

Sample Syllabus – Introduction to Philosophy

Day(s), Time, Place

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Course Description: The primary goal of this course is to develop important philosophical skills such as being able to critically engage with complex ideas, including the ability to object to the ideas of others, to develop ideas of your own, to defend those ideas from potential objections, and to express your ideas clearly. This will be achieved through the secondary goal of grappling with some central questions in epistemology (knowledge and skepticism), philosophy of mind (mind-body problem), metaphysics (personal identity and free will), and ethics. The reading materials include both historical and contemporary arguments attempting to answer questions such as:

- What is knowledge and how is it possible?
- How is the mind related to the body?
- What is a person?
- Are we free?
- What is the right thing to do?

The reading assignments are designed to introduce the student to some key figures in the history of philosophy (Aristotle, Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant and Mill), as well as the contemporary philosophical debates and their relevance to fields beyond philosophy.

Text(s): all the required readings will be made available online.

Learning Goals:

- Be familiar with some of the main historical philosophical figures.
- Be familiar with some of the big questions in philosophy and understand their historical and contemporary relevance.
- Understand the value of philosophy and critical reflection for improving both your theoretical and practical life.
- Be able to extract and critically assess argument from both philosophical and non-philosophical sources.
- Be able to construct sound and original arguments to defend your ideas both in writing and in discussion.

Requirements:

- Participation and Attendance (15%)

Everyone is expected to carefully do the assigned readings for the week and come prepared to discuss them and raise questions.

- Short Assignments (15%)

Approximately every other week there will be written assignments in the form of short papers (less than one page) responding to a specific question or reacting to a short reading.

- Short Paper 1 (20%)

The first short paper (around 1500 words) will be due DATE in class.

- Short Paper 2 (20%)

The second short paper (around 1500 words) will be due DATE in class.

- Final Paper (30%)

The final paper (2000-3000 words) will be due DATE at PLACE.

Course Policies:

- **General**

- You are expected to behave ethically. You are encouraged to ask questions, respond to other students points, and raise issues for discussion. Everyone is expected to treat their fellow students and professor critically but respectfully.
- You are expected to attend class on a regular basis. Every unexcused absence after the first one will be penalized.
- You are to have done the assigned readings prior to each class meeting (see below for the list of readings). I also expect each of you to make frequent, quality contributions to class discussion.

- **Assignments**

- You are expected to work independently on the essays and assignments. Discussion amongst students is encouraged, but when in doubt, direct your questions to me.
- Late assignments will be penalized with half a letter grade per day. In case there are special circumstances, please come talk to me preferably before the deadline.

- **Academic Integrity**

- As a member of the Notre Dame community, I will not participate in or tolerate academic dishonesty. Please take advantage of the aid I can give you rather than resorting to academic dishonesty.
- It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the Academic Honor Code (<http://fys.nd.edu/current-students/honor-code/>).

Tentative Course Outline:

The weekly coverage might change as it depends on the progress of the class. However, you must keep up with the reading assignments.

Unit 0: Introduction and Preliminaries
The Value of Philosophy <i>mm DD</i> Russell, “The Value of Philosophy”
Informal Logic and Argumentation <i>mm DD</i> “Introduction to Informal Logic”
Unit 1: Skepticism and Knowledge about the External World
Cartesian Skepticism <i>mm DD</i> Descartes, “Meditation 1” <i>mm DD</i> Moore, “Proof of an External World”
Grounding Knowledge <i>mm DD</i> Descartes, “Meditation 2” <i>mm DD</i> Bonjour, “Towards Coherentism” (excerpts)
The Problem of Induction <i>mm DD</i> Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> (excerpts) <i>mm DD</i> Harman, “The inference to the Best Explanation”
⇒ mm DD FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE (time and place) ⇐
Unit 2: Minds and Bodies
Dualism and Materialism <i>mm DD</i> Descartes, “Meditation 3 and 6” (excerpts) and “Correspondance to Elisabeth” (excerpts) <i>mm DD</i> Ryle, “Descartes’s Myth”
Non-Reductive Materialism and Its Challenges <i>mm DD</i> Putnam, “The Nature of Mental States” <i>mm DD</i> Jackson, “What Mary Didn’t Know” <i>mm DD</i> Chalmers <i>The Conscious Mind</i> (excerpts)
The Problem of Mental Causation <i>mm DD</i> Kim, “Mental Causation and Consciousness”

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Unit 3: Personal Identity and Freedom

Are We Our Body or Our Mind?

- mm DD* Locke, "Of Identity and Diversity" (excerpts)
- mm DD* Thomson, "People and Their Bodies"
- mm DD* Parfit, "Persons, Bodies, and Human Beings"

What Really Matters about Personal Identity

- mm DD* Wolf, "Self Interest and Interest in Selves"

Are We Free?

- mm DD* van Inwagen, "The Powers of Rational Beings: Freedom of the Will"
- mm DD* Kane, "Incompatibilism"
- mm DD* Vihvelin, "Compatibilism, Incompatibilism, and Impossibilism"

⇒ **mm DD SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE (time and place)** ⇐

Unit 4: Ethics

Deontology

- mm DD* Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (excerpts)
- mm DD* O'Neill, "Kantian Approaches to Some Famine Problems"

Utilitarianism

- mm DD* Mill, "Utilitarianism"
- mm DD* Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

Virtue Ethics

- mm DD* Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (excerpts)
- mm DD* Hursthouse, "Right Action"

Comparative Overview

- mm DD* *No Reading - In-Class Activity*

Unit 00: Conclusion

General Overview and Concluding Remarks

- mm DD* Re-read Russell, "The Value of Philosophy"

⇒ **mm DD FINAL PAPER DUE (time and place)** ⇐