

Syllabus

PHIL 150, Introduction to philosophy, Fall 2026

Course information

Course	PHIL 150: Introduction to philosophy
Term	Fall 2026
Meeting times	Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:30am–12:45pm
Location	Jerome Richfield 204
Instructor	E. R. Jiménez (email)
Office hours	Tuesdays, 2:30–3:30, Sierra Tower 506; Wednesdays, 12:00–1:00, on Zoom ; and by appointment

Description and objectives

Course description

This course offers an introduction to philosophy through the lens of aesthetics and the philosophy of art. These particular subdisciplines of philosophy pay particularly close attention to a problem that is at the foundation of philosophical reflection and interest in general: the relationship between experience and knowledge. They do so, moreover, with particularly acute attention to the challenge and difficulties of interpretation, given the particularly acute challenge and difficulties of making sense of art and aesthetic experience.

Course objectives

We have three basic aims in this course. They are:

1. to get a sense of what philosophy is about: what sorts of questions philosophers ask and how philosophers ask them;
2. to improve our capacities for reading work that is sometimes difficult to parse, and for writing on issues that are sometimes difficult to make clear; and
3. to awaken our capacities for sensitivity to, and reflection on, the nature and content of art and sensory experience.

These three aims are fulfilled simultaneously by the reading, the in-class discussion, and the assignments. Timeliness reflects diligence.

Requirements

Student learning outcomes

Students will understand and engage with the diversity of human knowledge as expressed in the history of philosophy. To that end, you will be expected to:

- explain and reflect critically upon the human search for meaning and values within and across the human experience, as expressed in philosophy
- analyze, interpret, and reflect critically upon philosophy from diverse perspectives

- demonstrate the ability to engage and reflect upon your own intellectual and creative development within the humanities
- describe and explain the historical and/or cultural context within which a body of work or thought tradition was created or emerged
- critically analyze how philosophy, as a discipline of memory and imagination, reflects upon the current conditions of the human experience

Assignments and grading

Assignments

You have effectively one assignment in this course, but it has a few parts. Simply put, over the course of the semester you're going to compile a portfolio of argument summaries and interpretations. You're going to complete one for at least four of the six units described on the [course outline](#). At the end of the semester you're going to do two things. You're going to submit a longer, more polished version of one of your portfolio entries, and you're going to complete an oral assessment in which I choose one of your portfolio entries at random and ask you about it.

Unit commentaries

Over the course of the semester, you have six opportunities to submit a commentary on an argument or issue from one of the assigned texts in one of the units. Each commentary should be 300–400 words and focused on outlining one or two philosophical moves carefully. Different moves are outlined for each unit, and you should follow the guidance of each unit's assignment. Across the six units, these moves will include:

1. identifying a significant philosophical claim and explaining why it matters;
2. reconstructing an author's principal reason(s) for holding some view;
3. explaining or challenging an argument through an example;
4. formulating an objection;
5. considering how an author might reply to that objection; or
6. comparing and contrasting two positions or interpretations.

A complete commentary identifies the relevant passage, claim, or problem; explains your reasoning in your own words; and performs the assigned philosophical move. I'll grade commentaries for completion only.

The commentary schedule is:

- Ungraded rehearsal — September 3: Plato, *Meno* or *Republic* X
- Commentary 1 — September 29: Philosophy and the ordinary
- Commentary 2 — October 13: Taste and judgment
- Commentary 3 — November 3: Art, theory, and context
- Commentary 4 — November 17: Meaning and interpretation
- Commentary 5 — December 1: Fiction and emotion
- Commentary 6 — December 15: Art, value, and social power

For details, see the [course outline](#).

Revised essay and memo

You're going to take one of your short commentaries and revise it into a 1,000-word essay. Revising a commentary generally means adding philosophical work unassigned by the original commentary assignment. For the revised essay, you should clearly explain the author's claim and reasoning, develop a substantive objection, and consider a possible reply.

Your revised essay should be accompanied by a 100–200-word memo explaining what you changed, and what remains difficult to figure out or unresolved about the issue you cover in your revised essay.

The revised essay and memo are due with your final portfolio on **December 15**.

Oral exam

At the end of the semester, you'll complete one six-minute oral exam based on your commentaries. I'll select one of your completed commentaries, at random, and ask you to explain the author's claim and strongest reason(s) for holding it; explain or defend the philosophical move you made in the commentary; and/or respond to a new question, example, or objection.

The oral exam is intended to assess your understanding, not your quality as a performer. Confidence, speed, eye contact, polish and other intangibles are not grading criteria.

Oral exams will take place during finals week, **December 14–18**. It is likely we'll need to make use of time outside of our finals exam time for this purpose. We'll discuss scheduling of the oral exam as the end of the semester nears.

Grading

Your grade will break down like this:

- **Unit commentaries:** 30%
 - Commentaries, four of them, are each thus the equivalent of 7.5% of your final grade, with no partial credit.
- **Revised essay and revision memo:** 40%
 - Your essay and memo will be graded out of a possible total of 20 points; each point is 2% of your final grade.
- **Oral defense:** 30%
 - Your defense will be graded out of a possible 10 points; each point is 3% of your final grade.

Rubrics

Evaluation for each of the assignments will follow these rubrics:

Unit commentaries

Commentaries are graded for completion; you get either a 1 (worth 7.5% toward your final grade) for a completed commentary or a 0 (worth 0%, of course). A complete commentary:

- engages directly with a relevant text (as specified in the commentary assignment);
- addresses the specific issue described in the commentary assignment; and
- answers the specific question or prompt described in the commentary assignment.

Commentaries must be at least 300 words to be accepted for completion.

Revised essay and revision memo

Your revised essay should be the single most sophisticated piece of philosophical work you do this semester, and you should deliberately view it that way. You're going to pick one of your commentaries and build it into a full-fledged essay in which you:

- describe a problem or issue or question and why resolving it is difficult;
- describe and explain the view of an author on it;
- describe and explain some objection or alternative to that view; and
- describe and explain some reply, on behalf of the author, to that objection or alternative.

The existence and quality of each of these parts is worth roughly a fifth of your essay grade, with the revision memo worth the final fifth.

In the revision memo, you will describe:

- what changes you made to the commentary; and
- what relevant issues or questions, to your mind, remain unresolved.

Essays will be graded out of 20 points (each point worth 2% of your final grade), with each of the four components and the memo worth 4 points each. For each component:

Points	Description
0	You didn't do it
1	You did it at all
2	You did it fairly well
3	You did it very well
4	You did it exceptionally well

Revised essays must be at least 1,000 words to be accepted; revision memos must be at least 250 words.

Oral exam

During your oral exam I'll ask you about one of the unit commentaries you submitted. I'll select one at random from the commentaries you did not convert into an essay. Questions I might ask you include:

- What is the author's view on this or that?
- What reasons does the author give, or might one give, for holding their view?
- What objections or alternatives might be given to the author's view?
- How might the author respond to those objections or alternatives?

I might also ask you to respond to an objection or alternative that I outline.

Your oral exam will be graded for evidence of preparation. You should be ready with responses to each of these questions for each of the commentaries you submit over the course of the semester.

Your oral exam will be graded out of 10 points (each point being worth 3% of your final grade), along the following lines:

Points	Description
0	You weren't prepared
1–2	You were barely prepared
3–4	You were slightly prepared
5–6	You were prepared
7–8	You were well prepared
9–10	You were exceptionally well prepared

Grading scale

Your final percentage grade will be rounded up to the nearest integer and your letter grade will be based on the following scale:

Percentage	Letter grade
95–100	A
90–95	A-
87–90	B+
83–87	B
80–83	B-
77–80	C+
73–77	C
70–73	C-
67–70	D+
63–67	D
60–63	D-
< 60	F

Percentage	Letter grade
------------	--------------

Policies

Attendance

I don't monitor it, but you're going to find that being in class is essential for completing the work, and that there is no substitute.

If you miss class for any reason, you don't need to tell me about it. [Check the calendar](#) to keep abreast of what's going on. Generally, I'll put anything of significance on the calendar, but I'd recommend you make a friend in class in case you want a more thorough rundown of what you missed.

Late work, makeups, extra-credit, and other assignment-related anomalies

All unit commentaries have a ten-day no-penalty grace period. That means you can hand them in up to ten days late, without any deduction. My hope is that this policy manages all problems of this sort. Note that:

- There will be no 'makeups'
- There will be no 'extra credit'

How I interpret policies

I interpret rules under a guiding thought about *fairness*: that policies should be applied in the same way for everyone; that everyone should have the same shot. I never think in terms of how the interpretation of a policy affects you or any other student individually; I always think in terms of how it affects the class as a whole.

When you ask for a rule to be relaxed, then, I'm not thinking about whether to relax the rule for you, but whether it would be fair to relax the rule for everyone (or everyone similarly situated). Most of the time this comes down to the simple question whether the policy should even exist, and if your classmates have already been acting in accordance with the policy, then to suspend it after the fact would be unfair to them for the diligence they've demonstrated.

University and other policies

Important note about a possible work stoppage during the semester

The California Faculty Association (the union that represents all CSU faculty, including lecturer faculty, tenure-line faculty, coaches, counselors, and librarians) is in the midst of a difficult contract dispute with the CSU system-wide administration. In response to the CSU management's stance, it is possible that the faculty union will call a strike or other work stoppage this term. I promise to inform the class as soon as possible of any disruption to our class meeting schedule. For further information about the issues involved in the strike, please see the resources at www.calfac.org and www.cfabargaining.org.

Missed classes for university-approved activities

If, while representing the university in an official curriculum-related, university-approved activity, you are required to miss classes, reach out to me to discuss next steps. Absence from class for official curriculum-related, university-approved activities does not relieve you from responsibility for any part of the course work required during your period of absence.

Academic integrity

Cheating is intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information or study aids in any academic exercise. When completing any work for this course—written or otherwise—assume that external assistance (e.g., books, notes, calculators, cell phones/cameras, other electronic devices, use of artificial intelligence, conversation with others) is prohibited unless I specifically say otherwise. You may not allow others to conduct research or prepare any work for you without advance authorization from the instructor. This includes but is not limited to the services of commercial term-paper companies or web sites. Substantial portions of the same academic work may not be submitted for credit in more than one course without authorization.

Fabrication is intentional falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.

Plagiarism is representing the words, ideas, or work of another as your own, in any academic exercise. You must identify every direct quotation by quotation marks, appropriate indentation, or other means of identification. Prompt acknowledgment is required when material from another source is paraphrased or summarized in whole or in part in your own words. Information obtained in one's reading or research that is not common knowledge among students in the course must be acknowledged (this includes the use of artificial intelligence).

Facilitating academic dishonesty is intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic dishonesty.

Cheating or plagiarism in connection with an academic program at a CSU campus is listed in Section 41301, Title 5, California Code of Regulations as an offense for which a student may be expelled, suspended or given a less severe disciplinary sanction. The full policy, including penalties, is in CSUN's [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

You are asked not to use generative AI at any stage of your work in this course—not for brainstorming, outlining, drafting, revising, or editing. Everything you submit, and everything done to prepare what you submit, should be produced by you.

The reason is not suspicion. The assignments here are built so that the work of producing them is the learning: attempting something, finding that the first attempt doesn't hold up, and revising it is how the underlying skill gets built. Work that arrives without that process may look finished, but it leaves the skill unbuilt.

By "generative AI" I mean tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and also AI features built into other software—Grammarly, for example—that generate, rewrite, summarize, or translate text. If you aren't sure whether something counts, ask before you use it.

If you use assistive technology as part of an approved accommodation, this policy is not aimed at you. Come talk to me and we'll make the expectations clear.

Student support and resources

Disability accommodations (DRES)

If you have a disability and need accommodations, please register with [Disability Resources and Educational Services \(DRES\)](#) or the [National Center on Deafness \(NCOD\)](#). DRES is in Bayramian Hall, room 110, and can be reached at (818) 677-2684 or dres@csun.edu. NCOD is on Bertrand Street in Jeanne Chisholm Hall and can be reached at (818) 677-2054, videophone (818) 435-3887, or ncod@csun.edu. If you would like to discuss your need for accommodations with me, please contact me to set up an appointment.

Basic needs (CSUN with A HEART)

If you are facing challenges related to food insecurity, housing precarity/homelessness, mental health, access to technology, eldercare/childcare, or healthcare, you can find guidance, help, and resources from [CSUN with A HEART](#).

Mental health resources

[University Counseling Services \(UCS\)](#) is a mental health center for students enrolled at CSUN. UCS provides a range of high-quality mental health services including initial evaluations, short-term counseling and psychotherapy, Wellness Workshops, group treatment, psychiatric services, crisis/urgent care services, and case management. UCS is located in Bayramian Hall 520 and can be reached at (818) 677-2366, Option 1 (Option 3 after hours), or coun@csun.edu.

Call or text 988 to reach the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline 24 hours a day. The older number, (800) 273-8255, still routes to the same service.

Reach the [Crisis Text Line](#) by texting START to 741741 (free, 24/7, confidential).

Learning Resource Center

Free tutoring is available on campus through the Learning Resource Center (LRC): tutoring in multiple subjects, one-on-one help with writing and grammar, and reading and writing workshops. Hours and appointments are on

the [Learning Resource Center](#) site.

Disclosures under the CSU Nondiscrimination Policy (Title IX)

All faculty and staff (with few exceptions) are classified as a “responsible employee.” In the event that you choose to write, speak, or otherwise disclose about having experienced discrimination or harassment based on a protected status (including Title IX violations such as dating/domestic violence, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, or stalking), and/or retaliation, and specify that this violence occurred while you or the perpetrator were a CSUN student, federal and state laws, and CSU policy, require that I notify our campus Title IX Coordinator/DHR Administrator within the Office of Equity and Compliance (equityandcompliance@csun.edu).

Someone from the Office of Equity and Compliance will contact you to inform you of your rights and options and connect you with support resources, including possibilities for holding accountable the person who harmed you. Know that you will not be forced to share information and your level of involvement will be your choice.

If you do not want the Office of Equity and Compliance notified, instead of disclosing the experience to me, you can speak **confidentially*** with:

- **Campus Care Advocate:**
 - Klotz Student Health Center, Room 210
 - Phone: (818) 677-7492
 - Email: careadvocates@csun.edu
- **University Counseling Services**
 - Bayramian Hall, 520 Phone:
 - Phone: (818) 677-2366, Option 1
 - Email: coun@csun.edu

**Note: If it is determined that an alleged perpetrator poses an imminent threat to the broader campus community or if person(s) under 18 years of age are involved, our Campus Care Advocate is required to notify our Department of Police Services.*

For more information regarding your university rights and options, see the [Office of Equity and Compliance](#) or read the [CSU Nondiscrimination Policy](#) in full.

Pregnancy-related modifications

As a part of your rights under the CSU Nondiscrimination Policy and as CSUN’s commitment to compliance with Title IX and supporting the academic success of pregnant students and students with pregnancy related conditions (pregnancy, childbirth, termination of pregnancy, lactation, and all related medical conditions or recovery), you can request reasonable, related modifications from the University. Please email CSUN’s Title IX Coordinator/DHR Administrator, La Shonda Coleman, in the Office of Equity and Compliance at equityandcompliance@csun.edu. The Office of Equity and Compliance will work with your professors and academic unit to provide reasonable modifications needed to be supportive of your education while pregnant or due to related medical conditions or recovery under Title IX. The [CSU Nondiscrimination Policy](#) has more information.

Contacting me

You have a variety of ways of reaching me and getting your questions or concerns resolved. These are also all ways of staying engaged in the course.

1. **Ask your question in class.** Other students might have the same question; other students might have answers. In addition to improving class morale, you’re helping each other out when you get a question answered in class.
2. **Visit the course Discord.**
 - Find regular updates in [#announcements](#)
 - Find discussion of the material and the course in [#general](#)
 - Pose a question in [#questions](#)

- Discuss off-topic issues in [#chat](#)
 - **Send me a direct message.** I'm going to try to be pretty attentive to DMs and activity on Discord throughout the work week, so should be fairly reachable:
 - M/W/F 9–5, and especially 10–12 and 1–3
 - T/Th 9–5 sporadically (I'm teaching)
3. **Come to my office hours.** I hold them Tuesdays, 2:30–3:30, in Sierra Tower 506; Wednesdays, 12:00–1:00, [on Zoom](#); and at other times by appointment.
 - If you have something sensitive you need to discuss with me personally, this is the way to do it.
 - [Write me an email](#) or [send me a DM on Discord](#) if you need to schedule a different time; I'll see if it's possible.
 4. **Shoot me an email** for any more official business. I'm at erick dot jimenez at csun dot edu.
 5. **Visit a tutor.** For more information, [go to the tutoring web site](#).
 6. **Poke around this course site.**
 - For questions about assignments, grading, and other policy matters, [see the page on policies](#).
 - For questions about readings, [see the course outline](#).
 - For questions about what's going on, [see the calendar](#).

Version

0.9 · Pre-semester