

Omar Fakhri

Introduction to Philosophy

Course Description

This introductory course will cover five major sub-disciplines in philosophy: Epistemology, Philosophy of Science, Metaphysics, Ethics, and Philosophy of Religion. You will be reading both historical and contemporary authors. On top of these five areas, you will be introduced to the basics of argumentation in the beginning of the semester. During this time, you will learn foundational concepts such as how to formulate arguments, basic reasoning skills, and some logical fallacies. The overall aim of this class is to introduce students to important and engaging philosophical questions. Questions such as: what can we know? What distinguishes a scientific theory from a pseudo-scientific theory? Are we a mind or a body? Is morality relative to custom? Does God exist? And other similar questions. The aim of this course is to help you come to appreciate critical thinking and philosophical investigation.

Learning Goals:

- Be able to clearly and concisely exposit arguments.
- Be able to critically assess arguments by either objecting directly or indirectly to a specific claim, or by exposing a logical mistake.
- Be able to understand, state, and describe the main philosophical problems and positions discussed in the reading and in lecture.
- Be able to write a well-developed philosophy paper that explains the key moves in a given argument and critically evaluate it.
- Be able to articulate and provide reasons for one's own position or lack thereof.

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance and Participation 10% - Attendance and participation is mandatory. Come to sections and class having done all the assigned reading.
2. Ten Reading Outlines 15% - You are required to write 10 reading outlines. A reading outline summarizes the *structure* of a given text. Aim at summarizing the main arguments and the author's train of thought. You must summarize all the main content in the reading that you decide to write an outline on. At the end of each outline, you must include one philosophically critical question that deals heavily with the main points of the text. The entire outline should not be shorter than $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page or longer than 1.25 pages, *single*-spaced (font 12). You get to pick *any* 10 readings you would like to write an outline on (with the exception of the logic reading assignment). You are not allowed to write an outline on a reading we already covered. That is, when you write an outline, you must write it on the reading that is due the day you wish to turn the outline in.
3. Précis 20% - A précis is a concise and clear summary of the main claims and arguments of a given text. Being able to identify the main moves and arguments in a difficult text and putting them in your own words is an important skill to have. *The précis should not be shorter than 590*

words and no longer than **610** words, double-spaced. The word limit range is important because it will force you to make difficult choices about what to include or exclude in the précis. It will also force you to write concisely and to avoid being verbose. You are also not allowed to quote verbatim from the text. It is important that you put things into your own words.

4. Shorter Critical Paper 25% - This paper should have two clearly identifiable sections: an expository and critical section. The prompt will ask you to exposit an argument or a view and to critically evaluate it. The paper will be about 3 double-spaced pages, with 12pt font and regular margins.
5. Longer Critical Paper 30% - This is the final paper, and it will function as your final for this class. Like the shorter paper, this paper should also contain two clearly identifiable sections: an expository and critical section. The prompt will ask you to deal with the views or arguments of two or more of the readings. The paper will be about 5-6 double-spaced pages, and it will be due the day your final exam is scheduled.

Required Text:

Pojman, Louis P., and Lewis Vaughn. *Philosophy: the quest for truth*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

The rest of the readings will be handed out.

Course Schedule

(* = handout)

Week 1: Introduction

Why study philosophy?*

Jennifer Nagel: Introduction*

Excursus: A Little Bit of Logic (pp. 33-52)

Part 1: Epistemology

Week 2: What can we know?

Descartes: Cartesian Doubt and the Search for Foundational Knowledge (pp. 118-194)

Roderick Chisholm: The Problem of the Criterion*

Week 3: Knowledge and testimony

Linda Zagzebski: The Inescapability of Gettier Problems*

Jennifer Lackey: Testimony: Acquiring knowledge from others*

Part 2: Philosophy of Science

Week 4: Induction, demarcation, and causation

Hume: Skeptical Doubts Concerning the Operations of the Understanding (pp. 259-269)

Karl Popper: Science: Conjectures and Refutations*

Nancy Cartwright: Causal Laws and Effective Strategies*

Part 3: Metaphysics

Week 5: What are we?

Descartes: Substance Dualism (pp. 285-292)

Barbara Montero: The Body Problem*

Week 6: What are we?

B. F. Skinner: The Causes of Behavior*
Karen Bennett: Why I Am Not a Dualist*

Week 7: Do we have free will?

Patricia Churchland: Is Determinism Self-refuting?*

Roderick Chisholm: Human Freedom and the Self (pp. 435-442)

Part 4: Ethics**Week 8: Relativism, anti-realism, and the demands of morality**

James Rachels: Morality is Not Relative (pp. 483-493)
Sharon Street: Does Anything Really Matter or Did We Just Evolve to Think So?*

Susan Wolf: Moral Saints*

Week 9: Abortion

Mary Anne Warren: On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion (pp. 661-667)
Don Marquis: Why Abortion Is Immoral (pp. 647-660)

Week 10: Death penalty

Burton Leiser: The Death Penalty Is Permissible (pp. 688-693)
Hugo Adam Bedau: No, the Death Penalty Is Not Morally Permissible (pp. 693-702)

Week 11: Animal rights

Peter Singer: The Case for Animal Liberation (pp. 704-708)
Carl Cohen: The Case Against Animal Rights (pp. 708-712)

Week 12: Famine and the meaning of life

Peter Singer: Famine, Affluence and Morality (pp. 714-723)
Camus: Life Is Absurd (pp. 616-621)
Ecclesiastes*

Part 5: Philosophy of Religion**Week 13: Against theism**

Plato: Euthyphro*

Johnson: Why Doesn't God Intervene to Prevent Evil? (pp. 120-125)
Hume: The Unreasonability of Belief in Miracles*

Week 14: For theism

Paul Copan: The Moral Argument*

Eleonore Stump: The Problem of Evil*

Lara Buchak: When is Faith Rational?*