

SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE

Introduction to Philosophy

This is a proposed design for a course and not one I have already taught. It is to be adapted to suit nature of particular class and to be in line with the relevant department goals and guidelines.

Course description

Let's watch this YouTube video to start with, entitled "Atlas, The Next Generation" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVlhMGQgDkY> (especially starting from 1:25)

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Blurb: "A new version of Atlas, designed to operate outdoors and inside buildings. It is specialized for mobile manipulation. It is electrically powered and hydraulically actuated. It uses sensors in its body and legs to balance and LIDAR and stereo sensors in its head to avoid obstacles, assess the terrain, help with navigation and manipulate objects. This version of Atlas is about 5' 9" tall (about a head shorter than the DRC Atlas) and weighs 180 lbs." (We'll return to the example of Atlas throughout the course.)

"What is philosophy?" This course will be organized around one answer: philosophy is an academic discipline in the Humanities with different branches and specializations. The branches and specializations different from country to country and culture to culture. We'll be focusing mostly on philosophy as it is researched and taught in the US and Canada, but we'll look further afield as well. In the US and Canada, we generally divide philosophical research into four categories:

1. History of Philosophy
2. Metaphysics and Epistemology
3. Logic, Philosophy of Science, and Philosophy of Math
4. Value Theory

Below are some very brief descriptions of these areas of philosophy. The questions we are going to focus on are followed by "***", but as you will see, there are many more.

1. **History of Philosophy**

When we study the history of this discipline, we can look at what philosophers have said over the last 2,500 years. In Canada and the US, it is common to focus on philosophers in Ancient Greece and also in Europe during the 1600s, 1700s, and 1800s, so we'll look mostly at those, but there are many other geographic regions and historical periods that are equally fascinating. In each of the categories below, some of the answers to the questions will have been offered by philosophers from tens, hundreds, or thousands of years ago, so we will come across these in every part of the course.

2. **Metaphysics and Epistemology**

We'll learn more about what these words mean throughout the semester. But we might also understand what they mean by looking at examples. Metaphysicians and epistemologists might ask questions like these:

- How can we be sure something we believe is true? ***
- What is the best way to decide whether to do something?
- Are we really deciding or does it just feel as though we are? ***
- How can we be sure that we understand what other people are communicating to us?
- Do other people experience the world the way I do? ***
- Can we prove that anything supernatural really exists?

3. **Logic, Philosophy of Science, and Philosophy of Math**

If you think that philosophy is all talk and long-winded articles, think again (even if you love talking and reading long articles!) Some philosophy looks a lot more like math than you might expect. And a lot of philosophers are very interested in rationality. Here is a very small sample of the sorts of questions logicians, philosophers of science, or philosophers of math might ask:

- What is the most rational way to decide what to do?
 - When a flight attendant asks me, "Would you like chicken or beef?", is it alright to say only "Yes"?
 - What makes one species different from another?
 - Can we learn anything about morality by studying brain scans? ***
 - Can robots like Atlas ever really be like us? ***
 - Is "2+2 = 4" true in the same way that "Paris is in France" is true?
 - Is time travel possible?
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- Can we be confident about our current scientific theories when we have been wrong so many times before?
- Is psychology a science?

4. **Value Theory**

Here we run into some of the stickiest questions. These are the ones we end up losing friends over, or starting wars. But they can also be the questions that, when we really think about them, help us improve our societies and protect those who are vulnerable. Here is a very small selection of questions value theorists try to answer:

- What makes something beautiful?
- Can thinking very hard about what is right and wrong help us solve real problems in our lives? ***
- Is it wrong for doctors to withhold information from patients? ***
- Should businesses be required to grant parental leave?
- Why should we protect the environment?
- Is it right to do something terrible if it achieves something good?
- Are men harmed indirectly when a society treats women badly? ***
- What does it even mean to say that something is right or wrong?
- How should we organize society?
- What is the difference between sex and gender?
- Should the law exist to punish criminals, to deter potential criminals, or for some other purpose?
- How should we understand race, ethnicity, and culture?
- Is it wrong for the government to protect its citizens by invading their privacy?

Week	Topic	Reading
1	Introduction	Philosopher's toolkit - provided by instructor
2	Philosophy	Selections from: Gaarder, J. (1991/1994) <i>Sophie's World</i> - Originally published in Norwegian, later translated into English. An English translation of the assigned selections will be made available electronically.
3	Education	1. Selections from: Plato <i>Meno</i> and <i>Republic</i> - Historians estimate that Plato wrote these dialogues around 380 B.C.E. A contemporary English

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		<p>translation of the assigned selections will be made available electronically.</p> <p>2. Brighthouse, H. "Social Justice and Flagship Universities" UW Philosophers Tackle Contemporary Issues series (video)</p>
4	Epistemology	<p>Selections from: Descartes, R. <i>Meditations</i> - Originally published in 1641. A contemporary English translation of the assigned selections will be made available electronically.</p>
5	Epistemology	<p>1. Selections from: Hume, D. <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> - Originally published in 1748. A contemporary edition of the assigned selections will be made available electronically.</p> <p>2. Gopnik, A. (2015) "How David Hume Helped Me Solve My Midlife Crisis" in <i>The Atlantic</i>: http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/10/how-david-hume-helped-me-solve-my-midlife-crisis/403195/</p>
6	Epistemology	<p>1. Kukla, R. (2007) How Do Patients Know?</p> <p>2. Interview in 2014 with Professor Rebecca Kukla discussing her work in social epistemology: https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/elucidations/2014/05/14/episode-59-rebecca-kukla-discusses-reproductive-risk/</p>
7	Epistemology	<p>1. Gendler, T. (2011) On the Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias</p> <p>2. Lee, C. (2014) Asian Americans, positive stereotyping, and philosophy</p>
8	Philosophy of Mind	<p>Correspondence between Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia and Rene Descartes</p>
9	Philosophy of Mind	<p>Andersen, H. (2015) Mental Causation - Published as a book chapter, but an electronic version will be made available.</p>
10	Moral Psychology	<p>Selections from: Churchland, P. (2012) <i>Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells Us About Morality</i> - assigned selections will be made available electronically.</p>

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11	Metaphysics	Frankfurt, H. (1969) Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility
12	Metaphysics	Liu, J. (2001) Is Human History Predestined in Wang Fuzhi's Cosmology?
13	Value Theory	Ch 1. "Persons, Character, and Morality" from Williams, B. (1981) <i>Moral Luck</i> Assigned chapter will be made available electronically.
14	Value Theory	Introduction from Card, C. (1996) <i>The Unnatural Lottery: Character and Moral Luck</i>
15	Conclusion	So, do we know what philosophy is now?

Component	Portion of Grade
Critical thinking quizzes x3	5% x 3 = 15%
Attendance	10%
Short paper	20%
Midterm exam or presentation (depending on class size)	25%
Final paper or exam (depending on class size)	30%