

Introduction to Philosophy Course Design

Course Description

Philosophy is about thinking, careful and logical thinking. In this course we will be working together as a group to come up with serious philosophical questions that we care about and thoughtful answers to them. As no one will truly think about a topic they do not care about, I will be framing the direction of the class based on student interest. This means class participation is mandatory.

We will begin our investigation with the theories of ancient Greece and end with contemporary thinkers. How we make our way from the first day of class to the last day of class is up to the students. By asking questions about reality (what it is made up of, how humans fit into it, how we can know what the truth is, can we even have knowledge at all, are we free, are we born with ideas or do we learn everything), we will be exploring valid and sound argument forms. By investigating and analyzing the arguments for one or another theory about reality, we will learn how to formulate logical forms of argumentation and consequently, how to object to arguments appropriately.

Class will be half lecture from me and the half questions and discussions motivated by you. Starting the first day of class, you will have homework. After each lecture, you must log onto Blackboard and post a one page (about 500 words) reflection on (1) what ideas stood out as important to you; **and**, (2a) give an explanation of why you think this is a serious philosophical problem **or** (2b) give a potential response to the issue. I will read these reflections and provide comments. You are welcome to comment on one another's posts. In the following class session, I will clarify what looked to be obscure from reading your posts and answer any remaining questions.

Goals and Objectives

My goal is to have my students learn the historical development of philosophical thought. The corresponding objective is to have my students leave the class being able to synthesize information. In philosophy, modern work is being done that either takes its birth in an antiquity or has been dealt with by a previous philosopher in some capacity. We will be taking one idea, the problem of other minds for example, and investigating how (ancient... modern... contemporary...) philosophers respond. My goal is to have my students leave basic logical forms of valid arguments. The corresponding objective is to have my students leave the class being able to formulate valid arguments, also to analyze the arguments of others for validity and soundness. Logical reasoning is a critical skill for any person living among others, no matter what else is going on in their life. Upon completing the course, my students demonstrate how to determine the validity of arguments, how to evaluate the soundness of their ideas, and will have gained value for philosophy in general: returning to their field with an enriched ability to analyze, synthesize, and reflect.

Small Assignments

I require my students to write reflectively: (500 words/one page) posted onto Blackboard after each class meeting. This causes introspection and requires each student to independently evaluate the worth of what has been said about a given topic. I am able to lead the unique group of students through the material by creating customized course content for the next meeting, given what is being said about the material. (Optional: students may read **and reply** to their fellow classmates. Ultimately, those who earn borderline grades will be given the higher score based on this extra work.)

Large Assignment

For a final grade, students choose one perspective from the many topics we have covered in class and write a paper, arguing for or against it. What is argued for is up to the students, though one firm position must be held. (Optional: students may meet with me after having created an outline and I will provide guidance on how to proceed).