

# PHIL 130

## Philosophy and Persons

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00pm–2:15pm, Dumbach Hall 004

**Instructor:** Dr. Joshua Mendelsohn <[jmendelsohn@luc.edu](mailto:jmendelsohn@luc.edu)>.

**Instructor's office hours:** Crown 367, Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:30–3:30pm or by appointment.

**Teaching assistant:** Heather Slawny <[hslawny@luc.edu](mailto:hslawny@luc.edu)>.

**Teaching assistant's office hours:** By appointment.

This course provides an introduction to philosophy by way of an investigation into the nature of personhood. Our principal questions will be: What is a person, and what place do we as persons occupy in the universe? In answering these questions, we will be forced to confront questions in epistemology (the study of knowledge), metaphysics (the study of reality, in the broadest sense), and value theory (the study of what makes an action or a person good or bad) and political philosophy (the theory of the origin and purpose of human societies).

In order to answer these questions, we will read both contemporary and classical writings spanning European and non-European philosophical traditions. The goal of the course will be not only to become acquainted with the content of these texts, but to begin to engage in philosophical inquiry ourselves.

### Course goals and rationale

This course forms the first part of the Philosophical Knowledge requirement of the Core. Students who take the course will develop and scrutinize their beliefs regarding what it means to be a person. They will also gain an understanding of the nature of philosophical argument and a beginning familiarity with the history of philosophy, as well as cognitive skills that will prepare them to take more advanced courses in philosophy and other disciplines: The ability to read a text closely and analyze its logical structure; the ability to articulate one's own views on a philosophical topic; and basic skills in evaluating, constructing and challenging philosophical arguments.

### Books

There is no textbook required for the class. Weekly readings will be posted on Sakai.

## Assessment

1. Class participation (15%). Good participation means coming to class prepared (i.e., having done the readings and having a hard copy available for reference) and contributing to the discussion by listening to others, thoughtfully formulating one's own position, and raising one's hand to speak regularly without dominating the discussion. You can also participate by writing in with questions 24 hours in advance. You need to come to class to participate, but coming to class does not automatically earn any participation credit.
2. Quizzes (5%). Short quizzes will be administered during class time. These quizzes will not always be announced in advance. They can **only** be taken during class. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped so as to accommodate students who miss quizzes due to unforeseeable circumstances.
3. Assignments (50%). Over the course of the term, you will be required to submit four assignments using Sakai. Specific instructions will be given for each assignment. These tasks will build on one another and increase in complexity. Their aim is to develop skills in comprehending, criticizing and constructing arguments. Usually, only four grades are possible for these assignments: 0% (no evidence of ability), 60% (minimal ability), 80% (some ability) and 100% (mastery). Students should expect to re-submit these assignments multiple times, aiming to achieve a grade of 100% on each. Each assignment may be submitted two to three times during the relevant submission period.
4. Three unit exams (30%). Your top two scores will count for 15% each.

The following table is used to compute letter grades from percentages. The listed percentage grade or higher is required for the respective letter grade:

A+	97.5	C+	77.5
A	92.5	C	72.5
A-	90	C-	70
B+	87.5	D+	67.5
B	82.5	D	62.5
B-	80	D-	60

## Academic honesty

All work you submit in this class is presumed to be your own. Cheating and plagiarism will incur very serious consequences. At a minimum, the student will fail the relevant assignment. More serious or repeat offenders may fail the course or face expulsion. Review the definition of plagiarism and the consequences at <https://www.luc.edu/cas/advising/academicintegritystatement/>.

## Student accommodations

The university is committed to supporting students who require special accommodations to participate fully. In order to receive the accommodations you require, you should (i) register with the Student Accessibility Center (<http://www.luc.edu/sswd>), (ii) present your accommodation letter to the instructor during the first two weeks of class, and (iii) notify the SAC of any upcoming exams two weeks in advance (step (iii) only applies to students with accommodations related to testing). Accommodations cannot be provided without all steps being taken.

## Discussing sensitive topics

In this class, you are encouraged to draw on your own experiences in discussing topics, questions and texts that may be personal or sensitive. This can sometimes result in sharing difficult experiences, including experiences of physical violence and sexual assault. You should feel permission to share as much or as little as you wish with the instructor and the class about such experiences, which are unfortunately common and likely to have affected multiple people in the class. If you have any concerns about this, please discuss these with the instructor.

Note also that as a Responsible Employee the instructor is legally required to pass on any reports of sexual assault, gender-based violence or stalking to the university's Title IX officer. The instructor also has a mandatory obligation under Illinois law to report disclosures of or suspected instances of child abuse or neglect. The purpose of these reporting requirements is for the University to inform you of available resources and support; you will **not** be forced to file a report with the police, but in certain situations, the University may need to take additional action to ensure the safety of the University community. If you have any questions about this policy, you may contact the Office for Equity & Compliance at [equity@luc.edu](mailto:equity@luc.edu) or 773-508-7766.

## Course Schedule

The following schedule provides an overview of the topics that we will address during this quarter as well as the assigned readings. This list is subject to revision, so be sure to **check the latest version of the syllabus online**. You must complete each reading **before** the class it is listed for.

### Introduction

Tues. **What is philosophy?** Handout on how to read philosophy.  
17 Jan.

Thurs. **How to read philosophy** Alain Locke, "Good Reading".  
19 Jan.

### Persons and value

Tues. **Why should we do the right thing?** Plato, *Republic* II, 357a–369a.  
24 Jan.

Thurs. **What is justice?** Plato, *Republic* IV, 433b–445b.  
26 Jan.

Tues. 31 Jan.	<b>What are our fundamental values?</b>	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> I.1–7.
Thurs. 2 Feb.	<b>Who is truly free?</b>	Plato, <i>Gorgias</i> , 467b–476a.
Tues. 7 Feb.		Plato, <i>Apology</i> , 20c–23b, 33c–42a.
Thurs. 9 Feb.	<b>Are right and wrong relative?</b>	Mary Midgley, “Trying out one’s new sword”. Ruth Benedict, “Anthropology and the abnormal”.
Tues 14 Feb.	<b>Can we have objective values without dogmatism and intolerance?</b>	Alain Locke, “Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace”.
Thurs. 16 Feb.	<b>Unit exam</b>	—

Persons and society

Tues. 21 Feb.	<b>How should we face injustice?</b>	Selections from M.L. King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”.
Thurs. 23 Feb.	<b>When is social control legitimate?</b>	J. S. Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> .
Tues. 28 Feb.	<b>Why are states necessary?</b>	Selections from Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> .
Thurs. 2 Mar.	<b>Do we need a state?</b>	Selections from Jean-Jaques Rousseau, <i>Discourse on the Origins of Inequality</i> .
Tues. 7 Mar.	<b>SPRING BREAK</b>	—

Thurs. **SPRING BREAK**  
9 Mar.

—

## Persons and knowledge

Tues. **The sources of knowledge**  
14 Mar.

Introduction to, and selections from, al-Ghazālī,  
*Deliverance*.

Thurs. **Could I be wrong about every-**  
16 Mar. **thing**

Rene Descartes, *Mediations on First Philosophy*  
1 and 2.

Tues. 21 **Rationalism: Innate ideas**  
Mar.

Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method* 4.

Thurs. **Empiricism: Against innate**  
23 Mar. **ideas**

Selections from John Locke, *An Essay Concern-*  
*ing Human Understanding*.

Selections from David Hume, *An Enquiry Con-*  
*cerning Human Understanding*.

Tues. **Review**  
28 Mar.

—

Thurs. **Unit exam**  
30 Mar.

—

## Persons and reality

Tues. 4 **The challenge of materialism**  
Apr.

Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* (1.419–482,  
2.167–183, 3.94–176).

Thurs. **EASTER BREAK**  
6 Apr.

—

Tues. 11 **Can we hope for a life after**  
Apr. **death?**

Plato, *Phaedo* 69e.6–78b.3.

---

Thurs. 13 Apr.	<b>What is the soul?</b>	Aristotle, <i>De Anima</i> , II.1.
Tues. 18 Apr.	<b>Is there a self at all?</b>	David Hume, <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> , Book 1, Part 4, Section 6. “Of Personal Identity” (including appendix).
Thurs. 20 Apr.		Selections from Milindapañha.
Tues. 25 Apr.	<b>Vedantic perspectives on the self</b>	Selections from the Upaniṣads.
Thurs. 27 Apr.	<b>Review</b>	—

### University privacy statement

Assuring privacy among faculty and students engaged in online and face-to-face instructional activities helps promote open and robust conversations and mitigates concerns that comments made within the context of the class will be shared beyond the classroom. As such, recordings of instructional activities occurring in online or face-to-face classes may be used solely for internal class purposes by the faculty member and students registered for the course, and only during the period in which the course is offered. Students will be informed of such recordings by a statement in the syllabus for the course in which they will be recorded. Instructors who wish to make subsequent use of recordings that include student activity may do so only with informed written consent of the students involved or if all student activity is removed from the recording. Recordings including student activity that have been initiated by the instructor may be retained by the instructor only for individual use.

### Intellectual property

This syllabus, as well as all course materials including lecture slides and exams, are intellectual property of the instructor, Dr. Joshua Mendelsohn. They may not be shared during or after the course without the written permission of the instructor.