

## PHIL 201: Introduction to Philosophy

**Objective:** The purpose of this syllabus is to guide the participant in the requirements, demands, logistics and expectations of this course.

### Getting Help:

To receive technical assistance on issues related to WebCT contact:

Academic Instructional Technology Help Desk

ES 102

Monday-Thursday 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m. Friday 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

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Welcome to Philosophy 201: Introduction to Philosophy

My name is Dr. George Backen, and I'm delighted that you've decided to study philosophy with me. "Philosophy" is a combination of the Greek words for love, *philein*, and wisdom, *sophia*. So philosophy means "love of wisdom." And this love of wisdom begins in a sense of wonder about all that surrounds us.

Have you ever wondered why there is something instead of nothing? Perhaps, it would make more sense if there was nothing at all: no universe, no galaxies, no earth, no life, and no you. But, yet, here you are, a conscious, inquisitive creature about to engage in philosophical inquiry. That there is anything at all is a source of great wonder for many, and in this sense of wonder philosophy begins, for philosophy tries to both understand and answer such questions as "Why there is something instead of nothing?"

Even if you have never wondered about existence, you may have considered questions about existence: How should I live my life? What is the right thing to do? Is there a God? What is the nature of reality? How can I be happy? Whenever you have considered or discussed such questions, you have played the role of the philosopher. And since you may already be a practicing philosopher, an aim of this course is simply to refine and inform your understanding and answers to such questions. That is, this course will attempt to improve your skills as a philosopher.

You will find contact information for me on the syllabus. Please do not hesitate to contact me via email, phone, or fax. When you initially register for this course, I would welcome

a call or message from you so that we may get to know each other better. Feel free to contact me anytime with questions or concerns, or simply to chat about the readings.

Sincerely,

George Backen, PhD, JD

### **Course Description/Objective**

Philosophy concerns itself with fundamental questions about us and our world, such as: What is the meaning of life? Is there a God? What is the nature of reality? Is knowledge possible? This course provides an introduction to Western philosophy from ancient to modern times through examinations of some of the major works that have provided influential and provocative answers to these questions.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

The student will:

1. Further develop an appreciation for the core issues in philosophy.
2. Further develop the ability to analyze and evaluate philosophical arguments.
3. Further develop the ability to think and write critically and clearly concerning complex issues.
4. Further develop the ability to express ideas and critically evaluate the ideas of others in a constructive way.
5. Learn the basic vocabulary of the subject.

**Credit hours:** Three semester hours

**Course Prerequisites:** None

### **Textbook**

To order textbooks or obtain information about book titles you may go to [www.exstudies.adams.edu](http://www.exstudies.adams.edu) and click on the “ASC Bookstore” icon.

Use **Section Number: 1020** to order books from Bookstore site.

Melchert, Norman, *The Great Conversation, Vol. 1: Pre-Socratics to Descartes*. 5th Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. ISBN13: 9780195306804

### **Completion Time**

You should expect to spend as much time on an online course as you do in a face-to-face course. As a rough guide, you should plan to spend six to ten hours per week on this

course. The actual amount of time will vary from individual to individual. This estimate includes the time you spend in reading, discussions, and assignments.

You will have access to all course materials from the start of the course to the end. You may look and study ahead, or go back and review, at any time during the course. All assignments, including discussion boards, have set due dates.

You have one year from your date of registration to complete this course. If you are receiving federal or private financial aid, requirements may differ. However, the minimum requirement for course completion, regardless of the number of credit hours, is six weeks. **No student may complete course requirements in less than six weeks.**

It is important to schedule your course study to fit into your academic plan. If you have important deadlines to meet such as graduation, be sure to complete and submit all of your assignments and take the final examination at least five weeks before the credit is needed. It is your responsibility to ensure the credits for this course will apply toward graduation or certification deadlines.

## **Course Introduction**

Philosophy is sometimes seen as wild speculations about unanswerable questions where each opinion or viewpoint is equally acceptable. This view, although shared by many, could not be further removed from the history of philosophy and the ongoing work of philosophers. Philosophy is a discipline with a rigid methodology strongly based on the criticism. For philosophy, criticism has the aim of moving away from error. We subject answers and justifications to criticism in order to see whether they are sufficient grounds to hold such views. Given the essential role of criticism, to engage in philosophy you must have courage; for one needs courage to subject their most precious and central beliefs to criticism.

Philosophy is usually divided into four disciplines: metaphysics, epistemology, logic, and ethics. Metaphysics is concerned with the nature of reality, epistemology is concerned with knowledge, logic is concerned with the construction and evaluation of arguments, and ethics is concerned with moral behavior. But central to all philosophical inquiry is logic; logic is the engine that makes philosophical inquiry run. Logic is the means by which we justify and criticize our conclusions and beliefs.

Logic is concerned with arguments. An argument is a group of statements in which one or more statements provide support or reason to believe a conclusion. That is, philosophers investigate the nature of reality and determine moral behavior by providing reasons to accept a particular conclusion. In the readings for this course, your job is to (1) determine the authors conclusions, (2) determine the premises or reason to believe these conclusions, (3) evaluate the arguments.

For example, suppose you read an article which argues: God exists. Once you understand what the conclusion the author is attempting to persuade you to accept, the next step is to

identify the premises. The premises are the reasons to support the conclusion, so ask yourself, “What reason does the author give to support the conclusion that God exists?” Your next step is to evaluate the argument. Is there a reason not to accept a premise as true? Do the premises logically support the conclusions? Is there a better argument to accept a contrary conclusion? Does the argument leave too many important issues unaddressed? As you go through the readings you will improve your ability to identify and evaluate arguments.

The course is divided into five sections. Each section consists of chapters from the text. When you feel comfortable with each section, you should take the exam. In order to prepare for the exams, each section has several Critical Reading Questions. The key to doing well on the exam is to be able to answer the Critical Reading Questions. You do not need to submit your answers to me, but if you’re unclear about an answer, please contact me and I will provide assistance.

Each chapter in the text is divided into sections. For some of the chapters, you are not expected to read the entire chapter, but only some of the sections. If you are only to read some of the sections, those sections will be labeled in the Critical Reading Questions section of the study guide. For example, Chapter 3 is divided into five sections, but since you will only be tested on the section “The Sophists,” that section is the only one labeled under the Critical Reading Questions of Chapter 3.

### **Course Instructions:**

There are Critical Reading Questions for each section in the study guide. These questions are the best preparation for the exams.

### **Examinations**

The course consists of five exams. These exams will have six short essay questions. Of these six questions, the student will be asked to answer four of them. If more than four are answered, the best four will be used to determine the exam grade. Exams are open book and you may use your notes. The student must complete the exam in one sitting of 90 minutes. The exams are located in the Assessments tab. **Do NOT start the exam until you are ready to take and complete it.** If you access an exam without completing it, you may receive a zero grade.

### **Course Schedule**

#### **Module 1**

**Readings:** Chapter 2: Philosophy Before Socrates  
Chapter 3: The Sophists

**Overview:** The first philosophers engaged in what is called “natural philosophy.” Natural philosophy is a systematic attempt to understand the essence of the natural world. This

work focused on finding the arche or primary substance of the world. That is, despite the variety of objects and states of matter in the world, these philosophers sought to identify the substance which underlies the multiplicity of things. Their work shows one of the key features of philosophy: progress by criticism. These philosophers looked to prior philosopher's arguments, and examined/criticized this previous work in order to come to a better understanding of the fundamental substance of the universe. Finally, we will look at the sophists who will make the claim that all we have access to our appearances, and so the nature of reality is forever beyond our understanding.

## Critical Reading Questions

### Chapter 2

#### Thales

1. What did Thales claim is the fundamental principle/substance of the world?
2. How did Thales' thinking differ from what came before?
3. Is Thales' claim that "all things are filled with gods" a religious claim? Explain.

#### Anaximander

1. What puzzling features of Thales' view seem to have stimulated Anaximander to revise it?
2. State Anaximander's argument for the Boundless.
3. How, according to Anaximander, does the Boundless produce the many distinct things of our experience?

#### Xenophanes

1. What are Xenophanes' criticisms of the Homeric gods?
2. Can we know the truth about things, according to Xenophanes? If so, how?

#### Heraclitus

1. What does Heraclitus mean when he says that all things are "in flux"?
2. In what sense is the "world-order" fire? Why was it not made by any god?
3. What are the *logos*?
4. Sum up Heraclitus' solution to the problem of the one and the many.

#### Parmenides

1. What does Parmenides mean when he says that "thought and being are the same" and "you cannot think 'nothing'"?
2. What are the arguments that there are not, in reality, many things, time, or change?

3. Know one of Zeno's arguments against motion, and explain how this argument supports Parmenides.

#### Democritus and other Atomists

1. For the atomists, what does reality consist in? How do they explain coming into being and passing away?
2. Why does Democritus say that our senses cut us off from the real? Why are we not absolutely cut off?
3. What problem does atomism pose for the idea that we have a free will?

### Chapter 3

#### The Sophists

1. What do the Sophists claim to teach? How do they understand *arete*?
2. What is rhetoric? How was it taught?
3. Explain Protagoras' saying "Man is the measure of all things."
4. What is "relativism." Explain how the sophists are relativists.
5. Contrast *physis* with *nomos* and conventional justice with natural justice.
6. Would a Sophist say that it is more important to be just or to appear just? Why?

### Module 2

**Readings:** Chapter 4: Socrates  
Chapter 5: The Trial and Death of Socrates

**Overview:** Socrates is perhaps the first moral philosopher. He began with the study of natural philosophy, but changed his concern from the nature of the physical world to how one ought to live. This change in thinking was so dramatic that the philosophers before Socrates are called "pre-Socratics." We will learn about Socrates' character, method, and aims.

#### Critical Reading Questions

#### Chapter 4: Socrates

1. How is Socrates similar and different from the sophists?
2. What is "dialectic"? How does the use of the dialectic help us approach truth?
3. For Socrates, why ought we search for truth?
4. What is meant by "human excellence is knowledge"?
5. What is Socrates' reasoning that all wrongdoing is out of ignorance?

6. For Socrates, why is the most important thing the care of the soul?

## **Chapter 5: The Trial and Death of Socrates**

### Euthyphro

1. Who is Meletus? Why does Socrates claim that Meletus is wise?
2. Why is Euthyphro at court?
3. Why does Socrates say he wants Euthyphro to instruct him? Is Socrates being sarcastic?
4. Euthyphro's first definition of piety is "to do what I am doing now." Why is Socrates dissatisfied with this definition? What is Socrates looking for in a definition?
5. Euthyphro's second definition of piety is "what is dear to the gods." Explain Socrates criticism to this definition.

### Apology

6. Who are Socrates' two accusers?
7. What is the story of Chairephon and the Oracle of Delphi? Why was Socrates confused by what the oracle said?
8. Why did Socrates go to see politicians, poets, and craftsmen? What did he learn about them? What kind of wisdom did Socrates discover he had?
9. In defending against the charge of corrupting the youth, Socrates uses an analogy of horse breeders. How is this analogy effective in his defense? Explain Socrates claim that he would not corrupt the youth willingly?
10. Explain Socrates defense against not believing in the gods of the Athens.
11. At verdict, 280 find Socrates guilty and 220 find him not guilty. Socrates is then given the opportunity to suggest a sentence/punishment. After his suggestions 360 sentence him to death, 140 vote for a lesser sentence. Explain why 80 jurors who found him not guilty wanted him sentenced to death. That is, what was so outrageous about his suggestions?
12. What are the two options that death may bring? Why doesn't Socrates fear death?
13. How does Socrates want the jurors to treat his sons?

### Crito

14. What reasons does Crito give Socrates to escape?
15. What argument does Socrates give that we should not listen to the opinion of the many?
16. Socrates claims that "the most important thing is not life, but the good life." Explain.
17. Socrates imagines that the laws integrate him. What do the laws claim that Socrates owes the laws?
18. Using the reasoning of the laws, provide the argument that Socrates should not escape.

## Module 3

**Readings:** Plato: Knowing the Real and the Good  
Aristotle: The Reality of the World

**Overview:** Plato was a friend and follower of Socrates. Plato takes Socrates basic claims and develops a metaphysical system called the Doctrine of Forms. This other-worldly vision of reality connects knowledge with living the good life. Aristotle was a student of Plato, but differs with a concern for this world whereby the good life is not constituted by knowledge of another world, but by developing ones character through practice, habituation, and reason.

### Critical Reading Questions

#### Chapter 6: Plato: Knowing the Real and the Good

1. Distinguish knowledge from opinion.
2. Be sure you can sketch the three lines of argument for the reality of the Forms: epistemological, metaphysical, and semantic.
3. Why does Plato think the Form of Bicycle is *more real* than the bicycle I ride to work?
4. Draw Plato's Divided Line and explain what each of its parts represents. (Close the book, then try to draw and label it.)
5. What two relationships exist between a Form and some visible thing that "participates" in it?
6. What argument is offered for the soul's immortality?
7. Why does Plato consider philosophy as "training for dying"?
8. What question does the Ring of Gyges story pose?
9. What is the psychology of the just person? Of the unjust person?
10. How is justice in the soul related to justice in the community? Who should rule in the state? And why?
11. Explain the threat posed to Plato's philosophy by the Third Man argument.

#### Chapter 7: Aristotle: The Reality of the World

##### The World

1. Explain Aristotle's four causes. What are these causes meant to explain?
2. Provide Aristotle's arguments that there is purpose in nature.
3. Explain teleology. What is entelechy? How is entelechy related to teleology?

##### First Philosophy

4. What is "first" philosophy? Is there another name for it?
5. List four criticisms of Plato's doctrine that the Forms are the most real of all things.

6. What is God like? What kind of cause is God?

### The Good Life

7. Why does Aristotle say that ethics cannot be an exact science?
8. Why does Aristotle think happiness is the highest good?
9. What is the function of human beings? What is their good?
10. What *kind* of a thing is a virtue? Can virtue be taught? How?
11. Explain Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. How do we determine the mean?
12. What is the very best life?

## Module 4

**Readings:** Chapter 8: Epicureans, Stoics, Skeptics  
Chapter 9: Augustine: God and the Soul

**Overview:** As the Golden Age of Greece fades, no longer will philosophers look to political organization as essential to the good life, but rather, morality becomes more focused on the self-sufficiency of the individual. In this shift we will look at three philosophies: Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Skepticism. Finally this section will explore the first great Christian philosopher: St. Augustine.

### Critical Reading Questions

#### Chapter 8: Epicureans, Stoics, Skeptics

##### The Epicureans

1. Why does Epicurus fasten on pleasure as the good?
2. What are the two things that philosophy can do for us?
3. What, according to the Epicureans, are the false beliefs about the gods, and how do these false beliefs distress us?
4. What false beliefs about death distress us, according to the Epicureans?
5. How does the wise person sort out and deal with desires?

##### The Stoics

1. On what distinction does Stoicism rest? Explain how making this distinction is the key, for the Stoic, to both happiness and freedom.
2. What according to the Stoic upsets us? How does this of distress allow humans to be self-sufficient for their own happiness?
3. What does it mean to keep one's will in line with nature?
4. Why doesn't a Stoic starve to death?

5. Explain “natural law.”

### The Skeptics

1. What should we conclude from an examination of (a) differences in sense organs among animals; and (b) differences in taste among humans?
2. About what kind of thing does the skeptic “suspend judgment”? What does that term mean?
3. What is the problem of the criterion? (Study the flow chart carefully.)
4. Why does the skeptic recommend suspending judgment as a key to happiness?

### Chapter 9: Augustine: God and the Soul

1. Explain Augustine’s story of the pear tree. Why does he find this incident so puzzling?
2. What problem made Augustine dissatisfied with Christianity?
3. How did the Manichees explain evil? Where is evil located? Where is good located?
4. How are wisdom and happiness related?
5. What is Augustine’s argument for the existence of God?
6. What does Plotinus mean by “emanation”?
7. What is the Great Chain of Being? How are being and goodness related?
8. How does Augustine solve the problem of natural evil?
9. What is puzzling about past, present, and future?
10. How does Augustine resolve the puzzles about time?
11. What is “original” sin? We often say babies are “innocent.” What does Augustine think?
12. What is “sin”? How is the will involved in it?
13. If the will is a good thing, why does it go bad?
14. How does Augustine reconcile free will with God’s foreknowledge?
15. What are the two kinds of love?
16. What are the two cities? What does each one seek? How do they differ?

### Module 5

**Readings:** Chapter 11: Anselm and Aquinas: Existence and Essence in God and the World

Chapter 12: Moving from Medieval to Modern

Chapter 13: René Descartes: Doubting Our Way to Certainty

**Overview:** In this section we will be moving from the medieval mind to the modern. Instead of knowledge being based on authority of the church or Bible, the moderns will look to the world or rely on reason to gain knowledge of the nature of reality.

## **Critical Reading Questions**

### **Chapter 11: Anselm and Aquinas: Existence and Essence in God and the World**

Anselm

1. What phrase does Anselm use to designate God? How does this definition of God lead to the conclusion that God exists?
2. What is Gaunilo's objection to the argument? How does Anselm reply?

Aquinas

1. How does Aquinas understand the relationship between human reason and divine revelation?
2. Why does Aquinas not accept Anselm's ontological argument for God?
3. According to Aquinas, what are the appropriate ways to prove the existence of God?
4. Know the five ways/arguments for the existence of God.
5. What is God's essence? How do we know?
6. How does analogy work in understanding talk about God?
7. Is the soul (agent intellect) immortal? Why?
8. What is good for humans?
9. Is the human will free? Why?
10. What is the final source of blessedness for human beings?

### **Chapter 12: Moving from Medieval to Modern**

1. Describe the Aristotelian/Ptolemaic picture of the universe.
2. Describe the ideal human life, as pictured by the humanists.
3. In what ways had the church grown corrupt?
4. What does Luther find in the New Testament that leads to his objection to indulgences?
5. To what authority does Luther appeal?
6. How does Copernicus resolve the puzzle about the apparent irregularity in the motions of the planets?
7. What does Kepler add to the Copernican picture?
8. What contributions does Galileo make?
9. What impact does giving up final causes have on values?
10. What questions does the new science pose to the philosophical quest for wisdom?

### **Chapter 13: René Descartes: Doubting Our Way to Certainty**

## Method

1. Explain Descartes' method for gaining knowledge.

### Meditation 1: On What Can Be Called into Doubt

1. What is Descartes hoping to do?
2. Why does Descartes not trust the senses?
3. Explain how Descartes can doubt that he is "sitting before the fire." Explain how he can doubt mathematics.

### Meditation 2: On the Nature of the Human Mind, Which Is better Known Than the Body

1. Why is knowledge of the mind more certain than knowledge of the body?
2. Why can't Descartes be deceived that he exists?
3. What makes for a "thinking thing" according to Descartes?

### Meditation 3: On God's Existence

1. What proof does Descartes offer for the reality of the physical world?
2. What proof does Descartes offer for the existence of God

## Grade Distribution and Scale

In alignment with ASC academic policies, no D may apply to a major or minor field.

### Grade Distribution

5 Exams	100 Points Each	500
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Total Course Points	500
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### Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage Points	
A	100-90	500-450
B	89-80	449-400
C	79-70	399-350
D	69-60	349-300
F	59-0	299-0

