

# Philosophy 100, Introduction to Philosophy

Sample Syllabus for TYS Proposal

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Office hours: M-Th 1-2pm via Zoom

Course website: [link](#)

## **1. COURSE CONTENT AND OBJECTIVES**

Philosophers ask difficult questions about knowledge, existence, and value. In this class, we'll learn how philosophers have addressed questions like the following. Are any of our beliefs so certain that they cannot be reasonably doubted? Where do our beliefs come from in the first place? Is the natural universe the product of intelligent design by a supernatural agent? How does your mind relate to your brain? What determines whether an action is morally right or wrong? Is it wrong to eat animals?

By the end of this course, you'll be able to read complicated philosophical texts, discern the substantive questions raised by their authors, and distill the basic details in written work of your own. You'll also get some practice in raising questions and objections to claims and arguments. You'll more generally sharpen your skills as a thinker and writer.

## **2. REQUIRED TEXTS**

All required texts are available to download for free on Canvas.

## **3. COURSE FORMAT**

We meet synchronously via Zoom every morning, Monday through Friday, from 11am-12pm. Classes begin with a short lecture and then consist of student-driven discussion, student presentations, and other activities.

## 4. ASSIGNMENTS

More details will be provided on the course website for each assignment component. Here are the basics.

*Participation.* See section 5 of this syllabus for the participation policy.

*Presentations.* Each student will give six short presentations. Presentations are given in groups of two or three students.

*Debate.* In our second-to-last class meeting, we'll have a semi-formal debate about animal ethics. This assignment involves group work and preparation ahead of time.

*Short papers.* You'll write three short papers (each no more than 1000 words).

*Exam.* You'll take one exam during our last class period.

## 5. GRADING POLICIES

Your final numerical score for the class is based on the percentage of points earned for the assignment categories, with each category being weighted by the percentage listed here.

15% Participation

5% Debate (x1, scored out of 25 points)

30% Presentations (x6, scored out of 25 points)

30% Short papers (x3, each scored out of 50 points)

20% Exam (x1, scored out of 100 points)

Final numerical scores are converted to a final letter grade as follows.

93-100 = A                      77-79 = C+

90-92 = A-                      73-76 = C

87-89 = B+                      70-72 = C-

83-86 = B                        67-69 = D+

80-82 = B-                       63-66 = D

60-62 = D-

0-59 = F

Final numerical scores are rounded up or down to the nearest whole digit in the usual fashion, so that (for example) a final numerical score of 89.44% converts to a letter grade of B+, whereas an 89.45% converts to an A-.

## 6. PARTICIPATION POLICY

It is difficult to overstate the importance of active participation in class activities. Research consistently demonstrates that students who participate learn and retain more than students who do not participate. Passively listening to lectures alone won't result in the best learning outcome. So, this class will ask a lot of you. You're expected to come to class prepared to engage with me and your fellow students on the topics

of the day. You'll practice the skills we're learning through in-class exercises, in groups and otherwise. What's more, you'll play an integral role in your peers' education—you'll help them learn more and they, in turn, will help you.

Your participation mark will be based on your demonstrated ability to contribute to class activities and discussions in ways that raise the level of discourse. Talking all the time isn't necessarily the same thing as great participation; indeed, talking too frequently can lead to imbalance and discomfort for others. Actively listening to classmates, responding with relevance, and building on your classmates' ideas all contribute to a strong participation grade.

I will reach out twice during the semester (on days 5, 10, and 15) to inform you of your "interim grade" for the participation component of the course. I'll also provide a justification for the interim grade and (if necessary) advice about how to improve it.

I'm very serious about helping to create a classroom environment in which everyone feels free to speak. This classroom is your classroom. Please don't keep yourself from asking a question because you fear it will sound stupid or unsophisticated or obvious. In addition, please behave courteously and respectfully to your classmates and me. While I am dedicated to making this class as democratic and student-driven as possible, I reserve the right to use my authority as instructor to ensure that no one is subject to ridicule or made to feel uncomfortable about speaking up.

## **7. SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS**

*Note:* The schedule of readings is subject to minor adjustments throughout the term.

### **Day 1, What is philosophy?**

- S&D 1

### **Day 2, What is an argument? How should we evaluate them? What is wisdom?**

- S&D 2
- Plato's *Apology*

### **Day 3, Is breaking the law ever morally permitted?**

- Plato's *Crito*
- MLK's 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail'

### **Day 4, Of what can we be certain?**

- S&D 5
- Descartes 1641, *Meditations* I & II

### **Day 5, Where do our beliefs come from?**

- Plato's *Meno* (up to line 84c)
- Locke 1690: Book II, Chapters i-xii (pp. 18-45)

- Second short paper (due online by 11:59pm)

### **Day 6, How does a mind relate to a body?**

- S&D 10
- Speaks 2018, 'Elisabeth's criticisms of Descartes' dualism'

### **Day 7, Can computers think?**

- Turing 1950, 'Computing machinery and intelligence'
- Searle 1980: Chapter 2, 'Can computers think?'

### **Day 8, Does God exist?**

- S&D 3
- Excerpts from Averroës, Ibn Tufayl, Paley, Collins, Pascal

### **Day 9, Why would God allow evil to exist?**

- S&D 4, 9
- Mackie 1955
- Second short paper (due online by 11:59pm)

### **Day 10, Under what conditions do we survive over time?**

- S&D 11
- Parfit 1971, 'Personal identity'

### **Day 11, What should we do? T**

- S&D 14
- Thomson 1976, 'Killing, letting die, and the trolley problem'
- Korsgaard 2007, 'What's wrong with lying?'

### **Day 12, What really matters?**

- S&D 13
- "The Experience Machine" from Nozick 1974, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*
- Third short paper (due online by 11:59pm)

### **Day 13, Should we eat other animals?**

- S&D 15
- Korsgaard 2004, 'Fellow creatures: Kantian ethics and our duties to animals'
- Singer 1974, 'All animals are equal'
- Debate held during class meeting

### **Day 14**

- Exam given during final class meeting