

Syllabus

Course Code: PHIL 115

Title: Introduction to Philosophy

Institute: Business and Social Science

Department: History/Philosophy

Course Description: Students investigate key issues in philosophy, including the nature of self, knowledge and truth, freedom and determinism, morality, the nature of the universe, the existence of God, death and afterlife, meaning and purpose. Emphasis will be given to clarifying students' own thinking on these issues through reading, reflection, and discussion.

Prerequisites: READ 092, READ 095, or passing score in reading on Foundational Studies test.

Corequisites:

Credits: 3

Lecture Hours: 3

Lab/Studio Hours: 0

Required Textbook/Materials:

Philosophy: A Text with Readings, Manuel Velasquez, (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2024), 14th ed.

N.B. For students taking the Distance Education (online) or Honors section, see the course addenda for those sections, obtainable from the Philosophy Department or instructor.

Additional Time Requirements:

For information on Brookdale's policy on credit hour requirements and outside-class student work refer to [Academic Credit Hour Policy](#).

See course/instructor section addendum.

Additional Support/Labs:

See <https://www.brookdalecc.edu/academic-tutoring/>

Course Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, as demonstrated through the writing of essay test questions and a summary/analysis report on primary source readings, the student will be able to:

- describe and analyze the basic problems of philosophy in the areas of epistemology, metaphysics and ethics (HU) (E)
- summarize philosophers' solutions to the problems of philosophy in the areas of epistemology, metaphysics and ethics (HU) (E)

- summarize the arguments of and critically analyze opposing views on a philosophical issue (HU) (E)
- develop and defend their own opinions on basic philosophical issues (HU) (E)

Learning Outcome(s) support the following General Education Knowledge Areas:

- (HU) Humanities
- (E) Ethical Reasoning and Action

What is philosophy? Philosophy is the love of wisdom. It is not about memorizing a lot of facts or accepting a set of revealed truths. Philosophy is the art of learning how to ask meaningful questions and to offer meaningful answers.

This course is an invitation to think, to question, to speculate, to reason, and to wonder.

The only prerequisite for succeeding in this philosophical adventure is the willingness to be intellectually honest. We shall be investigating our most cherished beliefs and commitments, our notions of reality, our concepts of time and space, our ethical standards, our political affiliations, our belief in God. Some of our presumptions will bear the test, but probably others will not. Our task is to investigate them honestly and objectively, without being afraid or feeling threatened by what we may find.

Our success will be reflected by the degree to which we are able to clarify our own thinking and to understand better the thinking of others on these issues.

The philosophical issues discussed in this course include the nature of self, knowledge and truth, freedom and determinism, morality, the nature of the universe, the existence of God, death and afterlife, meaning and purpose.

Through the writing of essay test questions and a summary/analysis report on primary source readings, students who pass this course will have demonstrated competency of the following:

- Understand and explain relevant concepts related to these /issues/problems.
- Think critically about these issues/problems.
- Form their own opinions on these issues/problems.

Course Content:

N.B. For students taking the Distance Education or Honors section, see the course addenda for those sections.

Chapter 1: The Nature of Philosophy

Section 1-1: What is Philosophy?

- Explain how Plato's Allegory of the Cave shows that philosophy is a freeing activity.
- Explain the importance of the philosophical perspectives of women and non-Western cultures.

Section 1-2: The Traditional Divisions of Philosophy

- Define epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics, and explain the kinds of questions each asks.

Section 1-3: A Philosopher in Action: Socrates

- Explain how Socrates' unrelenting questioning of conventional beliefs exemplifies the quest for philosophical wisdom.

Section 1-4: The Value of Philosophy

- Compare Plato's and Buddha's claims that philosophical wisdom is related to freedom.
- State how philosophy can help you build your outlook on life, be more mindful, and become a critical thinker.

Chapter 2: Human Nature

Section 2-1: Why Does Your View of Human Nature Matter?

- Define "human nature: and "psychological egoism."
- Explain how your views of human nature influence your relationships with other people, the universe, and your society.

Section 2-2: What is Human Nature?

- Describe and critically evaluate the Greek rationalistic and Judeo-Christian versions of the Traditional Western view of human nature.
- Explain how Darwinism challenged these views.
- Explain how existentialism and feminism have challenged the Traditional Western view of human nature.

Section 2-3: The Mind-Body Problem: How Do Your Mind and Your Body Relate?

- Explain why dualism is so influential a view of human nature, even though it leads to the mind-body problem.
- Explain and critically evaluate the way materialism, identity theory, behaviorism, functionalism, the computer view of human nature, eliminative materialism, and property dualism each tries to solve the mind-body problem.

Section 2-4: Is There an Enduring Self?

- Explain the role an “enduring self” plays in human life and how it leads to the problem of personal identity.
- Explain and criticize attempts to solve the problem of personal identity by appealing to the body, the soul, the memory, and the no-self view.

Section 2-5: Are We Independent and Self-Sufficient Individuals?

- Describe the idea of an independent and self-sufficient individual and explain the role it plays in our lives.
- Compare how Aristotle, Hegel, and Taylor challenge that idea.

Chapter 3: Reality and Being

Section 3-1: What is Real?

- State why our assumptions about what is real are vitally important.

Section 3-2: Reality: Material or Nonmaterial

- Explain what materialism is and why consciousness is difficult for materialism to explain.
- Explain what idealism is and why some philosophers have objected to it.

Section 3-3: Reality in Pragmatism

- Explain and critically evaluate pragmatism’s approach to philosophy, its method for determining what reality is, and James’ views on “sub-universes.”

Section 3-4: Reality and Logical Positivism

- Explain why logical positivists such as Ayer hold that metaphysical claims about reality are meaningless.

- Explain why critics have said that the logical positivists are wrong.

Section 3-5: Antirealism: The Heir of Pragmatism and Idealism

- Explain what realism and antirealism are and why antirealists say that there is no reality independent of our language or concepts.
- Explain why some feminists object to antirealism and how realists like Searle have tried to prove realism.

Section 3-6: Is Freedom Real?

- Explain and evaluate determinism, libertarianism, and compatibilism.

Section 3-7: Is Time Real?

- Explain the difference between objective and subjective time and why some philosophers have argued that subjective time is not real and others argue that objective time is unreal.

Chapter 4: Philosophy, Religion, and God

Section 4-1: The Significance of Religion

- Explain the importance of the choice between belief and unbelief.
- Define religion and distinguish it from religious belief, religious experience, and theology.

Section 4-2: Does God Exist?

- Explain and critically evaluate the ontological, cosmological, and design arguments for the existence of God.

Section 4-3: Atheism, Agnosticism, and the Problem of Evil

- Explain the difference between atheism and agnosticism.
- Define the Problem of Evil and critically evaluate the claim that evil shows that God does not exist.

Section 4-4: Traditional Religious Belief and Experience

- State and critically evaluate James' view that our passional nature should determine what to believe when an option is living, forced, and momentous
- Define what a numerous religious experience is and evaluate the claim that such an experience provides reasonable grounds for belief in God.

Section 4-5: Nontraditional Religious Experience

- Explain and evaluate Kierkegaard's view that only subjective thinking can know the truth about God, and Tillich's view that God cannot be proved but only experienced as one's ultimate concern.
- Explicate and evaluate the feminist claim that traditional religious concepts of God are sexist.
- Describe some of the central claims of Hinduism and Buddhism and how these differ from traditional Western approaches to religion.

Chapter 5: The Sources of Knowledge

Section 5-1: Why is Knowledge a Problem?

- Explain how the controversy over recovered memories shows the importance of understanding what knowledge is.
- Discuss why it is important, for society and for ourselves, to understand the sources of reliable knowledge.
- Explain why memory is not an original source of knowledge.

Section 5-2: Is Reason the Source of Our Knowledge?

- Describe and criticize Descartes' views on knowledge and Plato's argument for innate ideas.
- Explain and critically evaluate the rationalist claims that reason is a source of knowledge and that some knowledge is innate.

Section 5-3: Can the Senses Account for All Our Knowledge?

- Describe and criticize Locke's and Berkeley's empiricist views on the source of our knowledge and our knowledge of the "external" world.
- Explain Hume's view that sense experience is the only source of knowledge and evaluate his argument that it is unjustified to claim that there is an external world or that real causality exists.

- Explain the problem of induction, how it is related to Hume, and why it is difficult to solve.

Section 5-4: Kant: Does the Knowing Mind Shape the World?

- Explain how Kant's theory of knowledge combines rationalism and empiricism.
- Explain how Kant showed that we can know the synthetic *a priori* statements of mathematics and natural science.
- Critically evaluate Kant's claim that Hume's skepticism is mistaken because the mind organizes its sensations into the world as we know it.
- Describe how Kant's views were later modified by romantic philosophers, anthropologists, and constructivist psychologists and sociologists.

Section 5-5: Does Science Give Us Knowledge?

- Explain and critically evaluate inductionism, the hypothetical method, falsifiability, and Kuhn's theory of scientific knowledge.
- Explain how each is related to empiricism, rationalism, and Kant.

Chapter 6: Truth

Section 6-1: Knowledge and Truth

- Explain why knowledge has been defined as a justified true belief, and why this definition has been questioned.

Section 6-2: What is Truth?

- Explain and evaluate the correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic views of truth.
- Explain why these views matter.

Section 6-3: Does Science Give Us Truth?

- Describe some of the main strengths and weaknesses of the instrumental, realist, and conceptual relativist views of science.
- Explain how these views of science are related to the pragmatic, correspondence, and coherence theories of truth.

Section 6-4: Can Interpretations Be True?

- Explain why truth matters when interpreting texts.
- Relate the correspondence, pragmatic, and coherence views of truth to Aquinas', Wittgenstein's, and Gadamer's views of true interpretations.

Chapter 7: Ethics

Section 7-1: What is Ethics?

- Explain what it means to say that ethics is the study of morality.

Section 7-2: Is Ethics Relative?

- Describe and critically evaluate the theory of ethical relativism.

Section 7-3: Do Consequences Make an Action Right?

- Explain, evaluate, and use the theories of ethical egoism, act utilitarianism, and rule utilitarianism.

Section 7-4: Do Rules Define Morality?

- Explain, evaluate, and apply scriptural divine command theories, natural law theory, Kantian ethics, and Buddhist ethics.

Section 7-5: Is Ethics Based on Character?

- Explain, evaluate, and use virtue ethics.
- Explain and critically evaluate the ethic of caring as a feminist ethic.

Section 7-6: Can Ethics Resolve Moral Quandaries?

- Apply ethical theories to the moral issues of abortion and euthanasia.

Chapter 8: Social and Political Philosophy

Section 8-1: What is Social and Political Philosophy?

- Describe the kinds of questions social and political philosophy tries to answer.

Section 8-2: What Justifies the State and Its Power?

- Explain how the theories of Hobbes, Locke, and Rawls justify the authority of the state.
- Critically evaluate these theories.

Section 8-3: What is Justice?

- Explain what a just society is if justice is based on merit, equality, social utility, need and ability, or liberty.
- Critically evaluate each of these views of justice.

Section 8-4: Limits on the State

- Critically evaluate the claim that the authority of the state is limited by the right of civil disobedience, the right of freedom, human rights, and just war theory.

Chapter 9: The Meaning of Life

Section 9-1: Does Life Have Meaning?

- Interpret the question whether life has meaning and explain why it is important.
- Explain why some argue that the question itself is meaningless.

Section 9-2: The Theistic Response to Meaning

- Describe how some have found the meaning of life in a divine reality, and critically evaluate this view.

Section 9-3: Meaning and Human Progress

- Describe how some have found the meaning of life in human progress, and critically evaluate this view.

Section 9-4: The Nihilist Rejection of Meaning

- Describe the nihilist response to the question of whether life has meaning and explain how nihilists have argued for their response; critically evaluate the nihilist view.

Section 9-5: Meaning as Self-Chosen Commitment

- Explain the idea of subjective meaning as something created by the individual and why some have held this view; critically evaluate this view.

Department Policies: Department Policies are in alignment with College Policies.

Grading Standard:

N.B. For students taking the Distance Education or Honors section, see the course addenda for those sections.

- 1) Students will take several in-class tests, the exact number and style at the discretion of the instructor.
- 2) Students must write a report on any one of the selected sets of primary source readings. This report shall consist of summary and analysis/commentary. A guide for writing this report is available from the instructor or the learning assistant. The grade for this report will count as equal to one test grade.
- 3) If a student is absent from a class, the student must submit a report summarizing and giving reflections on the topics which were covered in class on the date of the absence. This report, the purpose of which is to demonstrate preparation of these topics, must be submitted before taking the test to which the topics pertain.

The grading standard for this course will be as follows:

100% to 93% = A
 92% to 90 = A-
 89% to 87% = B+
 86% to 83% = B
 82% to 80 = B-
 79% to 77% = C+
 76% to 70% = C
 69% to 60% = D
 below 60% = F

College Policies:

As an academic institution, Brookdale facilitates the free exchange of ideas, upholds the virtues of civil discourse, and honors diverse perspectives informed by credible sources. Our College values all students and strives for inclusion and safety regardless of a student's disability, age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, country of origin, immigration status, religious affiliation, political

orientation, socioeconomic standing, and veteran status. For additional information, support services, and engagement opportunities, please visit www.brookdalecc.edu/support.

For information regarding:

- Academic Integrity Code
- Student Conduct Code
- Student Grade Appeal Process

Please refer to the [student handbook](#) and [catalog](#).

Notification for Students with Disabilities:

Brookdale Community College offers reasonable accommodations and/or services to persons with disabilities. Students with disabilities who wish to self-identify must contact the Accessibility Services Office at 732-224-2730 (voice) or 732-842-4211 (TTY) to provide appropriate documentation of the disability and request specific accommodations or services. If a student qualifies, reasonable accommodations and/or services, which are appropriate for the college level and are recommended in the documentation, can be approved.

Mental Health:

24/7/365 Resources:

- Monmouth Medical Center Psychiatric Emergency Services at **(732) 923-6999**
- 2nd Floor Youth Helpline – Available to talk with you about any problem, distress, or hardship you are experiencing. Call or text at **888-222-2228** or visit the website at <https://www.2ndfloor.org/>

Faculty Counselors:

- Students who need to make an appointment with a faculty counselor can do so by calling 732-224-1822 (non-emergency line) during business hours. Faculty counselors are licensed mental health professionals who can assist students and refer them to other mental health resources.

Diversity Statement:

Brookdale Community College fosters an environment of inclusion and belonging. We promote a safe and open culture, encourage dialogue respecting diverse perspectives informed by credible sources, and uphold the virtues of civil discourse. We celebrate all identities with the understanding that ultimately, diversity, equity, and inclusion cultivate belonging and make us a stronger Brookdale community.

**The syllabus is intended to give student guidance in what may be covered during the semester and will be followed as closely as possible. However, the faculty member reserves the right to modify, supplement, and make changes as the need arise.*