Philosophy is about exposing, clarifying, analyzing, and (possibly) solving problems with the way we think about the world and ourselves.

In this class, we will cover a broad spectrum of topics in philosophy, including problems with our concepts of morality, knowledge, reality, the self, freedom, and thought. The class will emphasize not only what famous philosophers have said about these topics, but also methods we can use to think about these issues critically, for ourselves.

Texts

BonJour and Baker’s *Philosophical Problems, 2nd edition* and Weston’s *A Rulebook for Arguments* are available through the campus bookstore. Additional papers will be made available via Telesis. There will be handouts given for some class sessions. I will generally make these available on Telesis as well.

What to Expect

Philosophy is not easy. But for some of you it will be rewarding (and, dare I say, fun).

To do it well, you will need to combine having an open mind with being perpetually skeptical. Both are difficult by themselves, let alone together. Fortunately, both are (despite appearances) skills that can be acquired with practice.

The readings will require close, careful reading and a fair amount of critical thinking. Though the reading load might look light, it will take time (and patience) to understand everything that is going on.

Likewise, papers will require you to go beyond mere summary, or superficial defense of a previously held point. Both the professor and the TA will work to stretch your thinking and writing abilities, and will do their best to give you a lot of feedback on papers. Though it is very difficult to get a failing grade on a paper, it is also extremely difficult to get an ‘A’.

If you end up not liking philosophy, that’s OK. It’s not for everyone. There is no shame in dropping the class (by February 2nd) and finding something else to take. I say this not because I want people to drop, but because I want everyone in the class to be interested in the material and eager to participate.
Evaluation and Policies

There are three factors that I use to determine your grade in this class:

I. Attendance, Participation, and Assignments: 10%

- You are expected to attend every class and participate in class discussions (when they occur). There will be a sign-in sheet available for the first seven minutes of class; you must sign this sheet to get attendance credit.
- I understand that attending class is not always possible, due to illness, etc. You are allowed to miss up to four classes, no questions asked, before there are consequences.
- There will be occasional assignments and group activities throughout the semester. You are expected to complete these on time, and to do quality work.
- I also reserve the right to issue pop-quizzes during a class. A pop-quiz is equivalent to one class attended. In order to get credit, one only need pass the quiz; pop-quizzes are not otherwise graded.

III. Papers: 45% (15% each)

During the course of the semester, there will be four papers (of approximately 5 pages) assigned. Of these papers, I drop the lowest grade. These papers allow you to tackle some of the problems brought up in class and hone your writing skills. Requirements for these papers will be given in class.

Note on late policy: Due to the volume of papers for this class, all papers must be printed out and handed in at the start of class. In addition, late papers will not be accepted. However, the lowest paper grades will be dropped when calculating final grades.

IV. Exams: 45% (15% each)

There will be two exams during the semester, and a final “take home” exam due near the end of the semester. These exams are a way for you to show that you have been keeping up with the reading and engaging with the authors. Review material will be made available before each exam.

Note: University policy allows that, if you have 3 or more exams scheduled for one day, or if you have an excused absence, you may arrange to take your exam at an earlier date.
In general, the following guidelines are used in all philosophy courses to determine one’s grade:

- A paper (or test) will earn an “A” if it demonstrates outstanding understanding of the material, including the ability to explain, integrate, compare, contrast, and critique the material. The paper is structured and shows refinement.

- A paper (or test) will earn a “B” if it demonstrates good understanding of the material, and at least some ability to explain, integrate, and critique the material. The paper is structured and shows some refinement.

- A paper (or test) will earn a “C” if it shows knowledge of the material, but with little ability to explain, integrate, or critique it.

- A paper (or test) will earn a “D” if it shows little understanding of the material, and inadequate ability to explain, integrate, or critique it.

- A paper (or test) will earn an “F” if it shows no real understanding of the material outside of what a student might have known before taking this class.

Students are expected to adhere to University policies regarding academic integrity, including (and especially) issues of plagiarism.
Working Calendar

Note: Readings marked with an asterisk (*) will be made available on telesis. All others can be found in the Bonjour and Baker anthology.

Unit 1: An orientation to philosophy

Wed. 1/19: The Shadow Problem *If it’s in the light, why can’t we see it?
Fri. 1/21: Concepts and Definitions *We know what chairs are—don’t we?
Mon. 1/24: Plato’s Euthyphro *Those Gods—where do they get off?!

Read: “How to Think about Stuff”* (Towl), “Euthyphro” (Plato), “Introduction to Philosophical Thinking” (Baker)

Unit 2: The Problem of Evil *Why do bad things happen to good people? Or at all?

Wed. 1/26: Evil and God; Short paper on The Shadow Problem Due
Fri. 1/28: John Mackie and John Hick
Mon. 1/31: Hume and Reasons for belief
Wed. 2/2: Paper Workshop; Last day to drop classes


Unit 3: The Problem of Free Will *Maybe you’re already determined to believe in it!

Fri. 2/4: Determinism’s threat to free will
Mon. 2/7: Compatibilism
Wed. 2/9: Compatibilism
Fri. 2/11: Has the problem been solved? First paper due


Unit 4: Knowledge and Doubt *Are we dreaming? How could we tell?

Mon. 2/14: Overview of Epistemology
Wed. 2/16: From doubt to certainty: Descartes
Fri. 2/18: From matter to mind: Berkeley
Read: selection from *Pyrronism* (Empiricus), selection from “Meditations” (Descartes), selection from *Three Dialogues* (Berkeley)

Watch: *The Matrix*

Catch up and exam 1

- Mon. 2/21: OPEN
- Wed. 2/23: OPEN
- Fri. 2/25: Exam #1

Unit 5: Personal Identity *Are you the same person that went to bed last night?*

- Mon. 2/28: Brain Bisection
- Wed. 3/2: Locke on Personal Identity; Reid’s response to Locke
- Fri. 3/4: *Where am I?* Second paper due


Unit 6: Mind and Brain *Are you your mind? Your brain? What’s the difference?*

- Mon. 3/7: Is consciousness a brain process?
- Wed. 3/9: Is consciousness fundamental?
- Fri. 3/11: What would even count as evidence?

Read: “Sensations and Brain Processes” (Smart), “The Puzzle of Conscious Experience” (Chalmers), “Mind-Brain Correlations, Identity, and Neuroscience”* (Towl)

March 14-17 Spring Break

Unit 7: Government and the Social Contract *Who put them in charge, anyway?*

- Mon. 3/21: So, You’re Stranded
- Wed. 3/23: Our Island Governments
- Fri. 3/25: Put the Best in Charge: The Republic; Third paper due
- Mon. 3/28: Let’s agree to put *someone* in charge: Hobbes
- Wed. 3/30: Put someone in charge, but not a tyrant: Locke
Fri. 4/1: Is government really a contract?: Hume
Read: selection from The Republic (Plato), selection from Leviathan (Hobbes), selection from the Second Treatise on Government (Locke), Of the Original Contract (Hume)

Unit 9: Cultural Relativism, Egoism, and Happiness
Mon. 4/4: Who’s to say what is right and wrong?
Wed. 4/6: OPEN
Fri. 4/8: Second Exam
Mon. 4/11: “Just be happy”
Wed. 4/13: Isn’t it all about me?
Fri. 4/15: OPEN
Read: “Challenges to Morality” (Rachels), Selections from The Nichomachean Ethics (Aristotle), “Psychological Egoism” (Feinberg)

Unit 10: Science and Religion Rivals, Partners, or not on speaking terms?
Mon. 4/18: What counts as a science? As a religion?
Wed. 4/20: The demarcation problem (and why it matters)
Fri. 4/22: Complexity and Design; Fourth paper due
Read: Chapter 13, “Science and Religion”* (Boersema), “The Argument from Design” (Paley), “The Panda’s Thumb” (Gould), other readings may be announced

Unit 11: What Does it all Mean?
Mon. 4/25: Value Would you step into an experience machine?
Wed. 4/27: Value and Purpose in Life
Fri. 4/29: The Meaning of Life In the end, we have to imagine Sisyphus happy
Read: “The Experience Machine” (Nozick), selection from The Myth of Sisyphus* (Camus), selection from The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*(Adams)

The final exam will be a take-home exam. It will be due at 12:00 noon on Thursday, May 5th—the first day of final exams.