

PHI 141: Introduction to Philosophy

2024-25-II (January-May 2025)

First Course Handout

Instructor

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Tutors

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Lecture Schedule

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday; 8-8:50 am; L 5

Prerequisites

None

Objectives

This course introduces students to philosophy as a thorough-going form of intellectual inquiry. The course starts with consideration of the nature of questions that philosophers ask and try to answer. The students will be encouraged to feel, formulate and solve philosophical problems in their own ways. The course closely engages with the thoughts of some influential

philosophers such as Rousseau, Aristotle, Mill, Kant, Nietzsche, Confucius and Lao-Tzu. It examines their answers to some fundamental questions: How should one act? Are actions good because of their consequences? What's an excellent life? What does an ideal person look like? Do I find my true self in seclusion or in society? What is self? What is knowledge? Students will reconstruct and evaluate the arguments of the philosophers and thereby experience the joy of philosophical thinking.

Course contents

1. Introduction to Philosophy: The nature of philosophical questions and philosophical thinking. What is it to read great books? Reconstructing and evaluating arguments. Introduction to Socrates.
2. Being yourself: When are you most yourself – alone in seclusion or together with others? Rousseau on the state of nature and society. Aristotle on the naturalness of community, teleology, the political nature of human beings, *logos*.
3. How should we act: Mill on happiness and utilitarianism. Kant on good will, duty and self.
4. Whom should we emulate: Aristotle's answer in terms of happiness and excellence, character. Nietzsche's answer in terms of health, power and flourishing.
5. Chinese philosophers on ideals of living: Confucius on piety, ritual, leadership, teleology. Lao-Tzu's views on anti-teleology, water, paradox, non-action.

Textbook

Roochnik, David. *Thinking Philosophically: An Introduction to the Great Debates*. Wiley Blackwell: Malden, 2016.

Reading material

A set of photocopied reading material prescribed for the course can be purchased at the photocopy shop at Hall 8.

Hello IITK Platform

Essential information and additional resources will be made available on the online platform, Hello IITK: <https://hello.iitk.ac.in/>.

Attendance

Attend all classes and participate in discussions. Your active engagement with lectures and participation in discussions will greatly help you understand and appreciate the subject. It can also enhance your performance in exams. Maintain discipline and decorum in the class. There are no marks for attendance.

Evaluation

Quiz 1 (Monday, 10 February 2025): 10 marks

Mid-Sem Exam: 35 marks

Quiz 2 (Monday, 7 April 2025): 15 marks

End-Sem Exam: 40 marks

In quizzes, you are expected to write descriptive notes that demonstrate your comprehension of given concepts, theories or views.

In mid-sem and end-sem exams, you are expected to write long, critical, essay-like answers that demonstrate your comprehension as well as your own evaluation of given concepts, theories, or views.

About medical leave

If you cannot appear for a quiz for medical reasons, then –

- (1) Inform me by email about that before the quiz.
- (2) Apply to the SUGC for medical leave.

I can consider giving you marks on a pro-rata basis or holding a make-up quiz only if I receive communication from the SUGC granting you medical leave for the day of a quiz.

I cannot consider any other kind of leave.

Books and References

I A detailed list of books and other resources referred to in the textbook can be found in the section titled 'Works Cited' in the reading material. For example, it includes information about works of Rousseau, Aristotle or Confucious.

II Some titles in the 'Very Short Introduction' series of Oxford University Press can provide nice starting-points for your further explorations:

On individual philosophers

Socrates by C.C.W. Taylor

Plato by Julia Annas

Aristotle by Jonathan Barnes

Rousseau by Robert Wokler

John Stuart Mill by Gregory Claeys

Kant by Roger Scruton

Nietzsche by Michael Tanner

Confucianism by D.K. Gardner

On branches of philosophy

Philosophy by Edward Craig

Political Philosophy by David Miller

Ethics by Simon Blackburn

Metaphysics by Stephen Mumford

III A helpful introduction to Chinese philosophy: Lai, Karyn. *Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*. Second edition. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2017.

IV You can read relevant entries in the following major encyclopaedias that are available in the P. K. Kelkar Library:

Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 10 volumes, edited by Edward Craig, London: Routledge, 1998.

Encyclopedia of Philosophy (second edition), 10 volumes, edited by Donald Borchert, Detroit: Cengage Learning, 2006.

Web

Aeon: <https://aeon.co/philosophy>

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://iep.utm.edu/>

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/>