

Introduction to Philosophy

University Course Description

In this course, students will be introduced to the nature of philosophy, philosophical thinking, major intellectual movements in the history of philosophy, including topics from the western philosophical tradition and various problems in philosophy. Students will strengthen their intellectual skills, become more effective learners and develop broad foundational knowledge.

Course Purpose

This course centers on uncovering assumptions. Through the course of the semester we will be wrestling with our most fundamental beliefs, inquiring into what grounds them.

We will ask ourselves: "What do I know?", "How do I know that I know?", "Does God Exist?", "What is God?", "What is Good?", "What is Real?", and more!

By asking these questions and working through the domains of Metaphysics, Logic, Ethics, and Epistemology, we develop an understanding of what constitutes philosophy, why it remains relevant, and how we may be able to apply it to our own lives.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Remembering: Students will be able to recall and define key terms and concepts central to the Western philosophical tradition, as well as recognize major figures and their contributions to the field.

2. Understanding: Students will illustrate an understanding of how philosophical thought has evolved over time in the Western tradition. They should be able to reconstruct the movement of thought, as a narrative, developing through various figures.
3. Applying: Students will relate philosophical ideas to their own lives, employing philosophical theories to navigate personal beliefs, values, and life decisions.
4. Analyzing: Students will compare and contrast the development of philosophical thought over different periods in the Western tradition.
5. Evaluating: Students will make reasoned judgments about the impact and relevance of different philosophical ideas, presenting arguments for why certain philosophical concepts remain pertinent to contemporary life.
6. Creating: Students will form and articulate their own philosophical stance based on their understanding of the Western philosophical tradition, that they will defend through the use of academic peer-reviewed sources.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Explain major philosophical problems concerning knowledge, reality, mind, truth, morality, and meaning.
2. Identify and compare major philosophical traditions, including skepticism, rationalism, empiricism, transcendental idealism, nihilism, existentialism, and philosophy of mind.
3. Read and interpret primary philosophical texts by Plato, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Nietzsche, Nagel, Searle, Bostrom, and Chalmers.

4. Reconstruct philosophical arguments by identifying their premises, conclusions, assumptions, and logical structure.
5. Evaluate philosophical arguments by assessing their validity, soundness, strengths, weaknesses, and implications.
6. Explain the historical development of key philosophical debates, including skepticism, the possibility of knowledge, causation, metaphysics, morality, and artificial intelligence.
7. Develop clear, focused, and well-supported philosophical writing through repeated drafting, revision, and workshop participation.
8. Formulate original philosophical questions and defend reasoned positions in conversation and writing.
9. Distinguish between different sources of belief.
10. Reflect on how philosophical inquiry changes our understanding of ourselves and the world.

Grading Scale

Grade	Range	Grade	Range	Grade	Range	Grade	Range
A	94 - 100	B+	87 - 89	B-	80 - 82	C	73 - 76
A-	90 - 93	B	83 - 86	C+	77 - 79	C-	70 - 72

Grade Categories and Weights

Discussion Cards: 20%

At the start of each class you will submit a piece of paper/index card with a short question, comment, objection, or observation concerning the assigned reading. This should demonstrate that you have reflected on the reading. There are 22 readings through the course, 20 of these will count towards your grade, you may skip up to 2 submissions. Each submission counts for 1% of your total grade.

Levels Assignments: 80%

If you complete...	Then your grade will be at least...
Level 1	20%
Level 2	40%
Level 3	60%
Level 4	80%

See Handouts on Canvas for more information on the Levels Assignments.

Adapted from Dustin Locke's The Levels System.

Course Schedule

Week 1 T Aug 25 Introduction: What is Philosophy? Reading: Syllabus

Th Aug 27 Skepticism and Assumptions Reading: Plato, "Allegory of the Cave". In "Republic", pg. 514a-521b (beginning of Book 7) Recommended: Bradbury, "No Particular Night or Morning"

Week 2 T Sept 1 Skepticism and Assumptions Reading: Plato, "Apology", In "Five Dialogues"

	Th	Sept 3	Skepticism and Assumptions, cont. Reading: Descartes, "First Meditation" In "Meditations on First Philosophy"
Week 3	T	Sept 8	Rationalism: A priori Knowledge Reading: Descartes, "Second Meditation". In "Meditations on First Philosophy"
	Th	Sept 10	Rationalism: An a priori Proof Reading: Descartes, "Fifth Meditation" In "Meditations on First Philosophy"
Week 4	T	Sept 15	Rationalism: The External World Reading: Descartes, "Sixth Meditation", In "Meditations on First Philosophy"
	Th	Sept 17	Logic: Arguments and Logic Reading: Chapter 1, "The Logic Book"
Week 5	T	Sept 22	Logic: Arguments and Logic (Cont.) Reading: Chapter 1, "The Logic Book" Attempt 1 due
	Th	Sept 24	Foundationalism
Week 6	T	Sept 29	Draft workshop for Attempt 2
	Th	Oct 1	Empiricism: The Origin of Ideas Reading: Pages 3-13. In "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding" Attempt 2 due
Week 7	T	Oct 6	Empiricism: Causation and Induction Reading: Pages 15-25, 39-44, 47-49. In "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding"

	Th	Oct 8	Empiricism: The limits of Human Understanding Reading: Pages 25-31, 50-53, 102-5, 109-14. In “An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding”
Week 8	T	Oct 13	Transcendental Idealism: Kant’s Response to Hume Reading: Pages 1-6, 9-14 (skip §3), 15-22. In “Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics”
	Th	Oct 15	Draft workshop for Attempt 3
Week 9	T	Oct 20	Transcendental Idealism: Space, Time, and Experience Reading: Pages 23-27 (skip §13), 28-34. In “Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics” Attempt 3 due
	Th	Oct 22	Transcendental Idealism: Causality and the Conditions of Knowledge Reading: Pages 35-45 (skip §§24-26), 49-52 (skip §31), 53-58. In “Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics”
Week 10	T	Oct 27	Transcendental Idealism: The Limits of Metaphysics Reading: Pages 64-66 (skip §43), 67-69, 78-82 (just §53), 83-87. In “Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics”
	Th	Oct 29	3-Minute Thesis
Week 11	T	Nov 3	Draft workshop for Attempt 4

Th	Nov 5	Nihilism and Existentialism: Truth, Morality, and Nihilism: Reading: Nietzsche pages 3-4, 7-14 (§§1-13), 19 (§§26-27), 23-24 (§36), 32-39 (§§51-55), 86-87 (§136), 89-91 (§141), 140-142 (§244-246), 253-254 (§461)—section numbers (§ in parentheses follow page numbers. In “The Will to Power” Supplement: “Zarathustra’s Prologue” & “On the Three Meamorphoses”. In “Thus Spake Zarathustra”. Attempt 4 due
Week 12	T Nov 10	Nihilism and Existentialism: Truth as interpretation Reading: Nietzsche pages 262-264 (§§470-477), 266-267 (§§480-481), 268-273 (§§484, 487-490, 493-499), 275-283 (§§507, 511-522) . In “The Will to Power” Supplement: “Zarathustra’s Prologue” & “On the Three Meamorphoses”. In “Thus Spake Zarathustra”.
Th	Nov 12	Nihilism and Existentialism: Will to power; revaluation; the philosopher as creator of values Reading: Nietzsche pages 288-289 (§§531-532), 294-297 (§§550-551), 300 (§553), 304-307 (§§565-569), 308-309 (§574), 313-319 (§§583-585), 323-324 (§592), 326 (§600). In “The Will to Power” Supplement: “Zarathustra’s Prologue” & “On the Three Meamorphoses”. In “Thus Spake Zarathustra”.
Week 13	T Nov 17	Draft workshop for Attempt 5

Th	Nov 19	Minds and Computers: The Mind-Body Problem Reading: Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" Supplement: Isaac Asimov, "The Last Question" Attempt 5 due
Week 14	T Nov 24	Minds and Computers: The Chinese Room Problem Reading: Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs"
Week 15	T Dec 1	Minds and Computers: Simulation and Reality Reading: Bostrom, "Are We Living in a Computer Simulation?" Attempt 6 Due
Th	Dec 3	Conclusion: Philosophy, Reality, and Meaning; What, if anything, can we know? What has philosophy changed? Reading: David Chalmers, "The Matrix as Metaphysics"
Week 16	Dec 5–10	Finals Week Reading: Review Plato, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Nietzsche, Searle, Bostrom, and Chalmers Attempt 7 Due

*Schedule is subject to revision at the instructor's discretion.

Course Policies: Grades

- First Day Attendance: Complete the First Day Quiz on Canvas after the first class meeting
- I do not automatically round up grades (apart from the nearest whole number) at the end of the semester. This means I do not add points upon request. This should go without saying. However, I do take into account a student's character in cases where a student is very very close to reaching the next grade level. The questions I consider are 1) Has the student demonstrated engagement in class discussions? 2) Has the student regularly come to class on time? 3) Has the student submitted all assignments on time and with integrity? 4) Has the student visited office hours or demonstrated an

eagerness to excel in the course? 5) Has the student communicated respectfully? Has the student discussed anything with me during the semester apart from requests for extra points?

- Requests to review assignments before they are due can be completed during office hours.
- Late Work: Contact me if for any reason you are unable to complete an assignment on the due date, preferably contact me prior to missing the assignment.
- Extra Credit: Demonstrating a reading of the supplemental readings or other related work outside what is listed on the syllabus may count for extra credit. You may demonstrate this by writing a brief essay. Consult me if you would like to do so.