

Instructor: J. Neil Otte (jeffotte@buffalo.edu)
Class Room: #
Fall 20--

PHILOSOPHY 105: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

Course Description

We begin with a discussion of critical thinking and philosophical method before diving into ancient Greece with five of Plato's famous dialogues featuring Socrates and a discussion concerning the goals of philosophy, what counts as knowledge, the nature of reasoning, and the soul. From there, we will jump ahead over a thousand years and examine the dueling epistemologies of Descartes and Hume, examining along the way notions of selfhood, the foundations of knowledge, and arguments for and against belief in the existence of God. We will end with a look at the moral philosophy of John Stuart Mill, Immanuel Kant, and—for something completely different—Friedrich Nietzsche and some counter-Enlightenment themes.

To succeed in this course, you will need to have read and outlined the material before class so that you are prepared for quizzes and ready to participate. There is a midterm and final, both of which will require short answer essays, as well as two short papers. Philosophy is, in many ways, like learning a new language and, although the readings are short, they pose difficulties to unfamiliar readers, so plan on asking many questions and spending at least an hour studying every week outside of class for every hour in class. I am available during office hours, before and after class, by appointment, and I check my e-mail regularly.

Required Readings

Plato, Five Dialogues (Hackett, 1981; ISBN: 978-0872206335)
Descartes, René, Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy (Hackett, ISBN: 0-87220-420-0)
Hume, David, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (Hackett, ISBN: 978-0-87220-229-0)
Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. (Vintage, ISBN: 978-0-39471-985-6)

For further readings: See Course Documents on BlackBoard

Recommended (but Not Required) Reading

[The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#): This is a valuable tool for clarifying ideas, but should **not** be used as a source in papers. Wikipedia can be very good, but the Stanford Encyclopedia is curated by experts and its articles are edited by philosophers. This is also true of the [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#).

Why Philosophy

I find a majority of students love philosophy, but increasingly, I encounter students who forego majoring because they are worried about paying student loans and getting a job. Contrary to their reputation, philosophy undergraduates do very well on the job market compared to many other majors. See [this link](#) for further information about pursuing philosophy. You don't need to choose between studying what you love and getting a job.

Learning Outcomes

COURSE GOALS	METHOD OF EVALUATION
Demonstrate comprehension of important articles in moral psychology	Weekly Online Quizzes and Exams
Actively analyze and critique textual arguments	Online participation
Develop clear, original criticisms of the arguments and positions we read.	Assignments, Papers

Grade by Percentage

40%	Participation, Assignments, and Quizzes
15%	Exam 1
20%	Exam 2
10%	Paper 1
15%	Paper 2

Grading Scale

A = 92-100%
A- = 90-91%
B+ = 88-89%
B = 82-87%
B- = 80-81%
C+ = 78-79%
C = 72-77%
C- = 70-71%
D+ = 68-69%
D = 60-67%
F = 59% and below

Online Reading Quizzes

Every article we read will be accompanied by an online reading quiz. These quizzes are meant to ensure that you are reading carefully, and to help you focus on the main issues and arguments in the text. Some quizzes may ask you to provide a definition from the text, while others might ask you to spell out the author's argument in your own words.

Examinations

There will be two exams: a midterm and a final. These will cover only the material within those periods. A week in advance, you will receive a list of possible short answer essay questions (twenty to twenty-five questions). You will need to prepare answers to these, and I recommend you work with others. On the day of the exams, you will not be able to use any preparation. The exams will present you with five of the possible questions from the list and you will need to answer four (i.e. you will need to choose one answer to leave blank). This means each answer will be worth 25% points. Answers should be clear, concise, and complete.

Paper

Students will need to write one research papers of 8-10 pages (not including the reference page). These papers can criticize one of our authors, or articulate an original argument on the basis of the evidence. You will need to run your topic by me in advance. The paper will need to use [MLA format](#) and include a separate page for references. See the paper topics and instruction handout for more details.

Accessibility Resources

Students who require accommodation should contact me within the first three days of the session, so that we can make appropriate arrangements with the accessibility office. To contact Accessibility Resources, please follow [this link](#).

Academic Honesty

As the world is increasingly online, it has become very easy to present the words and ideas of others as our own. This can be particularly tempting in an online course like this. *Resist this temptation*. All student work may be scanned by online plagiarism checkers, which are remarkably good at catching plagiarized work. Students who are discovered to have plagiarized will be dealt with according to the university's academic integrity policy. In particular, no work that includes plagiarism will be graded or allowed to be made up, and evidence of plagiarism may be grounds for filing a report with the academic integrity office. It is your responsibility to know what plagiarism is and to avoid it. There will be no exceptions. To educate yourself on what counts as plagiarism, please visit [this link](#) or reach out to me if you have specific questions. For more information on the University at Buffalo's policy on academic integrity, visit [this link](#).

Course Schedule

September

Week One – *Philosophical Methods*

Week Two – *Plato*
Read: Euthyphro and Apology

Week Three – *Plato*
Read: Meno and Crito

Week Four – *Plato*
Read: Phaedo

October

Week One – *Descartes*
Read: Meditations 1 and 2

Week Two – *Descartes*
*Read: Meditations 3 and 4; **Midterm 1***

Week Three – *Descartes*
Read: Meditations 5 and 6; Paper 1 Due

Week Four – *Hume*
Read: On Impressions, Ideas, Personal Identity

November

Week One – *Hume and Mill*
Read: On Miracles, Utilitarianism

Week Two – *Kant*
Read: Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals, Enlightenment

Week Three – *Nietzsche*
Read: The Gay Science Book 3

Week Four – *Nietzsche*
Read: The Gay Science Book 4

December

Week One – *Nietzsche*
Read: The Gay Science Book 5

Week Two – *TBA*
Read: TBA

Final Exam Due the Last Day of Class
Paper Due - TBA