

## **80-100: Introduction to Philosophy**

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### *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 coherence. We will focus firstly on a relatively contemporary literature that was inspired by a short, and shocking, 1963 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. What we cover will partly be up to you. 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. 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 send me (by email) 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 20% of your final grade. For each question you fail to submit, I will subtract a point from the full 20. Please

send these questions to me NO LATER THAN 10AM the morning of the class that the reading is due.

There will be three writing assignments. The first, which will be due on June 2nd will be an analysis of one of the assigned readings. This should be 500-700 words (about 1-2 pages, double-spaced). The second, which will be due June 15th, will be comparison paper where you discuss the perspectives of 2 (or maybe 3) authors, comparing and contrasting their views on some issue. This should be 600-900 words (about 2-3 pages, double-spaced). The third, which will be due on June 26 (after the last day of classes), will be a longer paper in which you make your own argument concerning a topic we have discussed in class. This should be 1400-1600 words (about 5-6 pages, double-spaced). A rough outline of this final paper will be due 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:*

Daily reading responses: 15%

Class participation and attendance: 20%

First writing assignment (analysis): 15%

Second writing assignment (comparison): 20%

Third writing assignment (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.

*Cheating and Plagiarism:*

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 <http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/Academic%20Integrity.htm> and in the section on "University Policies" in the most recent edition of The Word: Undergraduate Student Handbook.

*Readings:*

WEEK 1 (Liberalism: Foundations and Elaborations)

May 18: Russell, *Politics and Philosophy*, pp. 432-446.

May 19: Hobbes, *Leviathan*. [Chapters 13 and 14](#).

Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals: of Self Love* [pp. 90-95](#)

May 20: Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*. [Chapters II-V](#). Focusing on II,V.

May 21: Rawls, "Justice as Rational Choice Behind a Veil of Ignorance."

May 22: "Arrow's Theorem", Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

WEEK 2 (Liberalism: Elaborations; Dissenters)

May 25: Nozick, Excerpts from *Anarchy, State and Utopia*

May 26: Pateman and Mills, "Contract and Domination" (2007)

May 27: Marx, *Capital*: Chapter 10.

May 28: Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair*. Preface, Introduction.

May 29: Marx, "On the Jewish Question."

WEEK 3 (The Analysis of Knowledge)

Jun 1: *Class cancelled*.

Jun 2: Plato, *Meno*.

Jun 3: Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"

Goldman, "A Causal Theory of Knowing."

Jun 4: Nozick, "Knowledge"

Jun 5: Goldman, "Nozick on Knowledge: Finding the Right Connection."

WEEK 4 (Belief: Pragmatic and Ethical Aspects)

Jun 8: Pierce, "The Fixation of Belief."

Jun 9: Pascal, "Faith is a Rational Wager."

Jun 10: Clifford "The Ethics of Belief."

Jun 11: James, "The Will to Believe."

Jun 12: Plantinga, "Religious Belief without Evidence."

WEEK 5 (Probability: Interpretations)

Jun 15: Hajek, "Interpretations of Probability" (SEP)

Jun 16: Ramsey, "Truth and Probability"

Jun 17: Kyburg & Teng "Empirical Interpretations of Probability"

Jun 18: Howson & Urbach.

Jun 19: Glymour: "Why I'm not a Bayesian"

WEEK 6

*The Problem of Induction*

*Ockham's Razor*