

80-100: Introduction to Philosophy

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Office Hours: Wed 1.20 – 2.20 and by appointment.

Description:

This is an introductory course in philosophy, intended to acquaint you with aspects of a few areas of western philosophical thought, and – in places – give you a flavor of the work of contemporary philosophy in the analytic tradition. It will not be possible to proceed very systematically. If you feel you need to fill in some background in order to follow the reading, please consult the excellent online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, which will get you up to speed on most subjects without much pain, and in relatively little time.

We will begin with an introduction to political philosophy in the liberal, or “social contract” tradition, and later introduce some dissenting voices. This literature is concerned with questions such as: what are the origins of legitimate political authority? In what relation ought the individual stand to the state? What makes a distribution of goods and labor in society just?

We turn afterwards to epistemology, which is the study of the nature of knowledge and associated concepts including belief, justification, evidence, truth, testimony, and rationality. We will focus firstly on a relatively contemporary literature that was inspired by a short, and shocking paper by Edmund Gettier. We move next to a somewhat older epistemological tradition that is more sensitive to the pragmatic and ethical aspects of belief formation.

We will finish the course with a selection of topics from the philosophy of science. I suggest that we study the various interpretations of probability, the problem of induction, and Ockham’s razor.

Course Requirements:

There will be reading assigned for every class meeting. I will generally provide you with the materials, but if there is some difficulty please make an effort to find the reading yourself. Reading materials will be posted on Box. The link to the folder is: <http://bit.ly/2bxxbFh>. It is MANDATORY that you complete this reading before the meeting of the class. You are expected to contribute to class discussion – I will not be lecturing the entire time. For every class meeting, you are required to post on the public class spreadsheet (<http://bit.ly/2ciNSco>) one discussion, or comprehension question about the reading. This can be a question like: “I think the state of nature is ambiguous in Locke: is it meant to be a historical state or just a tool for theorizing?” or “Why does Rawls think we should employ worst-case reasoning behind the veil of ignorance?” It can be a genuine request for clarification on some point, or a broad open-ended question for class discussion. This will be worth 10% of your final grade. For each question you fail to submit, I will subtract a point from the full 10. Please send these questions to me **no later than 9AM** the morning of the class that the reading is due. These are meant to give me a sense of how you are dealing with the material, and to give you a sense of what your classmates are thinking about the readings.

There will be a number of short, unannounced reading quizzes. They will take no more than 7 minutes at the beginning of class. They will not be graded harshly, and are meant to encourage you to keep up with the reading assignments and to attend class. These are worth 15% of the final grade. We will accommodate unavoidable absences. Everyone is entitled to 1 freebie.

There will be three writing assignments. The first, which will be due on **Oct. 17th** will be an analysis of one of the assigned readings. It should be 500-700 words (about 1-2 pages, double-spaced). The second, which will be due **Nov 14th**, will be comparison paper where you discuss the perspectives of 2 authors, comparing and contrasting their views on some issue. It should be 600-900 words (about 2-3 pages, double-spaced). The third, which will be due on **Dec 15th**, will be a longer paper in which you make your own argument concerning a topic we have discussed in class. It should be 1400-1600 words (about 5-6 pages, double-spaced). A rough outline of this final paper will be due **Dec 7th**, approximately a week before the final draft. The outline itself will not be graded, but the grade of the final paper will be reduced by a full letter grade if the outline is not received on time. Detailed instructions for these assignments will be handed out in class, about a week ahead of time.

Grading:

Reading responses: 10%	Class participation: 10%	Reading Quizzes: 15%
First essay: 15%	Second essay: 20%	Third essay: (argument): 30%

Missing class and late assignments:

I recognize that occasional problems associated with illness, family emergencies, job interviews, other professors, etc. will inevitably lead to legitimate conflicts over your time. If you expect that you will be unable to turn in an assignment on time, or must be absent from a class meeting, please notify me (either in class or via email) in advance and we can agree on a reasonable accommodation. Otherwise, your grade will be penalized.

Academic Integrity:

It is the responsibility of each student to be aware of the university policies on academic integrity, including the policies on cheating and plagiarism. This information is available at <https://www.cmu.edu/academic-integrity/>.

Political Philosophy

(Plato's Illiberal State)

Mon, August 29 – First Day of Class.

Wed, August 31 – Plato's Republic Books I, II.

Mon, Sep 5 – Labor Day. No Class.

Wed, Sep 7 – Plato's Republic Book III, IV.

Mon, Sep 12 – Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies.

Thucydides, Pericles' Funeral Oration.

(Liberalism: Foundations and Elaborations)

Wed, Sep 14 – Hobbes, Leviathan Ch. 13, 14.

Hume, Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals.

Mon, Sep 19 – Locke, Second Treatise of Civil Government Ch. II-V.

Wed, Sep 21 – Rawls, "Justice as Rational Choice Behind a Veil of Ignorance".

Mon, Sep 26 – "Arrow's Theorem" Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

Wed, Sep 28 – Nozick, Anarchy, State and Utopia. Excerpts.

(Liberalism: Critiques and Challenges)

Mon, Oct 3 – Pateman, The Sexual Contract. Excerpts.

Wed, Oct 5 – Mills, The Racial Contract. Excerpts.

Mon, Oct 10 – Marx, Capital. Chapter 10.

Wed, Oct 12 – Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment".

Epistemology

Mon, Oct 17 – Plato, Meno.

Paper 1 Due.

Wed, Oct 19 – Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"

Mon, Oct 24 – Goldman, "A Causal Theory of Knowing".

Wed, Oct 26 – Nozick, "Knowledge".

Mon, Oct 31 – Pierce, "The Fixation of Belief".

Wed, Nov 2 – Pascal, "Faith is a Rational Wager".

Mon, Nov 7 – Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief".

Wed, Nov 9 – James, "The Will to Believe".

Phil. of Science

Mon, Nov 14 – Hajek, "Interpretations of Probability".

Paper 2 Due.

Wed, Nov 16 – Ramsey, "Truth and Probability".

Mon, Nov 21 – Kyburg and Teng, "Empirical Interpretations of Probability".

Wed, Nov 23 – Thanksgiving, No Class.

Mon, Nov 28 – Howson and Urbach

Final Outline Due.

Wed, Nov 30 – Glymour, "Why I'm not a Bayesian".

Mon, Dec 5 – The Problem of Induction.

Wed, Dec 7 – Ockham's Razor.