

# PHIL 112: Making Sense of Ourselves

**Instructor:**

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Caldwell 210B

Office Hours: M 11:30 AM-12:30 PM, R 2:30-3:30 PM (or by appointment)

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## Course Description

This course is an introduction to philosophy through a variety of questions that arise when we, as humans, attempt to make sense ourselves and our place in the world. We will discuss several topics throughout the course, including God, consciousness, free will, personhood, social identity, and the meaning of life. Questions will address include: What is the meaning of life? What is the self? Do we have free will? What is consciousness? Does morality depend on the existence of God?

No prior background in philosophy will be assumed. Class meetings will proceed through a mix of lecture and discussion, and participation will be a significant component of the course. Students will complete short writing assignments directed toward both understanding the various issues discussed in the course and becoming proficient in clear, concise philosophical argumentation.

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## Course Requirements

Three short papers (600-750 words each): 30%

Expanded final paper (1200-1500 words): 25%

Four take-home quizzes: 20%

Participation: 20%

In-class written reflections: 5%

### 1. Three short papers

Students will write three short (600-750 word) papers over the course of the semester. There are seven units in the course, and each unit will have a paper prompt distributed. For each unit, students can choose whether or not to write a paper, but must write three papers in total. Each of these papers will be worth 10% of the course grade, for a total of 30%.

### 2. Expanded final paper

At the end of the semester, in lieu of a final exam, students will revise and expand one of the three short papers they wrote during the semester into a longer paper (1200-1500 words) that engages more deeply with its subject matter. With permission from the instructor, students can instead write an

entirely new paper of the same length on a different topic from the course. This expanded paper will be worth 25% of the course grade.

### 3. Four take-home quizzes

At the end of each unit, each student who chose not to write a paper for that unit will instead complete a short take-home quiz on the material from that unit. Each of these quizzes will be worth 5% of the course grade, for a total of 20%.

### 4. Participation

Because philosophical discussion is essential to understanding course material, participation will be a significant component of the course (20% of the course grade). Students are expected to carefully read the material assigned for each class in advance and arrive prepared to participate in discussions of that material. Although attendance is required, even perfect attendance is not sufficient for a grade of A in participation. Students must not only attend class but regularly make valuable contributions to class discussions in order to earn an A in participation. Contributions to class discussions will be evaluated on the basis of frequency, constructiveness and respectfulness. Other forms of participation, such as attending office hours, will also be taken into consideration.

Students who feel that regular participation in group discussions will not be possible for them should contact the instructor with their concerns. Alternative methods of participation will be accommodated for such students to the best of the instructor's ability.

### 5. In-class written reflections

At the start of each non-discussion class period, students will be asked to complete brief written responses to the assigned reading(s) for that day. These written responses will be worth 5% of the course grade. Each student's three lowest grades on these assignments will be dropped, including grades of "0." Students who miss in-class written responses due to lateness or absence will not be permitted to make them up. The purpose of the course policy of dropping the three lowest grades on the responses is to provide leeway for a reasonable number of absences while also incentivizing attendance.

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## Course Policies

### 1. Late papers

Each student will be given one "free late day," to be used once in the course, whenever the student requests it. Otherwise, unless special permission is obtained from the instructor **at least 24 hours before the due date**, late papers will not be accepted without a penalty. Permission will only be given in the event of unforeseen circumstances that prevent the student from completing the paper on time. In the event of such circumstances, the student is responsible for providing suitable documentation

to the instructor. When a paper is turned in late without prior permission from the instructor, 1/3 of a letter grade will be deducted from that paper's grade for each calendar day that the paper is late.

## **2. Academic Honesty**

The UNC Instrument of Student Governance defines plagiarism as “deliberate or reckless representation of another’s words, thoughts, or ideas as one’s own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise.” All students are expected to adhere to the UNC Honor Code, and plagiarism will be punished as severely as the university allows.

In general, using anyone else’s words in papers is discouraged in this course. If quoting from assigned readings is necessary in a paper, all quotations must appear in quotation marks, and an internal citation (such as a footnote or endnote) indicating their source must be provided in a standard format. It is also a form of plagiarism to closely paraphrase text from an external source, changing a few of the words but imitating the sentence/paragraph structure of the external source. Text that appears outside of quotation marks in a paper must be the student’s own words, and those words must be presented within the student’s own organizational and sentential structure.

In addition, plagiarism can be committed non-deliberately; if one is reckless in one’s use of other people’s words or ideas, then one has committed plagiarism even if one did not intend to do so. In borderline cases, students should err on the side of consulting the instructor, instead of hoping that they are not committing plagiarism. Students should also contact the instructor with any other questions or concerns about plagiarism-related issues.

## **3. Non-Discrimination**

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is committed to equality of educational opportunity. The University does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of race, color, gender, age, national origin, religion, creed, genetic information, disability, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

In addition, the instructor is committed to making the classroom a safe space for all students. Personal attacks or discriminatory treatment of others will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

## **4. Accommodations**

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office. If you have need of these services, please visit <http://accessibility.unc.edu>, call 919-962-8300 or email [accessibility@unc.edu](mailto:accessibility@unc.edu). Please contact ARS as early in the term as possible.

## Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to revision. Readings may be added, removed and/or adjusted at the instructor's discretion. Any such changes will be announced both in class and via e-mail. Otherwise, students should come to class each day having read the reading assigned for that day.

There is no assigned textbook. All course readings will be posted on Sakai.

| Week   | Agenda   | Assignments                                      |
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| <b>Unit I: The Existence of God</b>          |  |  |
| Week 1                                       | Pryor "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy"<br>Pryor, "What is an Argument?"<br>Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence"                                      |  |
| Week 2                                       | Zagzebski, "The Problem of Evil"<br>Dostoevsky, "The Brothers Karamazov"<br>(selections)<br>Pryor, "Guidelines on Writing a<br>Philosophy Paper" | Paper prompt 1 distributed                       |
| <b>Unit II: Free Will and Responsibility</b> |  |  |
| Week 3                                       | van Inwagen, "The Incompatibility of Free<br>Will and Determinism"<br>Frankfurt, "Alternative Possibilities and<br>Moral Responsibility"         |  |
| Week 4                                       | Nahmias, "Your Brain as the Source of<br>Free Will Worth Wanting"<br>Wolf, "The Moral in Moral Luck"   | Paper prompt 1 due<br>Paper prompt 2 distributed |
| <b>Unit III: The Meaning of Life</b>         |  |  |
| Week 5                                       | Tolstoy, "My Confession"<br>Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus"<br>(selections)  |  |
| Week 6                                       | Nagel, "The Absurd"<br>Wolf "The Meanings of Lives"  | Paper prompt 2 due<br>Paper prompt 3 distributed |
| <b>Unit IV: Consciousness</b>                |  |  |
| Week 7                                       | Nagel, "What is it Like to be a Bat?"<br>Jackson, "What Mary Didn't Know"  |  |
| Week 8                                       | Levin, "Could Love Be Like a Heatwave?"<br>Place "Is Consciousness a Brain Process?"   | Paper prompt 3 due<br>Paper prompt 4 distributed |
| <b>Unit V: What is the Self?</b>             |  |  |
| Week 9                                       | Parfit, "Divided Minds and the Nature of<br>Persons"<br>Lewis, "Survival and Identity"   |  |
| Week 10                                      | Schechtman, "Personhood and Personal<br>Identity"<br>Siderits, "Persons and Selves in Buddhist<br>Philosophy"                                    | Paper prompt 4 due<br>Paper prompt 5 distributed |

| <b>Unit VI: Personhood and Moral Status</b> |  |  |
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| Week 11                                     | Tannenbaum and Jaworska, "Persons and Moral Status"<br>Kittay, "At the Margins of Moral Personhood"                                  |  |
| Week 12                                     | Kittay, "At the Margins of Moral Personhood" (continued)<br>Andrews et al, "Chimpanzee Rights: The Philosophers' Brief" (selections) | Paper prompt 5 due<br>Paper prompt 6 distributed |
| <b>Unit VII: Social Identities</b>          |  |  |
| Week 13                                     | Mills, "But What Are You, Really?"<br>Dembroff, "Real Talk on the Metaphysics of Gender"   |  |
| Week 14                                     | Barnes, "Disability, Minority, and Difference"<br>Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" (selections)                                 | Paper prompt 6 due<br>Paper prompt 7 distributed |
| Week 15 and exam period                     | Course wrap-up [no new reading]  | Paper prompt 7 due<br>Final paper due            |