

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2021-2022

Philosophy Course Number: 2037G

Philosophy and Artificial Intelligence

Winter 2022

Th 9:30am-10:30am in HSB 240-1250
+ weekly asynchronous online lectures

Instructor: Michael Randall Barnes

Office Hours: Th 1pm-3pm in WIRB [room TBD]
(as well as by appointment
both in person and online)

Email: michael.barnes@uwo.ca

DESCRIPTION

Will robots take all our jobs? Will humans become cyborgs? Will nano-technology revolutionize medicine? As we rely more and more on machines and other new technologies, they are changing how we interact with the world and one another. In this course we will consider the impact of artificial intelligence on our current lives, and on our future. It has been said that “Philosophy will be the key that unlocks artificial intelligence”—presumably for the better. On the other hand, the Oxford philosopher Nick Bostrom has warned that advances in superintelligence may soon make humans obsolete. Who should we believe? This course will address these and other issues by first considering some traditional questions in philosophy of mind—e.g., Can a robot think? What is the Turing Test? Can machines ever be conscious?—before turning to a consideration of some of the ethical and social implications of this new technology.

TEXTS

Coeckelbergh, M. (2020). *AI Ethics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
+ Reserve readings as assigned, posted on OWL.

OBJECTIVES

The goal of this course is to familiarize students with some of the philosophical challenges posed by advances in the field of artificial intelligence (AI). By the end of the course, students will have a better understanding of the nature and scope of AI and the metaphysical, ethical and social implications of various forms and applications of AI. Students will also be in a position to take more advanced courses in a number of different areas of philosophy, including but not limited to, Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Technology, Philosophy of Mind, and Ethics.

GRADING

This course uses an achievement-based approach to grading that focuses on satisfactory completion of assignments rather than the degree of assignment quality. If a submission meets all of the standards specified in the instructions, then it is complete; if it does not, then it is incomplete. You will be given 3 tokens at the beginning of the semester, which you can exchange for an opportunity to revise and resubmit an assignment (you must email me to use a token). And you can acquire more tokens by submitting work that significantly exceeds the standards specified in the assignment.

Your final grade is determined by which bundle of assignments you complete (these are specified in **Course Requirements** below). All the standards specified in the bundle must be met to get the corresponding grade. Higher grades require that you do more work and more demanding work.

The value of this approach is that it (1) promotes higher quality work, (2) helps ensure that course learning objectives are met, (3) more closely reflects the nature of real-world evaluation, and (4) affords students more control over how they participate in the course and what they get out of it.

| Evaluation Scheme | | | | |
|---|---|----------------------------|--|--|
| | Superior | Satisfactory | Needs Improvement | Unsatisfactory |
| Evaluation | Exceeds assignment standards | Meets assignment standards | Does not meet one or more assignment standards | Does not meet standards and indicates a lack of engagement with the course |
| Corresponding Token Policy | Gain 1 Token for each Superior assignment | N/A | Can resubmit by handing in 1 Token | Can resubmit by handing in 2 Tokens |
| In general, the feedback you receive on assignments will be corrective. As such, if you are completing the assignments adequately, feedback will be fairly minimal. If there are aspects of your assignments that need to be improved, you will be provided guidance on how to do that. | | | | |

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

- An Introductory Reflection (approx. 500 words)
- 3–6 Weekly Reflections (approx. 400 words)
- 1–2 short papers (approx. 1,000 words each)
- 0–2 Philosophy Meme Posts (approx. 300 words)
- A Final exam (format TBD)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The requirements for the course vary based on which bundle you decide to pursue. The following table specifies the requirements for each bundle. Keep in mind that you may not succeed in your initial attempt at completing a given type of assignment so plan accordingly. Most importantly, **be sure to carefully read the instructions for each assignment as these determine the standards against which you will be evaluated.**

| GRADE REQUIREMENT BUNDLES | | |
|---|--|---|
| <i>Requirements for an A grade:</i> | <i>Requirements for an B grade:</i> | <i>Requirements for an C grade:</i> |
| Introductory Reflection completed (400 – 500 words) | Introductory Reflection completed (400 – 500 words) | Introductory Reflection completed (400 – 500 words) |
| Paper 1 completed and exceeded ‘satisfactory’ expectations (i.e., received ‘superior’) | Paper 1 completed and met ‘satisfactory’ expectations | Paper 1 or Paper 2 completed and met ‘satisfactory’ expectations |
| Paper 2 completed and exceeded ‘satisfactory’ expectations (i.e., received ‘superior’) | Paper 2 completed and met ‘satisfactory’ expectations | |
| 6 x Weekly Reflections completed (300 – 400 words each) | 4 x Weekly Reflections completed (300 – 400 words each) | 3 x Weekly Reflections completed (300 – 400 words each) |
| 2 x Philosophy Meme Posts completed (300-400 words each) | 1 x Philosophy Meme Posts completed (300-400 words each) | |
| 80 points or higher on Final Exam | 70 points or higher on Final Exam | 60 points or higher on Final Exam (lower than this will result in a D grade) |
| Failure to satisfy D-level standards will result in an F. | | |
| <p>“+’s”: If you earn 15 points higher on the final exam than the minimum needed to earn the term grade you are otherwise qualified to earn, you will earn a plus on your term letter grade.</p> <p>Example: If you satisfactorily completed both of your paper, have completed 4 or more of weekly reflections, and completed at least one Meme Post, you are qualified to earn a B for the semester. If you earn 85 points or more on the final exam, your semester grade will be a B+.</p> | | |

RESUBMISSION POLICY

If you submit an assignment that is evaluated as not satisfactory, you may resubmit the assignment in exchange for 1 or more tokens (see **Evaluation Scheme** above for details). To do this, you must email me to (1) notify me that you plan to use your tokens and (2) propose a new deadline for when your new version is due. You will then have an opportunity to revise your submission and have it reevaluated. If it is Satisfactory, it will count as complete. If it is ‘Superior’, it will count as complete, and you will also receive an additional token. **Please note that most of the mistakes students make are often easily avoided by carefully reading the instructions for the assignment. Be sure to use the Specification Checklist for each assignment before submitting it.**

LATE POLICY

Deadlines are somewhat arbitrary. Nevertheless, they are helpful for promoting good time management and active engagement with the course. For this reason, I have designed my late policy to reflect these facts. In general, I will grant extensions without penalty as long as they are requested 3 or more days prior to the due date. Extension requested less than 3 days prior to the deadline will be granted in exchange for 1 token. Extension requested after the deadline will be granted in exchange for 2 tokens.

When you request an extension, you must propose a new due date for the assignment based on when you think you can have it completed by. As long as the due date is reasonable, I will grant it. This will be your new due date and you must complete your assignment by then.

| Overall Token Policy | | | |
|----------------------|--|---|--|
| Gaining Tokens | Students receive 3 tokens at the beginning of the semester | | Students will receive 1 token for each ‘Superior’ assignment |
| Handing Tokens In | 0 Tokens | 1 Token | 2 Tokens |
| Resubmissions | N/A | For an assignment evaluated as Needs Improvement | For an assignment evaluated as Unsatisfactory |
| Extensions | When requested 3+ days prior to the deadline | When request 2 or fewer days prior to the deadline | When requested after the deadline |

CONTACTING ME

I will respond to any email that includes a question or request. Expect a response within 48 hours of sending me a message. (You will probably want to factor in this timeframe when considering how quickly you’d like a response to your message.) If, for some reason, I do not get back to you within 48 hours, you should feel free to follow up.

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY POLICIES

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html>. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

AUDIT

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the week of classes.

ACCOMMODATION

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

SELF- REPORTED ABSENCE FORM

Students who experience an unexpected illness or injury or an extenuating circumstance (48 hours or less) that is sufficiently severe to temporarily render them unable to meet academic requirements (e.g., attending lectures or labs, writing tests or midterm exams, completing and submitting assignments, participating in presentations) should self-declare using the online Self-Reported Absence portal. This option should be used in situations where the student expects to resume academic responsibilities within 48 hours or less. The following conditions are in place for self-reporting of medical or extenuating circumstances:

http://westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#SubHeading_322

EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

At least three days prior to the deadline for withdrawal from a course without academic penalty, students will receive assessment of work accounting for at least 15% of their final grade. For 3000- or 4000-level courses in which such a graded assessment is impracticable, the instructor(s) must obtain an exemption from this policy from the Dean and this exemption must be noted on the corresponding course syllabus. In rare instances and at the Dean's discretion, other courses could receive a similar exemption, which also must be noted in the course syllabus.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

The last day of scheduled classes in any course will be the last day on which course assignments will be accepted for credit in a course. Instructors will be required to return assignments to students as promptly as possible with reasonable explanations of the instructor's assessment of the assignment.

ACADEMIC OFFENCES

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

PLAGIARISM CHECKING

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>
Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>
Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>
Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be had by phoning 519.661.3030 (during class hours) or 519.433.2023 after class hours and on weekends.

USE OF RECORDINGS

All of the remote learning sessions for this course will be recorded. The data captured during these recordings may include your image, voice recordings, chat logs and personal identifiers (name displayed on the screen). The recordings will be used for educational purposes related to this course, including evaluations. The recordings may be disclosed to other individuals under special circumstances. Please contact the instructor if you have any concerns related to session recordings. Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation, or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor.

WESTERN COVID POLICIES

MASKING GUIDELINES

Students will be expected to wear triple-layer, non-medical, paper masks at all times in the classroom as per University policy and public health directives. Students who are unable to wear a mask must seek formal accommodation through Western Accessible Education at aew@uwo.ca, and present medical documentation. Students are not permitted to eat or drink while in class to ensure masks stay in place. Students will be able to eat and drink outside of the classroom during scheduled breaks. Students unwilling to wear a mask as stipulated by Western policy and public health directives will be referred to the Dean, and such actions will be considered a violation of the student Code of Conduct.

COURSE ABSENCES DUE TO DAILY COVID SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Missed assessments (e.g., presentations, essays, quizzes, tests, midterms, etc.) require formal academic considerations (typically self-reported absences and/or academic counselling). Methods for dealing with missed work and course content are at the discretion of the instructor(s). Students should be aware that some learning outcomes cannot be easily made up and may need to be completed in a subsequent year. Your instructor will provide you with further information as to how this applies within this course. Students who demonstrate a pattern of routinely missing coursework due to self-reported COVID symptoms, and therefore do not demonstrate mastery of the learning outcomes of the course, will not receive credit for the course.

CONTINGENCY PLAN FOR AN IN-PERSON CLASS PIVOTING TO 100% ONLINE LEARNING

In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, all remaining course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will not change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor. In the event that online learning is required, a stable v1 (2021.09.03) internet connection with working microphone and webcam will be required. As has been the case in the past, the decision to pivot to online learning will be made by Western, and not individual instructors or departments (excepting temporary online instruction in the event of instructor illness).