

PHIL 150: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY – FALL 2026

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Office Location: [TBD]
Office Hours: W 1:15-2:15 pm; Th 2:45-3:45 pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces you to Western philosophy by engaging with some classical texts that address enduring questions of human interest: the purpose of life; the problem of knowledge; the relation between mind and body; the existence of God; the problem of knowledge; free will; and the grounds of morality. We read, analyze, and puzzle our way through a selection of texts from some of the greatest philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Mill, and Kant, among others, and use them to develop our own thinking on central topics.

Texts

- Required readings will be posted as PDFs on Canvas.

Learning Outcomes

- To have a firm grasp of several central concepts, principles, and theories in philosophy.
- To understand the historical development of these concepts and theories.
- To develop sustained, analytical responses to the central themes of the course.
- To synthesize ideas from different readings to grasp broader philosophical concepts.
- To write essays that demonstrate working knowledge of the course material and to analyze that material in a clear, systematic, original, and well-developed manner.

Assignments & Grading

Philosophical texts can be complicated, even when they may appear otherwise. It significantly helps with understanding to come to class with questions and thoughts in advance. For this reason, it is required and extremely important that you do the reading before the class meets. In addition, I highly recommend the following guide to reading philosophy: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>.

Assessment:

Assignment	Weight
Weekly Discussion Question/Comment	15%
Participation and Attendance	20%
Midterm	30%
Final exam	35%

Weekly discussion questions: Each week before that week's first class (except for the first week of class and the week of the midterm), you must post 2 questions/comments (or one of each). One question/comment must be on material from the upcoming week and one from past class discussion. These should be a result of careful reflection, and express your own original vantage point on the material. They are due on Canvas no later than midnight prior to the first class of the week. The assignment will be graded based on the following criteria: relevance, clarity, thoughtfulness, and accuracy. **No extensions or make ups are possible for this assignment.**

I recommend that you do the reading well before the comment deadline, so you have time to think about what others are saying and respond. This will help everyone have a better class experience.

Attendance & Participation

- 5% of your grade will be based purely on attendance. Attendance will be taken at every class. If you arrive more than 15 minutes late, this will count as an absence. Exceeding 4 absences will result in a further reduction of the final grade by 2% for every excess class missed. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what was covered and to confirm the reading assignment for the next class.
- 15% of your grade will be based on participation. Participation may include asking relevant questions in class, engaging with others productively when in groups, and turning in any in-class, pass/fail quizzes. Philosophy works best with your participation. The aim is not for me to deliver content to you (though I will certainly assist you in helping to understand the readings) but to engage with you in conversation about the topics of the readings.
- If you are not comfortable speaking in class or are unable to participate well in class a particular week, you can send me 2 questions **AND** 2 comments for the weekly discussion assignment. I will attempt to have us discuss the questions/ comments in class, so this is a good way to clarify content that was not very clear to you.

Midterm and Final Exams: The midterm and final exams are in-person, closed-book exams including multiple choice questions and short essays.

Late submissions: For all assignments, late papers submitted without a valid medical or family emergency-based excuse will be penalized by 1/3 grade per day late. You will be excused from this penalty only if I have explicitly notified you in writing (e.g., by email) that you are exempt.

*****In any of these cases, if you are unable to submit assignments on time due to circumstances outside of your control, please let me know and I will determine whether to waive the late penalty in your case.*****

Grading will be on a 100-point scale. Here are the letter conversions:

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

Office Hours: Office hours is a time to ask questions you might not have formulated in class or to discuss certain details, problems, possible alternatives to what we've discussed in class, and more. It's also a time to try out paper examples, theses, etc. I've set a tentative time for office hours. If your schedule does not permit you to attend any of the office hours, please let me know as soon as possible, and I'll do what I can to accommodate you.

OTHER INFORMATION

Class Communications: All updates on assignments and class meetings will be communicated through Announcements on Canvas. It is therefore important that you turn

on all Canvas notifications (for announcements, assignment comments etc.) and check your (CSUN) email regularly. Please email me through Canvas or your CSUN email address ONLY. In all email correspondence, please identify the course title and/or number. Please reserve substantive questions about the course material for office hours or after lecture. I typically respond to emails within 24 hours. Help me stick to this 24-hour rule by placing multiple questions in a single email.

Electronic Devices: No electronics of any type are allowed, unless by individual permission. You are not permitted to record class without explicit consent.

Respectful Language: Abusive language is counterproductive and will not be tolerated. At all times, I encourage you to approach sensitive topics with thoughtfulness and communicate in ways that show respect.

Learning Language: Whenever possible, I will do my best to explain things in the simplest terms. If I stray from this and you're lost, ask for clarification. The ultimate goal is for you to understand the material and to articulate your views with clarity and precision.

Academic Integrity: Each student has a responsibility to maintain academic integrity and is expected to be familiar with the University's policies on academic dishonesty (http://catalog.csun.edu/policies/_academic-dishonesty/). Academic misconduct will not be tolerated, and students who engage in academic misconduct will be reported to the appropriate university body, which may impose additional penalties in addition to this class's grade penalties.

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) including Large Language Models such as ChatGPT is forbidden in this class. All work completed for a grade for this class is expected to be completed in full by none other than yourself with no use of AI. Please note that the use of Grammarly is prohibited in this class. (No grade penalty for improper grammar for the most part!)

Learning Accommodations: If you have a disability and need accommodations, please register with the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) office or the National Center on Deafness (NCOD). The DRES office can be reached at 818.677.2684 and NCOD can be reached at 818.677.2611. If you would like to discuss your need for accommodations, please let me know

READING SCHEDULE

Note: I reserve the right to make changes to this course outline at any time (though I will try not to do this much).

Unit I: Introduction & Argumentation

Week 1 (8/24; 8/26)

- Nagel's *What Does It All Mean?* Introduction (Chapter 1)
- Watch: Monty Python's Argument Clinic:
[<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQFKtI6gn9Y>]

- Critical Thinking, Arguments, & Fallacies – a Brief Introduction

Unit II: Plato & Aristotle on The Examined Life The Soul, Happiness & Virtue

Week 2 (8/31; 9/2)

- Plato – *Meno* 70a–80d; 80d–100b

Week 3 (9/9; 9/7 is LABOR DAY—NO CLASS)

- Plato – *The Apology*

Week 4 (9/14; 9/16)

- Plato – *Phaedo* 57a–95b
- Plato’s allegory of the cave

Week 5 (9/21; 9/23)

- Aristotle – *On the Soul*, Book II. 1-4
- Aristotle – *Nicomachean Ethics*. Books I-2

Unit III: God and Belief

Week 6 (9/28; 9/30)

- Anselm—selections from the *Proslogion*
- William Paley—selections from *Natural Theology*

Week 7 (10/5; 10/7)

- David Hume—selections from the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*
- Thomas Aquinas—“Five Ways”

Unit IV: How do we know what (we think) we know?; Mind and Matter

Week 8 (10/12; 10/14)

- Nagel’s *What Does It All Mean?* Chapters 2 -4;
- Midterm review

****Midterm Exam**- 10/14**

Week 9 (10/19; 10/23)

- Descartes – *Meditations* 1 and 2.
- Descartes – *Meditations* 3 and 5

Week 10 (10/26; 10/28)

- Descartes – *Meditations* 6
- Elizabeth of Bohemia – Letter exchange with Descartes

Week 11 (11/2; 11/4)

- Hume, Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, 2-4
- Hume, Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, 5.

Unit V: Free Will, Ethics, and Justice

Week 12 (11/9; 11/11 is VETERAN's DAY—NO CLASS)

- Nagel's *What Does It All Mean?* Chapters 6-8
- Hume, D. 1748. – Of Liberty and Necessity, 397-406
- Frankfurt, H. – “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person”

Week 13 (11/16; 11/18)

- John Stuart Mill – Chapters 2 and 3 in *Utilitarianism*.
- Martha Nussbaum–“Mill Between Aristotle & Bentham” in *Daedalus*, 133(2): 60–8.

Week 14 (11/23; 11/25)

- Bernard Williams – “Against Utilitarianism”
- Immanuel Kant – Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals, Chapter 2

Week 15 (11/30; 12/2)

- Plato's *Republic*, Books 1-2
- Plato's *Republic*, Books 3-4

Week 16 (11/30; 12/2)

- Aristotle's *Politics*, Book 1
- Finals Review Session

****Final Exam****