

PHIL 101 Introduction to Western Philosophy

Instructor: Renjie Yang

Email address: renjie@cnu.edu.cn

Class Time: Wednesdays 10:20am - 12:10pm, Fridays 18:00pm - 19:40pm

Location: 3406/3407, Building #3

Course Website: <https://comphiacademy.github.io/PHIL101/>

1. Course Description:

Philosophy as a discipline investigates the foundational issues that are central to our values, beliefs and lives. This course is an introduction to the major themes, ideas, concepts and methods that are essential for the practice of philosophy. We will examine both the historical roots of some major topics of philosophy as well as their contemporary perspectives. The focus of the course will be on the following questions:

- Does God exist?
- How can we know about the world outside ourselves?
- What is knowledge?
- What are minds, and what is it to have a mind?
- Can Machines have minds?
- What actions are moral?
- What is justice?
- Does life have meaning?

This course is more about engaging in rational thinking and philosophical practice than memorizing a set of doctrines or facts. The purpose is to cultivate cognitive skills to think critically about philosophical topics. These skills could be easily transferred to other disciplines you study. They also help you become a clear thinker on any issue that you deem important in your life.

2. Learning Objectives:

Upon completing this course, you will be able to:

- Recognize, charitably reconstruct, and engage in productive ways with arguments in both historical and contemporary philosophical texts;

- Develop, revise, and polish a sustained, reasoned argument in a paper that addresses an argument presented in a philosophical text;
- Describe the central issues and theories in both the history of philosophy and contemporary philosophy that we covered in this course.

3. Quarter Credits:

Upon the completion of the course, the student will receive 5 quarter credits for this course.

4. Grading:

There will be 3 short papers and one term paper. The short papers should be around 500 words but less than 1000 words. The term paper should be strictly 2000-2500 words. I will provide suggested topics for you to choose.

Attention For those who worry about the 5 writing credits, you can write a 10-15 pages term paper. Keep in mind that my grading will be based on the quality of the paper, which is not equivalent to the length.

- 3 short papers - 30%
- Term paper - 30%
- In-class quizzes - 20%
- Class Participation - 20%

| | | | | | |
|----|----------|----|---------|----|---------|
| A | 93 - 100 | B- | 80 - 82 | D+ | 67 - 69 |
| A- | 90 - 92 | C+ | 77 - 79 | D | 63 - 66 |
| B+ | 87 - 89 | C | 73 - 76 | D- | 60 - 62 |
| B | 83 - 86 | C- | 70 - 72 | F | 0 - 59 |

5. Academic Integrity:

The university expects all students to do their own work. Instructors will fail assignments that show evidence of plagiarism or other forms of cheating, and will also file a report to the university administration. A student reported to the university for cheating is placed on disciplinary probation; a student reported twice is suspended or expelled.

7. Readings

I will send all the readings to you via email. Our course TA will also help distributing the course documents online. Although there is no required book, you can get most of the readings from the following book:

John Perry, Michael Bratman, John Martin Fischer. (2015). *Introduction to philosophy: classical and contemporary readings*, 8th edition. Oxford University Press.

8. Course Schedule:

This is a tentative schedule. Please check the course website for the most recent updates.

| Date | Content |
|--------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Apr 21 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction• Reading(s): None |
| Apr 23 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Logic and Arguments• Reading(s): Class handout |
| Apr 28 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Philosophy, Religion and Society• Reading(s): Plato. <i>Apology</i> |
| Apr 30 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why Believe?• Reading(s): St. Anselm. "The Ontological Argument" St. Thomas Aquinas. "The Existence of God" |
| May 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Labour day, no class |
| May 7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Metaphysical Skepticism I• Reading(s): Rene Descartes. <i>Meditations I</i> David Hume. "Of Skepticism with Regard to the Senses"• Short Paper 1 Due |
| May 12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Metaphysical Skepticism II• Reading(s): Jonathan Vogel. "Cartesian Skepticism and Inference to the Best Explanation" |
| May 14 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Nature of Knowledge I• Reading(s): Plato. <i>Meno</i> |
| May 19 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Nature of Knowledge II• Reading(s): Gettier. "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" Zagzebski. "The Inescapability of Gettier Problems" |
| May 21 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mind and Body I• Reading(s) Rene Descartes. <i>Meditations II & VI</i>• Short Paper 2 Due |

| | |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| May 26 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mind and Body II • Reading(s): Ryle. “Descartes’ Myth” |
| May 28 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mind and Computation • Reading(s): John Searle. “Minds, Brains, and Programs” |
| June 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aristotelian Ethics • Reading(s): Aristotle. <i>Nichomachean Ethics</i> (Excerpt) |
| June 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilitarianism • Reading(s): John Stuart Mill. <i>Utilitarianism</i> (Excerpt) • Short Paper 3 Due |
| Jun 9 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kantian Ethics • Reading(s): Kant. <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals</i> (Excerpt) |
| June 11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justice • Reading(s): John Rawls. <i>A Theory of Justice</i> (Excerpt) |
| Jun 16 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Meaning of Life I • Reading(s): Albert Camus. “The Myth of Sisyphus” Susan Wolf. “The Meaning of Lives” |
| June 18 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Meaning of Life II • Reading(s): Amy Olberding. “Sorrow and the Sage: Grief in the Zhuangzi” |
| June 21 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Term Paper Due |