

Feb 25: Believe in God – “Pascal’s Wager” by Pascal

Feb 27: NO CLASS

## Is There a God?

**Position papers due before class**

March 3: There is a God – “The Fine-Tuning Argument”, by Robin Collins

March 5: There is a God – “The Cosmological Argument”, by Thomas Aquinas

March 10: There is a God – *Meditation 5* by Renee Descartes

March 12: There is no God – “The Rebellion” from *The Brothers Karamazov*

March 24: There is no God – “What is the Problem of Divine Hiddenness?” by Peter van Inwagen

## What is the Nature of Right and Wrong?

**Position papers due before class**

March 26: There are no objective moral truths – “The Argument from Relativity” by Mackie

March 31: There are objective moral truths – “Judging other Cultures” by Martha Nussbaum

April 2: God is the source of morality – “Morality and Religion” by Russ Shafer-Landau

## What makes an Action Right or Wrong?

**Position papers due before class**

- April 7: Morality is about duty – Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* Preface and Part I
- April 9: Morality is about pleasure and pain – Mill, “What is Utilitarianism?”
- April 14: Morality is about being a good person – Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 8

### Which Life is Best?

- Position papers due before class**
- April 16: The best life is one of contemplation – Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book X
- April 21: The best life is one of action – MLK Jr, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”
- April 23: The best life prepares for the afterlife – Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2-2: 179-181
- April 28: A good death – “Death” by Thomas Nagel

### Are We Free?

- Position papers due before class**
- April 30: Freedom is incompatible with Determinism – The Consequence Argument
- May 5: Freedom is incompatible with Indeterminism – The Mind Argument
- May 7: Final Exam Review
- May 12: Final Exam, 10:15-12:15