

PHIL 1100: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

Spring 2024
The Ohio State University

Instructor	Jason DeWitt
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Office Hours	W 1pm-3pm or by appointment
Class Time	WF 9:35am - 10:55am
Class Location	Mendenhall Lab 125

Description Welcome! I'm very excited to do philosophy with you all. Philosophy is, fundamentally, a conversation about some of the deepest mysteries of the universe and of the human condition. Hopefully, this sounds exciting. Whether you are completely new to philosophy or have some experience, I hope we can all engage in this 3000-year-old conversation together and make some philosophical progress.

We will do this by first developing our philosophical and logical toolkit. Then we will examine issues of knowledge, skepticism, the nature of personhood, the divine, and the source of morality. We will end the course by discussing ethics and the value of a philosophical life.

There are many ways to organize an Introduction to Philosophy course: by location (for example, Asian vs. European philosophy), historically (starting with the beginning of philosophy and proceeding from there), or topically (getting a whirlwind tour of several of the many topics in philosophy). We will be doing a little bit of it all: looking primarily at discussions of God and personhood in Western, Chinese, Indian, Native American, Islamic, and African philosophy.

Besides familiarizing students with classic topics and works from these philosophical traditions, there are three other primary goals for this course. First: to increase the critical thinking and analytic writing skills of the students. We will accomplish this via scaffolded writing assignments that ask the students to summarize philosophical arguments and positions and to critically evaluate them. Second: help the student to grow as a reflective philosopher. This goal will be assessed by two reflection exercises on the student's personal philosophical beliefs – one done at the beginning of the semester, the other at the end. Third: to help the student see that philosophy is more than just a set of central questions investigated by a small subset of authors in the Western canon. All these goals taken together, by end of course, should leave students as better philosophers, thinkers, and writers who see philosophy as applying to many of the central parts of their lives.

General Education Information This course partially fulfills your legacy GE requirements by being part of the *Cultures and Ideas* category of the old General Education curriculum. The goals of *Cultures and Ideas* GE courses are the following: Students evaluate significant cultural phenomena and ideas in order to develop capacities for aesthetic and historical response and judgment; and interpretation and evaluation.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

- Analyze and interpret major forms of human thought, culture, and expression.
- Evaluate how ideas influence the character of human beliefs, the perception of reality, and the norms which guide human behavior.

How this course attains these goals and outcomes: In this course, you will develop your capacities to critically analyze, interpret and evaluate prominent historical and contemporary philosophical arguments and theories.

This course also partially satisfies your new GE requirements by being part of the *Cultural Studies* category of the new General Education curriculum. The goals of *Cultural Studies* GE courses are the following: Successful students will evaluate significant cultural phenomena and ideas to develop capacities for aesthetic and cultural response, judgment, interpretation, and evaluation.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

- Analyze and interpret selected major forms of human thought, culture, ideas, or expression.
- Describe and analyze selected cultural phenomena and ideas across time using a diverse range of primary and secondary sources and an explicit focus on different theories and methodologies.
- Use appropriate sources and methods to construct an integrated and comparative perspective of cultural periods, events, or ideas that influence human perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors.
- Evaluate social and ethical implications in cultural studies.

How this course attains these goals and outcomes: In this course, you will develop your capacities to critically analyze, interpret and evaluate prominent historical and contemporary philosophical arguments and theories.

Class Conduct This class will be heavily discussion based. And we will discuss very sensitive political and religious topics, so even if we disagree with someone else, we must voice that disagreement in a respectful manner and treat all the members of class with human dignity. If we want to, as a class, we may develop a list of conversational ground rules for our discussions. Also, do not use cellphones once class starts and please do not email, Internet shop, or social media scroll during class.

Carmen All course content such as announcements, slides, assignments, grades and required readings (or videos or podcast episodes) will be made available on Carmen (or be made available via an Internet link on Carmen). You are expected to do the readings *before* the class for which the reading is assigned. Check Carmen regularly. What is assigned on Carmen takes precedence over the assignments/readings detailed on the syllabus. Contact me via *email*, *instead* of via the Carmen messaging.

Materials All of the assigned reading/watching/listening material will be available for free on Carmen or available free through the Internet via a link on Carmen. There are no required textbooks for the class. That being said, if you want to buy one of the classic works we will focus on (for your own personal library), you can purchase this book:

1. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, Hackett, 4th Ed. By Rene Descartes and translated by Donald A. Cress. ISBN = 978-0872204201.

Requirements and Grading Your overall course grade will be assigned based on the following components (with the corresponding percentage of overall grade for the assignment given in parenthesis):

- Initial reflection paper (5%).
- Argument summary/critique (10%).
- Midterm paper (20%).
- External philosophy research project (10%).
- Final paper. (30%).
- Final reflection paper (5%).
- Participation and attendance (20%).

This list of assignments is in chronological order. Detailed assignment sheets for each assignment will be distributed closer to the time of assignment, though some minimal detail for each portion of your grade can be found in the next section of this syllabus. Tentative due dates will be given below. There will be no extra credit in this class.

Descriptions of Major Course Assignments

The **initial reflection paper** will be a short paper (500-1000 words) in which you describe your personal philosophical beliefs regarding some of the topics of our class. I expect you to offer some reasoning for the beliefs you hold, but not much reasoning as we will have only just begun our introduction to philosophy at this point in the semester. Hopefully, you will compare this paper with your **final reflection paper** (same length) at the course's end so that you can see how much you have grown as a philosopher.

You will be assigned an **argument summary/critique**. It will be due rather early in the semester and will be worth 10% of your grade. I expect the argument summary to be 500-1000 words long. It will consist of two parts. Around half of it should be summarizing the assigned argument (taken from our readings or lectures), and the second part should be devoted to offering a clearly expressed and plausible criticism of the argument summarized in section one. It is a low stakes way to practice the sort of skills you need on the midterm and final papers.

You will be assigned **two papers**. The midterm will be worth 20% of your grade. The final will be worth 30% of your grade since you will have gotten constructive feedback on several writing assignments by then. I expect the papers to be 1100-1700 words long. They will each consist of three parts. The first section should be devoted to clearly explaining the argument assigned (taken from our readings or lectures). The second section should be devoted to offering a plausible critique of that argument. And the final section will involve you offering a rebuttal to the objection you discussed in section two.

The **external philosophy research project** is intended as a project for students to examine how wide-ranging the world of philosophy is and to do a short research project on a philosophical issue, movement, or philosopher of their choice. A pre-approved list of philosophers, movements, and issues will be distributed, but students can choose another topic if they meet with me a couple of weeks before the due date to get topic approval. The end-product can be an essay of 500-1000 words or a powerpoint presentation of 300-800 words. Students can work alone on this project or work in small groups (the groups can be no larger than a group of three).

Participation and attendance. Please read the assigned reading material *before* class for the day that it was assigned. Everyone is expected to participate in the class in some capacity, whether it be in small group discussion, by asking questions, or by participating in whole-class discussions. A note will be made of participation in lectures, and your participation grade will rise the more one conscientiously participates. A conscientious participant is one who makes respectful contributions to the discussion, not one who tries to dominate it or change the subject. Conscientious participation also requires being familiar with the material before class begins. As for attendance, it will be recorded and kept up with via exit cards. Most class periods, I will distribute index cards where you are to write a question or comment that you had about the material for the day. Make sure to write your full name on them legibly as they will serve as the way I take attendance during lectures. A conscientious participant **MUST** make an effort to ask an on-topic question with their exit cards. You are allowed up to **four** absences, no questions asked. That is, you can miss four lectures, for any reason whatsoever, with no penalty to you. (No need to email me or even let me know when you're going to absent!) Starting with the fifth day missed, however, a point will be dropped from your participation and attendance grade for every further day missed. This means, for example, if you miss six lectures, the **maximum** participation and attendance grade you will be able to receive will be an 18 out of 20. Of course this attendance policy is up to negotiation on a one-on-one level if you are suffering from a more severe illness, facing some traumatic life event during the semester, or are a student-athlete with the University-approved travel documentation. If any of this applies to you or if you have any questions about the attendance policy (or any other grading policy), please just come see me or email me.

Late Assignments Extensions will only be granted in extraordinary circumstances (or, of course, if you have an accommodation from SDLS which involves an extension). That being said, please email me ASAP if you need an extension because of some emergency. Late submissions of assignments will lose 5 points per day. No credit will be given after 5 days.

Instructor Feedback and Response Time For every assignment, I will have grades returned to the students within 14 days of submission. If you need to contact me out of class, please email me at dewitt.197@osu.edu directly. I have technical difficulties getting Carmen messages, so if you message me via Carmen do not expect me to receive your message. I will respond to emails within about 24 hours on weekdays and around 48 hours on weekends.

Grading Scale We will use the OSU Standard Grade Scheme:

- 93-100: A
- 90-92.9: A-
- 87-89.9: B+
- 83-86.9: B
- 80-82.9: B-
- 77-79.9: C+
- 73-76.9: C
- 70-72.9: C-

- 67-69.9: D+
- 60-66.9: D
- Below 60: E

Disability Services The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Student Life Disability Services. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. SLDS contact information: slds@osu.edu; 614-292-3307; slds.osu.edu; 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue.

Academic Misconduct Academic misconduct is a serious offense. *You are responsible for knowing what counts as academic misconduct.* You are also expected not to commit it. In accordance with Faculty Rule 3335-5-487, all suspected cases of academic misconduct will be reported to the university's Committee on Academic Misconduct who will then be responsible for investigating or establishing procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.

We will discuss what and how to cite sources for philosophical writing as we go through our first set of writing assignments. We will also discuss which online resources are the most reliable sources for writing philosophy.

Commitment to a diverse and inclusive learning environment The Ohio State University arms the importance and value of diversity in the student body. Our programs and curricula reflect our multicultural society and global economy and seek to provide opportunities for students to learn more about persons who are different from them. We are committed to maintaining a community that recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among each member of our community; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her own potential. Discrimination against any individual based upon protected status, which is defined as age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status, is prohibited.

Your Mental Health As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learn, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. No matter where you are engaged in distance learning, The Ohio State University's Student Life Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) is here to support you. If you find yourself feeling isolated, anxious or overwhelmed, on-demand resources are available at go.osu.edu/ccsondemand. You can reach an on-call counselor when CCS is closed at 614-292-5766, and 24-hour emergency help is also available through the 24/7 National Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org. The Ohio State Wellness app is also a great resource available at go.osu.edu/wellnessapp.

Tentative Course Schedule

The schedule below is tentative. Any unexpected changes to the schedule will be announced on Carmen as the course proceeds. The materials under the date are mandatory readings, unless specifically labeled as merely recommended. Do not read the recommended readings unless you want to. If you are a philosophy major or minor (or thinking about becoming one), it's best to do a majority of the recommendations.

Week One

January 10th Introduction

■ Read the Syllabus.

January 12th Introduction

■ Read (1) “Introduction: On the Study of Philosophy” and (2) “Logical Toolkit” by Perry, Bratman, and Fischer (2010).

Week Two

January 17th God

■ Read (1) excerpts from *Summa Theologica* by St. Thomas Aquinas (written circa 1274) and (2) section 2.1 of “Arabic and Islamic Philosophy of Religion” by McGinnis and Acar.

January 19th God

■ Read (1) excerpts from “Why I Am Not a Christian” by Bertrand Russell (1927) and read (2) “Guidelines on Reading Philosophy” by Jim Pryor. Recommended: Read the entire “Why I Am Not a Christian” essay.

Week Three

January 24th God

■ Read (1) excerpts from *The Proslogion* by St. Anselm (1078) and (2) section 2.2 of “Arabic and Islamic Philosophy of Religion” by McGinnis and Acar. Recommended: watch “Anselm & the Argument for God: Crash Course Philosophy #9” by CrashCourse (2016).

January 26th God

■ Read (1) “The Problem of Evil” by Metcalf and (2) “Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper” by Jim Pryor.

Week Four

January 31st Epistemology, God, & Self

■ Read “Meditations I - III” by Rene Descartes (1641). Recommended: Watch *The Matrix* by L. Wachowski & L. Wachowski (1999).

February 2nd Epistemology, God, & Self

■ Read (1) “Descartes’ Meditations 4-6” (2011) by Marc Bobro and (2) “al-Ghazālī’s Dream Argument for Skepticism” (2020) by John Ramsey. Recommended: if you want to read the actual text of Descartes’s *Meditations*, then read IV-VI instead of the Dobro. Also recommended: read “Brains in a Vat” by Hilary Putnam (1981).

Week Five

February 7th Epistemology, God & Self

■ Read (1) “Correspondence to Descartes” by Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia (1643) and (2) “Anton Wilhelm Amo: The African Philosopher in 18th Century Europe” by Dwight Lewis (2018).

February 9th Epistemology, God, & Self

Watch (1) “PHILOSOPHY - Epistemology: Three Responses to Skepticism [HD]” (2016) and (2) “PHILOSOPHY - Epistemology: New Responses to Skepticism [HD]” (2016) by Wireless Philosophy.

Week Six

February 14th Personal Identity

Read (1) sections 1-4 of “Personal Identity” (2023) by Eric Olson and (2) “Writing Philosophy Papers” by Perry, Bratman, and Fischer (2010).

February 16th Personal Identity

Watch (1) “PHILOSOPHY - History: Locke on Personal Identity #2” (2014) and (2) “PHILOSOPHY - History: Locke on Personal Identity #3” (2014) by Wireless Philosophy.

Week Seven

February 21st Personal Identity

Read selections from *Reasons and Persons* (1984) by Derek Parfit.

February 23rd Self & God

Guest lecture by Pranav Ambardekar. Reading TBD.

Week Eight

February 28th No-Self

Read (1) sections 1-2 of “Buddha” (2023) by Mark Sideritis and (2) “The Buddhist Theory of No-Self (Anātman/Anattā)” (2023) by Daniel Weltman.

March 1st No-Self

Read (1) sections 3-4 of “Buddha” (2023) by Mark Sideritis and (2) “Was Hume a Secret Buddhist” (2019) by Rachel Paine.

Week Nine

March 6th Selfhood

Read “A Theory of Confucian Selfhood: Self-Cultivation and Free Will in Confucian Philosophy” (2004) by Chung-ying Cheng. Recommended: “The Chinese Conception of Selfhood” (1999) by Roger Ames.

March 8th Selfhood

Read “Soul and Self: Comparing Chinese Philosophy and Greek Philosophy” (2008) by Jiyuan Yu. Recommended: “Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Self in Early China” (2009) by Lisa Raphals.

SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS! March 13th and 15th

Week Ten

March 20th Personhood

Read “Akan Philosophy of the Person” (2006) by Ajume Wingo. Recommended: “Akan Concept of a Person” (1971) by Kwame Gyekye.

March 22nd Personhood

Read “Akan and Euro-American Concepts of the Person” by Kwame Anthony Appiah. Recommended: “Self as a Problem in African Philosophy” (1992) by Chukwudum B. Okolo.

Week Eleven

March 27th Personhood

Read “Common Themes in American Indian Philosophy” (2010) by Norton-Smith.

March 29th Personhood

Read “An Expansive Concept of Persons” (2010) by Norton-Smith. Recommended: read “The Dance of Person and Place” (2010) by Norton-Smith.

Week Twelve

April 3rd Personhood

Read “Feminist Perspectives on the Self” (2020) by Ellie Anderson and Cynthia Willett.

April 5th Personhood & Animals

Read “Theories of Moral Considerability: Who and What Matters Morally?” (2022) by Jonathan Spelman. Recommended: “Nonhuman Persons” (2021) by Gerard Elfstrom.

Week Thirteen

April 10th Source of Morality

Read *Euthyphro* by Plato (written c. 380 BC).

April 12th Morality

Read: “Why Be Good? Plato” from Notre Dame. Recommended: Watch “Confucius - How To Be Happy (Confucianism)” by Philosophies for Life. Watch “PHILOSOPHY - The Good Life: Aristotle [HD]” by Wireless Philosophy.

Week Fourteen

April 17th The Meaning of Life

Read “The Meaning of Life” by Thaddeus Metz (2021). Recommended: Watch *The Seventh Seal* by Ingmar Bergman (1957).

April 19th Purpose & Value of Philosophy

Read “The Value of Philosophy” by Bertrand Russell (1969).

Important Assignment Dates (Also Tentative!)

Initial reflection paper Jan. 21st at 11:59pm

Argument summary/critique Feb. 11th at 11:59pm

Midterm essay Mar. 3rd at 11:59pm

External philosophy project Apr. 7th at 11:59pm

Final paper Apr. 21st at 11:59pm

Final reflection Apr. 28th at 11:59pm