

# Conflict of Ideals: PHIL 103

## Syllabus

MWF: 1:30-2:20

Patrick Grafton-Cardwell

pgrafton-cardwell@springfieldcollege.edu

Office Hours: MW, 12:45-1:15 or by appointment

Fall 2020

## Description

This course focuses on tough questions in philosophy, with a special focus on ethical questions. We read works from both historical and contemporary philosophers to get a feel for the way philosophy has both progressed over time but also remained significantly unchanged. As we familiarize ourselves with some of the tough questions on which the course is centered, we also get a sense of the way that conflicting ethical, aesthetic, and religious ideals have influenced major philosophical debates.

Our course introduces some of the major normative theories of ethics: utilitarian ethics, Kantian ethics, and virtue ethics. Along the way, we apply those theories to think about the ethics of technology, art, and social interaction. We also discuss questions that have important ethical upshots: Are we free? Does God exist? What's the meaning of life?

This is a 3 unit course. This means you're expected to spend somewhere in the neighborhood of 6 hours per week working on the course requirements. This is in addition to the time we meet for class.

## Modality

This is an e-engaged course, which means we aren't meeting face-to-face. We are, however, meeting weekly online for discussion and application of course material. Each week of the course (with a few exceptions) will consist of two asynchronous days and one synchronous day.

On every Monday and Wednesday of the course, there is an assigned reading to complete. On Brightspace, I will post a short (roughly 10-minute) video summarizing and discussing some of the main views and arguments from each reading. By the end of each Monday and Wednesday (prior to midnight), you should read the assigned reading, watch the associated video, and then participate in the associated online discussion. Each Friday, we'll meet online during our assigned course time (i.e. synchronously) for additional instruction, discussion, and application of the material.

Springfield College uses Brightspace as its Learning Management System. It supports teaching and learning. You can find basic course information there such as syllabi and faculty office hours. Brightspace is also a critical tool to provide communication and course instruction during campus emergencies and emergency recovery. We'll be using Brightspace to host readings, assignments, and any other course documents (such as the syllabus).

Our text-based course discussion will be hosted on Discord, an app designed to facilitate discussion and community. We have a Discord server set up specifically for our course, and the server has several channels assigned to distinct purposes (e.g. “general”, “philosophy-in-the-wild”, or “questions-for-patrick”). Discord can be accessed via a web browser, or you can download the Discord app on your phone, tablet, or computer. The Discord server for our course can be accessed [here](#).

## Spiritual and Ethical Outcomes in the Core Curriculum

1. Demonstrate an understanding of historical and contemporary examples of how humans engage in making meaning within their world.
2. Demonstrate literacy in diverse religious and/or philosophical perspectives on the meaning making process.
3. Describe how human values shape structures and institutions (and vice versa).
4. Practice methods of philosophical and/or religious reasoning as they engage fundamental questions about the human condition.
5. Critically reflect on a diversity of worldviews, including their own.

## Objectives

The goals of this course are to empower you to:

- Identify, explain, and evaluate the theories and arguments of a variety of philosophers working in ethics and related philosophical topics. (S & E outcomes 1, 2, 4, and 5, measured with Essays and SNTs.)
- Engage in reflective and respectful discourse with your peers, reflecting openness, humility, and a spirit of collaborative inquiry. (S & E outcome 4, measured with Class Discussion.)
- Reflect meaningfully on the relevance of what you’ve read and discussed for living a fruitful and happy life. (S & E outcomes 3 and 5, measured with Apologiai.)
- Develop your own answers to the questions we discuss, as well as an increased ability to communicate them and argue for them by written means. (S & E outcomes 4 and 5, measured with Essays and Apologiai.)

## Communication

I will be available to contact via email on weekdays, generally before 5pm. I’ll attempt to respond to emails within 48 hours (usually sooner). To make sure your email is responded to in a timely manner, please put “PHIL 103” in the subject line. I’ll be available during weekly office hours on Zoom and by appointment for Zoom as well.

If I email you, the email will be sent to your school email, so you should check that once per day on weekdays. If my email requires a response, please respond within 48 hours.

If you’re contacting me to ask a question about the course, an assignment, or something related, make sure to check the syllabus first.

Class communication must always be respectful; I won’t tolerate rude behavior, unnecessary vulgarity, or abuse of any kind (towards myself or any others). If you aren’t sure what counts as any of those things, you should read the [Disruptive Behavior Policy](#) in the Springfield College Student Handbook. Students who engage in rude, vulgar, or abusive communication in the course are subject to dismissal.

## Texts

There are no required textbooks for this course. All required readings will be made available via Brightspace.

## Assignments and Grading

Your grade for this course will be determined by your performance on a few short Essays, a pair of Apologiai, some Socratic Note-Taking Responses to readings, and your regular engagement in class discussions. Grading for the course will be “additive”. This means that your total grade will be out of 4.0, and every course assignment will contribute some smaller portion to that, between 0.1 and 0.4. The Essays and SNTs will be “interchangeable”, meaning there will be many opportunities to turn them in, more than enough to earn the maximum in the Category Value. It will be up to you to decide which Essays or SNTs you want to do. I suggest working ahead and spreading out the work (rather than procrastinating or cramming) as two good strategies. The two Apologiai (explained below) and class discussion will be non-interchangeable, on the other hand. You need to do those assignments at the times they’re due to receive the grade value from that category.

Per the Springfield College Grade Equivalencies, you’ll receive the following grades for the corresponding Grade Points achieved in the course:

Grade Equivalencies	Grade Points
A	4.0
A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3.0
B-	2.7
C+	2.3
C	2.0
C-	1.7
D+	1.3
D	1.0
D-	0.7
F	0.0

Here’s a breakdown of how the grade will be calculated:

Grade Type	Category	Assignment	Value	Cat. Value
Interchangeable	SHORT ESSAYS	SHORT ESSAY 1	0.4	2.0
		SHORT ESSAY 2	0.4	
		SHORT ESSAY 3	0.4	
		SHORT ESSAY 4	0.4	
		SHORT ESSAY 5	0.4	
	SNT RESPONSES	Up to 8	0.1 per	0.8
Non-interchangeable	APOLOGIAI	FIRST APOLOGIA	0.4	0.8
		FINAL APOLOGIA	0.4	
	CLASS DISCUSSION	High Level Contributor	0.4	0.4
<b>Total</b>				4.0

More details on the assignments (including how many offerings are available for each interchangeable assignment) are available below.

## Short Essays

These are short (800 word maximum) writing assignments, in which you'll practice summarizing arguments, offering objections and replies, and evaluating a philosophical dialectic. You may submit a short essay interacting with one reading per each course unit after unit 1. Since there are 11 total units, that means you have 10 opportunities to submit a short essay. You may submit 5 total essays. The instructions for short essays are as follows.

**Length:** 800 words maximum.

**Instructions:** Choose one article or chapter from the current unit.

Summarize the author's main argument in the article. Provide an objection to the argument and discuss how the author should best reply to the argument. Include an introduction and conclusion.

1. Start by summarizing and explaining the author's thesis and their single best argument for it. (About 1 page)
2. Discuss what you take to be the single best objection to the argument you discussed above, either from the readings, class discussion, or your own thoughts. (about 1/2 page)
3. Discuss how the author should reply to the objection, either from the readings, class discussion, or your own thoughts. (about 1/2 page)
4. Assess for yourself: who is right? Does the objection succeed, or is the author's reply good? Write this up as a conclusion to the paper. (about 1/2 page)
5. After you have written up parts 1-4 and figured out what you will argue for, add an introduction to the beginning of your paper, setting out what will be discussed and what conclusion you will draw (i.e. your thesis). (about 1/4 page)

To receive full credit, a short essay must accurately summarize an author's thesis and argument, provide a plausible objection and reply, give a cogent evaluation of the dialectic, and include all the portions of the paper included in these instructions.

## Socratic Note Taking Responses

A Socratic Note Taking Response is a short, formally written set of notes on a course reading. The purpose of these assignments is to help you read philosophy with a more engaged, interrogative mindset. "Socratic Note Taking" is named after the philosopher Socrates, who famously taught by asking questions.<sup>1</sup> In these notes you will write questions as you read. Think of it as a reading quiz that you create yourself, along with an answer key. These assignments will also help you create a detailed set of notes on the papers for which you complete them.

You are allowed to complete an SNT covering all course readings for any day on which some reading is due. There are 27 such days. You may submit 8 total SNTs. SNTs will be graded on a Pass/Fail basis.

**Instructions:** SNT responses will follow a standard format. Create a page with three columns: a page number column, a question (that you write) column, and an answer (that you also write) column. You should record 2-3 questions for every 5 full pages of reading assigned, up to a maximum of 10 questions. So, for 1-9 pages of reading, 2-3 questions are required. For 10-14 pages, 4-6 questions are required. For 15-19, 6-9. For 20-25, 8-10. For anything above 25 pages, 10 full questions. (For online readings, you should record 3-5 questions for

<sup>1</sup>This assignment was inspired by Walker, Trafimow, and Bronstein [2017] "The Socratic Note Taking Technique", Teaching Philosophy 40 (3):341-365.

each online article.) Questions should be one sentence (or not much more), and answers should be 1-3 sentences. (Break it down into more than one question if you find you can't answer in 3 sentences or so.) These are meant to be expository questions – questions about what the text is saying – rather than objections or comments. For a philosophical text, expository questions can be about the author's thesis, about her argument(s) for it, about the reasons for premise(s) in an argument, or just about how to understand something that is said in some specific passage. For a fictional text, expository questions can be about how best to understand the events or states-of-affairs in the story, how to interpret their significance, or about the author's goals in introducing certain themes or ideas. As with all other writing assignments, these should be your work only. Don't consult other students or the internet for help. Upload your response on Moodle on the day that we discuss the relevant reading. Here is an example:

Page number	Question	Answer
2	What are the three major conceptions of well-being?	The first is hedonism. The second is the desire-based theory. The third comes from objective list theory.
3	What are two examples of the conditions of human flourishing, from Nussbaum's "capabilities approach"?	One example is bodily health. Another is practical reason.
3	What does the author mean by an "objective" theory, as opposed to a "subjective" theory?	An objective theory is one on which the same factors count for well-being for all people. A subjective theory says that different things may contribute to well-being for different people.

## Apologiai

At the beginning and end of the course (i.e. during the first and final weeks) you'll be required to write an articulation and defense (i.e. an "apology") of your way of life. This will require reflecting on how you actually live your life, how someone might see it as immoral or in some other way lacking value, and thinking about how you would defend your way of life to them. Your final apologia will expand on themes developed in the first apologia.

### First Apologia

In the *Apology*, Socrates defends his way of life. He offers reasons that the way that he lived was the best way to live. Socrates addresses a number of criticisms that have been directed at him and that have been part of what led him to be put on trial. In reading and thinking about this text, we can easily see that the Greek word "Apologia" does not mean what we tend to think of when we think of an apology. Rather, it is a reasoned defense of one's life or some aspect of one's life against those who might accuse one of not living rightly, not having the right values, or doing things one should not be doing.

You have been alive for a number of years. During that time, you have made choices and done things. Those things have partially formed your character – you have become the kind of person that does those things. You have also, most likely, made some plans for the future. Perhaps you plan to continue living much the way you have. Perhaps you plan to make some changes. Whatever you did in the past, you had reasons for. And what you plan to do, you have reasons for too. Taking that into consideration, we are going to follow in the footsteps of Socrates.

**Instructions:** Pick one particular action or choice that you have made that a) you value and think is right, but that b) another or others think is wrong and not valuable. (For instance, maybe you want to pursue a major that your family doesn't understand or agree with. Or maybe you hang out with the "wrong" people. Or maybe

you have another life commitment that some might consider off-track.). (The key here is to select a real choice you've made about something important to you, that people you care about have disagreed with ("people you care about" can be close people (your family, friends), but it can also be larger groups you care about (your culture, your nation, your human-community)).

Your First Apologia should have the following elements:

1. An explanation of your choice and its context. Include here an explanation of who your "accusers" are. Why is their view on this issue important to you? Why, in other words, are you moved to justify your choice here to them?
2. A presentation of the best reasons your 'accusers' give for why they think you are wrong. As you present their accusations and reasoning, be sure to be generous in your explanation of what they think you're doing wrong. Present their best reasons. (If you can't defend your choice against their best well-intentioned arguments, then you don't really think you are right).
3. The reasons you give for why, despite your accusers' concerns, you nevertheless believe your choice is grounded in solid values, an accurate assessment of reality and a commitment to consistent thinking. Ultimately, here you will be explaining how your choice reflects a "way of life" that you aim to live (in other words, a set of practices and choices that reflect a worldview resting on an ethics, an epistemology and a metaphysics).

**Format:** Your apologia should be 500-800 words. If you like, you can write it in the form of a letter to your accuser, or in the style of closing remarks at a trial, or what-not. Feel welcome to choose a style (and an organization of points) that fits the task, and that gets you excited about writing. But remember that it is designed to be an argument: taking a position and defending it with reasons/values/beliefs against those who would critique it.

### **Final Apologia**

Your first assignment was to write an Apologia of some aspect of your life. For this final assignment, you will revisit that initial Apologia, based on some of the theories we have been studying and the tools to do so, and expand that idea further into your life.

This Apologia must be at least 1,500 words, and will do the following:

1. Revisit the choice we were defending in the earlier version. Do you still stand by your choice and reasoning as described before? Have you come up with reasons for abandoning that choice? Have you come up with even better reasons? Think about the theories we've studied and decide whether any of them help you better reason about the choice in question (or not).
2. Now, consider another choice you may be faced with in the future. Make it up, but make it real and salient to your life. How might you go about making that choice? Consider some of the following questions:
  - (a) What values do I hold that are especially salient with respect to this choice?
  - (b) Are those values defensible and consistent with other values I hold?
  - (c) What conceptions of self and the universe are implicated in my values and choice?
  - (d) How, exactly, does my choice reflect the values that I hold?
  - (e) How might I defend this choice to an objector?

## Class Discussion

As mentioned above, our text-based classroom discussion will take place on Discord. On each course date for which a reading is due (every Monday and Wednesday after the first day of the course), you're required to make an appearance on the course's Discord server to make at least two substantive posts about the reading for that day. A substantive post is a post that asks a question, makes an argument, poses an objection, or in some other way interacts thoughtfully with a course text, the related lecture video, another substantive post, or something (say, in the news) that directly relates to the topics of the course.

I'll track your participation in the server in part using a bot called Engauge. Engauge will monitor your participation in the reading discussion channels, giving you "experience" for each post you make. That experience will allow you to "level up" over time. I'll partake in some of the discussions and I'll monitor to make sure that the posts you're receiving experience for are actually substantive posts. In order to receive full credit for class discussion, you need to reach Level 15 in the discord server. Levels 10-14 will receive .3 credit. Levels 5-9 will receive .2. Levels 2-4 will receive .1. Anyone who does not advance beyond Level 1 will receive no credit.

## Late Work & Extensions

All Essays, SNTs, and Apologiai are due on Brightspace by the beginning of the start of class on the day listed as their due date in the course schedule. I won't take late work or grant extensions on Short Essays or SNT Responses, except in extreme circumstances. There are more than enough opportunities to receive full credit for those portions of the grade, so try to work ahead in case you're unable to complete a later assignment. I'm happy to grant extensions on your Apologiai if you communicate with me ahead of time.

The penalty for late Apologiai without an extension is one third of a letter grade per day. For example, an assignment that would've been an A, if handed in one day late would instead be given an A-. If handed in two days late it would instead be given a B+. Work will be considered one day late if it is to me between any time in the 24 hours after the due date, two days late if to me between 24-48 hours of the due date, and so on.

## Academic Dishonesty

Don't plagiarize. I'll know if you do, and you will receive a 0 on the assignment (and possibly fail the course). It's also immoral and you'll be worse off as a person if you do it. You are responsible for knowing what plagiarism is. If you aren't sure whether something counts as plagiarism, ask me. Simple cases are things like copying words or ideas from others without attributing credit to them, using a paper (or section of a paper) you wrote for another class, or helping anyone else do any of those kinds of things. You can research our school's stance on plagiarism and related issues [here](#).

## Tentative Course Schedule

The course will divide into 11 discreet units, each with a particular theme, as shown on the following page.

Date	Unit	Readings	Assignments Due
08/31	1-Philosophy		
09/02		Plato, <i>Apology</i>	SNT
09/04			<b>First Apologia</b>
09/07	2-Ethics	Midgley, "Trying Out One's New Sword"	SNT
09/09		Schwitzgebel, "Cheeseburger Ethics" & Nussbaum, "Beyond Anger"	SNT
09/11			Essay
09/14	3-Utilitarianism	Mill, sections from <i>Utilitarianism</i>	SNT
09/16		Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism"	SNT
09/18			Essay
09/21	4-Freedom	Bailey & Rasmussen, "A New Puppet Puzzle"	SNT
09/23		Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility"	SNT
09/25			Essay
09/28	5-Kantian Ethics	Kant, sections from <i>Groundwork</i>	SNT
09/30		Feldman, "An Examination of Kantian Ethics"	SNT
10/02			Essay
10/05	6-Technology	Chang, "The Truth of Fact, the Truth of Feeling"	SNT
10/07		Moor, "Why We Need Better Ethics for Emerging Technologies"	SNT
10/09			Essay
10/14	7-Virtue Ethics	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Book I.1-2, 7-9, & 12-13	SNT
10/16		Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Book II.1-6 & X.6-9	SNT
10/19		Hursthouse, "Right Action"	SNT
10/21		Rini, "Raising Good Robots"	SNT
10/23			Essay
10/26	8-Ethics & Art	Archer and Matheson, "When Artists Fall"	SNT
10/28		Scarborough, "Burying the Dead Monuments"	SNT
10/30			
11/02		Baron, "On Admirable Immorality"	SNT
11/04		Eaton, "Where Ethics and Aesthetics Meet"	SNT
11/06			Essay
11/09	9-Bullshit	Frankfurt, "On Bullshit"	SNT
11/11		Barney, "[Aristotle], <i>On Trolling</i> "; Riggle, "High Five"; & Coates, "How the Quiet Car Explains the World"	SNT
11/13			Essay
11/16	10-God	Collins, "God, Design, and Fine-Tuning"	SNT
11/18		Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence"	SNT
11/20			Essay
11/30	11-Meaning	Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism"	SNT
12/02		Murdoch, "On 'God' and 'Good'"	SNT
12/04			
12/07		Blumenfeld, "Living Life over Again"	SNT
12/09		Wolf, "Meaningfulness"	SNT
12/11			Essay & <b>Final Apologia</b>

## Academic Assistance and Accommodations

This class may be recorded or transcribed if an enrolled student has been approved for this service as an academic accommodation by the Academic Success Center's Disability & Accessibility Services. Recordings are for the approved student's individual access only, and are not to be shared, copied, or distributed to others. For questions or concerns about acceptable use, please contact the Academic Success Center: 413-748-3389, [asc@springfield.edu](mailto:asc@springfield.edu), or Learning Commons 300.

A wide variety of academic assistance is offered through the Academic Success Center in the Learning Commons, Suite 300 (3rd floor). To contact the ASC, please call 413-748-3389 or email [asc@springfield.edu](mailto:asc@springfield.edu). During the fall and spring semesters, the ASC is open Monday-Thursday, 9am-9pm; Friday, 9am-3pm; and Sunday, 4-9pm. The ASC offers the following services:

- Writing & Reading Support Services offers students help with all aspects of the writing and reading processes.
- Math-Science Support Services provides assistance to students taking courses in Mathematics, Physics, Computer Science, Biology and Chemistry.
- The Content Tutorial Program delivers support for course work that is outside what is covered by Writing & Reading Support Services and Math-Science Support Services.
- The Conversation Partners Program provides support for non-native speaking students wishing to improve conversation and comprehension skills.
- Disability & Accessibility Services works with students with disabilities to provide appropriate accommodations, auxiliary aids, and services that facilitate equal access and meaningful participation in their educational experiences at Springfield College.
- The Academic Coaching Program is available to help students improve time management and learning strategies.
- The Academic Progress Program provides assistance and support for the students in academic jeopardy to help improve their academic skills, performance and standing.
- The MTEL Assistance Program provides support for students preparing to take the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure.

Springfield College is committed to an inclusive and accessible educational environment for students with disabilities. If you need academic accommodations due to a disability or disabling condition (including temporary disabilities), please contact the Academic Success Center's Disability & Accessibility Services. They will work with you on an individualized, case-by-case basis to determine eligibility and develop an appropriate accommodation plan. To schedule an appointment, please call 413-748-3389, email [asc@springfield.edu](mailto:asc@springfield.edu), or stop by the ASC located in the Learning Commons, Suite 300. Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the procedures outlined by Disability & Accessibility Services for determining eligibility and requesting accommodations in advance each semester and/or as needed. Accommodations cannot be provided retroactively.

To assist our international students as they transition into an English language academic environment and to support native-born and multilingual speakers, the College offers a variety of supports. The Academic Success Center offers English language supports through its Writing & Reading Support Services, which offers students help with all aspects of the writing and reading processes. Another support is the Conversation Partners Program, which provides support for non-native speaking students wishing to improve conversation and comprehension skills. Pending approval of the course instructor, the International Center offers students who are English Language Learners or multilingual speakers ELL Test Proctoring with extended time for course exams in an alternative location.