

Introduction to Philosophy

Description: Philosophy, one of the world's oldest academic disciplines, is dedicated to systematically exploring fundamental questions relating to, among other things, reality, the self, knowledge, value, and normativity. This course will look at three of philosophy's biggest topics: What can we know? Who am I? How should I live? Using texts both ancient and contemporary, we will see how grappling with these enduring questions may inform our response to modern-day concerns, ranging from the treatment of criminals, to our understanding of mental health, to the ethics of cloning. Along the way, we will develop the critical thinking, speaking, writing, and imaginative skills necessary to investigate difficult questions.

Required text: *Philosophy: The Big Questions* (eds. Rush Sample, Charles Mills, and James Sterba)

Assignments:

- **Argument reconstructions** – Analyze each of the short philosophical arguments provided. Then find an argument “in the wild” (in an opinion column, on tv, on social media, etc.). Analyze and evaluate the argument.
- **Short evaluative essay** (3-4 pgs.) – Choose from 3 prompts.
- **Create a Dialogue** (3-4 pgs.) – Create a dialogue between two people arguing over one of the provided topics. You choose the setting, characters, etc. One side can win the argument, but both characters must provide plausible arguments.
- **Philosophy Exploration** (1-2 pgs.) – Using the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy or the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, find a topic that interests you (that we have not discussed in class) and do a short write-up about it.
- **Final essay** (5-7 pgs.) – Choose from 5 prompts or decide on your own final topic (which must be approved by me!)

Week 1: What is Philosophy?

- Elizabeth Beardsley and Monroe Beardsley – “The Nature of Philosophical Thinking”
- Plato – “Apology”
- Martin Luther King Jr. – “Letter from Birmingham Jail”

Unit 1: What Can we Know?

Week 2: Skepticism and Common Sense

- René Descartes – selections from *Meditations On First Philosophy*.
- Lisa Shapiro – selections from *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*.
- Jonathan Vogel – “Cartesian Skepticism and Inference To The Best Explanation”
- GE Moore – “A Defense of Common Sense”

Week 3: Alternative Epistemologies

- Charles W. Mills – “Alternative Epistemologies”.
- Uma Narayan – “The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist”
- Helen Longino – selection from *Science As Social Knowledge*
- Optional: Genevieve Lloyd – selection from *The Man Of Reason*

Week 4: Other Minds

- A.J Ayer – “One’s Knowledge of Other Minds”
- Thomas Nagel – “What is it like to be a bat?”
- Kristin Andrews – “Getting to Know Other Minds” from *The Animal Mind*
- Susan Schneider – selections from *Artificial You: AI and the Future of your Mind*

Week 5: Philosophy of Religion

- William L. Rowe – “The Cosmological Argument”
- Blaise Pascal – “The Wager”
- **Optional:** William L. Rowe – “The Ontological Argument”
- J. L. Mackie – “Evil and Omnipotence”
- Eleonore Stump – “The Problem of Evil”

Unit 2: Who Am I?

Week 5: Understanding the Self

- John Locke – “The Self and Consciousness”
- Peter Unger – “I do not exist”
- Charles Taylor – “Selfhood and Narrative Understanding”
- Şerife Tekin – “Self and Mental Disorder: Lessons for Psychiatry from Naturalistic Philosophy”

Week 7: Determinism and Moral Responsibility

- Augustine – “Human Freedom and Divine Providence”
- Paul Holbach – selection from *The System of Nature*

- Elizabeth Shaw and Robert Blakey – “Determinism, Moral Responsibility and Retribution”
- Derk Pereboom and Gregg Caruso – selection from “Hard-Incompatibilist Existentialism: Neuroscience, Punishment, and Meaning in Life”

Week 8: Compatibilist Approaches

- Harry G. Frankfurt – “Freedom Of The Will And The Concept Of A Person”
- James P. Sterba And Janet Kourany – “How To Complete The Compatibilist Account Of Free Action”
- Jean-Paul Sartre – “Condemned to be Free”

Unit 3: How Should We Live?

Week 9: Ethics

- Plato – “Morality As Good In Itself”
- Judith Thomson – selections from *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity*
- John Stuart Mill – selection from *Utilitarianism*
- Immanuel Kant – “Fundamental Principles of The Metaphysic of Morals”.

Week 10: Applied Ethics

- Carol Gilligan – selection from “In a Different Voice”
- Bernard Boxill – “Equality, Discrimination, And Preferential Treatment”.
- Leon R. Kass – “Cloning, Sexual Reproduction and Genetic Engineering”
- J. David Velleman – “Against the Right to Die”

Week 11: Is Life Meaningful?

- Leo Tolstoy – selection from *My Confession*
- Albert Camus – selection from *The Myth Of Sisyphus*
- Thomas Nagel – “The Absurd”
- Susan Wolf – “The Meaning of Lives”
- **Optional:** Dan Weijers – “Optimistic Naturalism: Scientific Advancement and the Meaning of Life”

Week 12: Finding happiness

- Seneca – “Life Guided by Stoic Philosophy”
- Emilie Du Châtelet – “Discourse on Happiness”
- Lorraine Besser-Jones – “The Pursuit and Nature of Happiness”

- **Last day of class:** In-class individual exploration of other philosophical topics (using SEP or IEP), with a short write-up at the end.