

JOSEPH CAREW
SAMPLE SYLLABUS

Introduction to Philosophy

Short Course Description

This course is to serve as an introduction to philosophy. Philosophy can be defined as a study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and values. Put differently, it attempts to provide answers for the “big” questions that puzzle us and are the hardest ones to find a clear-and-cut solutions to such as: What distinguishes knowledge from opinion? How did the universe come to be? What makes something morally right or wrong? What is the best form of political government?

Thematic Course Description

Everyone asks, and believes they have answers to, “big” questions about what the world is and how we should treat one another. To this extent, philosophizing is something that we all instinctively do. However, we often take our answers to such questions for granted. For instance, we may not have logically reflected upon whether we have good reasons for holding that our basic beliefs about human nature or what is good and evil are true or upon whether our underlying intuitions, assumptions, or values are incompatible with one another. The task of philosophy as a discipline is to try to provide systematic arguments for our basic beliefs or modify them when necessary. It does so by employing critical thinking skills in order to propose valid arguments and avoid fallacies, biases, and inconsistency.

In this course, we will examine several major areas of philosophy, including epistemology or the theory of knowledge, the philosophy of mind, ethics, and political philosophy. In particular, we will look highly influential theories concerning what is truth, what is it to be a person, what makes an action right or wrong, and the nature of society. We will cover classical positions in the history of philosophy as well as positions from more contemporary figures.

Class Schedule

Week 1: The Nature and Importance of Philosophy

- Plato, *Apology*

Part I: Knowledge and Reality

Week 2: What is Knowledge?

- Plato, *Theatetus*

Week 3: Empiricism and the Scientific Method

- Bacon, *Novum Organum*
- Hume, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding*

Week 4: Foundationalism vs Coherentism

- Davidson, “A Coherence Theory of Knowledge and Truth”

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Part II: Mind, Body, and Personhood

Week 5: The Mind-Body Problem

- Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditations 1 & 2

Week 6: The Role of Consciousness and Memory in Personhood

- Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, “Of Identity and Diversity”

Week 7: The Unconscious

- Freud, *Outline of Psychoanalysis*

Week 8: Are We Just Brains?

- Metzinger, “The No-Self Alternative”

Part III: Ethics and Politics

Week 9: Virtue Ethics

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, excerpts

Week 10: Deontology

- Kant, *The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*

Week 11: Utilitarianism

- Mill, *Utilitarianism*

Week 12: Social Contract Theory

- Hobbes, *Leviathan*, excerpts

Week 13: Alienation

- Marx, *Economic and Political Manuscripts of 1844*

Assessment

The final grade will consist of four components:

- Participation (10%)
- In-Class Midterm Exam (20%)
- Term Paper of 2500-3000 words (40%)
- Take-Home Final Exam (30%)

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, students will become acquainted with several major domains of philosophy (epistemology, philosophy of mind, ethics, and political theory). They will also gain knowledge of important thinkers in the history of philosophy as well as in contemporary philosophy from both the so-called “analytic” and “continental traditions. By exploring how these thinkers provide systematic answers to perennial philosophical questions concerning the nature of truth, being a person, and moral and political values, they will also learn how to formalize arguments and analyze their validity. The two exams, in which students are asked to summarize key concepts from different texts, are meant to assure that they have sufficiently internalized this knowledge for their future studies. Students will also improve their critical

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reading and writing skills by analyzing texts and creatively putting them to use in order to explore their own philosophical interests and existential concerns through course material. The term paper, the topic of which can be freely decided by each student in consultation with the instructor, is to promote the development of such skills. Philosophy is not just a body of knowledge, but also a distinctive methodology of critical thinking best learned in practicing it.