

Instructor: Dr. Megan Fritts Cabrera
Department: Philosophy – School of Human Inquiry
Email: mcabrera@ualr.edu
Office Location: Stabler Hall, 203P
Office Hours: Zoom, by appointment

**Philosophy 4380 (991/9U1) Special Topics:
Philosophy of Weird Things**

Web-based asynchronous course

CRN 33900/33901

3 Credit Hours

July 7-August 8 2025

Course Description and Objectives

The aim of this course is to show that one can—and should—think philosophically about weird things! This imperative includes topics on the fringes of academic philosophy, such as: should we believe in Bigfoot?; what about extra-terrestrials?; are ancient myths more like history, or more like fairy-tales?; what—if anything—can we infer from near-death experiences?; can “biohacking” lead to human immortality, and should we want it to? In this course, we will apply rigorous philosophical thinking to the strange, eerie, and truly bizarre. We will examine how these peculiar phenomena relate to timeless philosophical questions in metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, in addition to raising brand new questions of their own!

Credit Hours Explanation

This is equivalent to three credit hours. For each academic credit hour, a typical undergraduate student will spend *two hours* outside of class preparing for and studying for the class.

Learning Outcomes

You are encouraged to think carefully about your own objectives in registering for this class. Even if you are primarily here to fulfill a major, minor, or other university requirement, it is our shared responsibility that you ultimately gain more from this course than simply a passing grade. After successfully completing this course, participants will:

- Understand how to think about concrete issues through the lens of philosophical reasoning.
- Gain the ability to read difficult philosophical texts.
- Learn how to construct and critique arguments.
-

Classroom Etiquette

In this course we may address some emotionally-charged issues about which you may already have strong convictions. Thus, it is asked that you be respectful when challenging the arguments of your peers or the instructor. Of course, reasoned disagreement is permitted and strongly encouraged. However, I request that you direct your criticism at the ideas and arguments at issue and not at particular people.

Respect and civility regarding your classmates, professor, and reading material are necessary for doing well in this class. Remember, however, respecting the views of others does not mean agreeing with them! Please come talk to

me if any part of the reading, behavior of classmate, or my own behavior, makes you feel uncomfortable or unable to participate in class. Open communication is key!

Related: my student hours are for everyone! Please drop by whenever you want to chat about college/philosophy specifically, or feel like you could use a little bit of extra discussion on something we went over in class. Philosophy is hard. Please take advantage of these resources early and often so you do not get lost in the material later on in the semester.

Technology Policy:

Use of laptops and cell phones is allowed in the back row of the class room, but not in any other row (unless you have an accommodation for one: let me know if you do). This is because many students get distracted by screens, even their classmates' screens. If you're in the back row, there will be no one sitting behind you to distract. I would encourage you to opt out of using laptops and cellphones in class, and instead take notes by hand or just pay close attention. Numerous studies have shown that taking handwritten notes radically increases information retention and learning outcomes in class.

Academic Integrity

Students may not gain undue advantage over their classmates by deceptive or dishonest means. Throughout their education students should be impressed with the facts that cheating, duplicity, unauthorized reproduction of classroom materials, and plagiarism are morally degrading and that such practices seriously interfere with learning and intellectual development. It is a responsibility of instructors to make every effort to prevent dishonesty, protect honest students, and take appropriate action in instances of dishonesty. It is the responsibility of the student not only to abstain from cheating, but in addition, to avoid the appearance of cheating and to guard against making it possible for others to cheat. **This includes the use of ChatGPT and other LLMs (including Grammarly) for creating any part of an assignment (unless using the software is part of the assignment).** Courtesy and honesty require that any ideas or materials borrowed from another must be fully acknowledged. It is the obligation of each student to report all alleged violations of academic integrity to the instructor, as well as the responsibility of all instructors to report all alleged violations of academic integrity to the [Office of the Dean of Students](#).

Students may not reproduce, in whole or in part, classroom lectures or study materials presented by a professor without specific approval in advance by the professor. Publication of any such material shall only be with the express consent of the professor.

The determination that a student's work was the result of dishonest action can be considered in the instructor's evaluation of that work and in the determination of the course grade. In addition, disciplinary action will be taken by the appropriate university official (representative from the [Office of the Dean of Students](#)) or by the Academic Integrity and Grievance Committee.

Students with Disabilities:

Your success in this class is important to me, and it is the policy and practice of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock to create inclusive learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you have a documented disability (or need to have a disability documented), and need an accommodation, please contact me privately as soon as possible, so that we can discuss with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) how to meet your specific needs and the requirements of the course. The DRC offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive

process among you, your instructor(s), and the DRC. Thus, if you have a disability, please contact me and/or the DRC, at 501.569.3143 (V/TTY) or 501.683.7629 (VP). For more information, please visit the [DRC website](#).

Inclement Weather Policy

1. During inclement weather, UA Little Rock will make a decision on whether or not to close based on all available information.
2. The chancellor will decide whether or not conditions warrant canceling classes and activities and closing the campus or whether classes and activities will be canceled but with specified campus offices open. Online or web-enhanced classes will continue as scheduled at the discretion of the faculty member.
3. The [UA Little Rock website](#), UA Little Rock email, the university's main telephone number (501-916-3000), and the Rave campus alert notification system are the official means of communicating information concerning weather-related closings.
4. When necessary, the university will announce a separate decision about canceling night classes (those classes starting at 4:20 p.m. or later) by 2 p.m., if possible.
5. Ordinarily, sites remote from campus such as the Bowen Law School and the Arkansas Studies Institute will close or cancel classes and activities whenever the university does so. In some circumstances, however, a separate decision may be made whether or not a site remote from campus will be open or closed, and this decision will be announced through the university's official means of communicating weather-related closings.
6. Vice chancellors are responsible for seeing that necessary services are provided in their respective areas when the university is closed. Employees required to provide such services will be identified by their supervisors. Classified employees who must report to work when the university is closed due to inclement weather will be allowed compensation time of 1.5 hours for one hour worked. Persons who are not required to work when the university is closed will be granted authorized absence. Employees who do not report to work when the campus is open will be charged annual/compensatory leave or leave without pay. The Payroll Department will prescribe payroll reporting and timekeeping.
7. The Policy Advisory Council of the University Assembly will recommend to the chancellor if and when missed undergraduate and graduate class days should be made up. In the event that the university is closed during a final examination day, the provost, in consultation with the Faculty Senate president, will reschedule any missed graduate or undergraduate final examinations with the exception of online exams which will continue as scheduled.
8. Weather and road conditions vary from place to place. Employees and students are expected to exercise good judgment regarding the safety of travel when road conditions are affected by the weather.

Texts

All course material (readings + podcast episodes) will be posted on Blackboard, under the week's "Content" folders.

Grading for the Course

Your grade for this course will be determined by 1) exams, 2) homework assignments, 3) participation, and 4) a term paper. Grades will be posted on Blackboard. The precise weighting for graded assignments is as follows:

Weekly Reaction Papers (4): 60 points total, 15 points each.

Reaction papers are mid-length essays designed to challenge the participant to think critically about the course material. There are four reaction papers throughout the course. Reaction papers should be between 500-750 words in length, and they are worth 15 points each.

Discussion Board (2): 5 points each, 10 points total.

At two different points during the course, make note of something interesting you learned on the podcast and write a discussion post about it. These should be from two different episodes, but they can be whichever ones you want. Also, comment on at least four classmates' posts during the term (again, whichever posts you want). Your posts should be at least 250 words, comments may be shorter.

Final Paper: 30 points

The purpose of the final paper is to demonstrate the student's ability to integrate and apply the course material by formulating a comprehensive essay that addresses the fundamental questions of this course.

Late Work:

The instructor reserves the right to grade late work on a case by case basis. However, as a general rule, late work will be accepted with a 5-point (that is, half a letter-grade) reduction per day that it is late. After 5 days, barring special circumstances, the work will no longer be accepted.

Grading Scale:

90–100: A, “exemplary, far beyond requirements/expectations”

80–89: B, “exceeds requirements/expectations”

70–79: C, “meets requirements/expectations”

60–69: D, “below minimum requirements/expectations”

0–59: F, “failing”

Rounding up in-between grades is not guaranteed and is always at the instructor's discretion. The only factors that determine whether a grade is rounded up are exceptional attendance or participation.

COURSE OUTLINE

If we depart from this schedule, an announcement will be sent out on Blackboard.

Week 1, July 7-13: Philosophy of Bigfoot (and other cryptids)

- Listen to Philosophy on the Fringes, ep: “Bigfoot”
- Read (1) Darren Naish, chapter from *Hunting Monsters*, (2) Thomas Nagel, “Testimony”

Week 2, July 14-20: Philosophy of Extra-Terrestrial Life

- Listen to Philosophy on the Fringes, eps: (1) “Extra-Terrestrial Life”, (2) “The Fermi Paradox”
- Read (1) Milan Cirkovich, Chapter from *The Great Silence*, (2) Kenny Pearce, “Space Aliens and Skeptical Theism”

Week 3, July 21-27: Philosophy of Near-Death Experiences

- Listen to Philosophy on the Fringes, ep. “Near Death Experiences”
- Read (1) Gary Habermas, chapter from *Near Death Experiences*, (2) John Martin Fischer, “Near Death Experiences: The Stories They Tell”

Week 4, July 28-August 3: Philosophy of Myths and Mythology

- Listen to Philosophy on the Fringes, eps. (1) “Myths, Pt. 1”, (2) “Myths, Pt. 2”
- Read (1) Chapter 1 from *A Very Short Introduction to Classical Myth*, (2) Karl Popper, “Science: Conjectures and Refutations”

Week 5, August 4-August 8: Philosophy of Biohacking

- Listen to Philosophy on the Fringes, ep. “Biohacking”
- Read (1) Shelly Kagan, “Is Death Bad for You?”, (2) John Martin Fischer, “Why Immortality is Not So Bad”

FINAL PAPER DUE 8/8 by 11:59 PM