



Shanghai Jiao Tong University

PI900 Introduction to Western Philosophy

Instructor Information	<p>Marcello Barison Home Institution: University of Chicago Email: marcello.barison@gmail.com Office Hours: Determined by Instructor</p>		
Term	<p>June 28, 2021 - July 29, 2021</p>	Credits	<p>4 units</p>
Class Hours	<p>Monday through Thursday, 120 mins per teaching day</p>		
Discussion Sessions	<p>2 hours each week, conducted by teaching assistant(s)</p>		
Total Contact Hours	<p>66 contact hours (1 contact hour = 45 mins, 3000 mins in total)</p>		
Required Texts (with ISBN)	<p>Philosophy: The Quest for Truth, 9th ed., Louis Pojman. Oxford University Press, 2014. Plus short essays on electronic reserve</p>		
Prerequisite	<p>Open to freshmen</p>		
<p>The course might be moved to online delivery due to COVID-19 pandemic. Students will be notified once the decision is made.</p>			



Course Overview

This course attempts to encourage the student to philosophize, not just to study philosophical texts. It is then more of an invitation to philosophize than an introduction to the discipline of philosophy. Introductions seek merely to lay out the structure of a particular discipline. We will do that here but more importantly, the course is an invitation to become philosophical, not just become a student of the subject.

Rather than begin, then, by swimming in the open sea of the inherited concepts, problems, and theories developed in the course of the history of philosophy, we will try to uncover and recall those experiences, which issued the concepts, provoked the questions, and demanded the theories. In this way, the student will hopefully come to see that philosophical problems, like all problems, arise from our conflict with experience; that theories are our attempts to clarify experience, and that each of us participates in the qualities of the human condition that gave birth to philosophy as a discipline.

The questions we will raise in this course have primarily to do with metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. They include questions of mind and matter, being and becoming, reality and appearance, and the value and meaning of life.

The readings are selected from classical and contemporary authors. We will read and discuss the theories of Plato, Epictetus, Descartes, Heidegger, Peirce, Sartre, Camus, Tolstoy and several contemporary authors.

Course Goals

The course has an academic and an existential goal. These goals are related but distinct.

Academic goal: The course aims to introduce you to the discipline of philosophy and its major branches: metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics; to provide you with a general introduction to and understanding of philosophical views, issues, and arguments of some of the most important philosophers in the history of Western philosophy; to introduce you to some of the central problems of philosophy such as the existence of God, the mind-body problem, the question of what we can know, the problem of freedom and determinism, and the question of the meaning of life.

Existential Goal: Philosophy, the great philosophers from Plato to Heidegger have said, begins in wonder. My principal goal is to provoke you to wonder about the mystery of life.



Grading Policy

There will be a midterm, final exam, and a group project. Each will be worth 30% of your final grade. Oral participation and/office hours discussion will be worth 10%.

Here is what I have in mind with respect to the team project. I will divide the class into 2 teams of roughly 7 people each. Your team is your discussion group, but it is also your working group for a debate you will present to the class. Each team will be assigned to defend different positions on one of the following issues: The existence of God (God exists / God does not exist); The Mind-Body Problem (Human beings are just physical bodies / Human beings are bodies with souls); Freedom and Determinism (Human beings are just physical bodies wholly determined by the laws of nature / Human beings possess free will); The Meaning of Life (Life has meaning / Life is absurd). This will be an opportunity for the class to become a community of thinkers, and to also to have some fun. Let yourselves go—but remember to convey the content of the issues accurately.

Oral Participation & Office Hours Discussion	10%
Group Presentation	30%
Midterm Exam	30%
Final Exam	30%

Grading Scale

Number grade	Letter grade	GPA
90-100	A	4.0
85-89	A-	3.7
80-84	B+	3.3
75-79	B	3.0
70-74	B-	2.7
67-69	C+	2.3
65-66	C	2.0
62-64	C-	1.7
60-61	D	1.0
≤59	F (Failure)	0



Class Schedule

Date	Lecture	Readings
Day 1	Introduction: What is philosophy and why study it?	No reading
Day 2	What is philosophy?	aPojman: Introduction, pp. 2-5; Plato's Allegory of the cave, pp. 180-21; Russell, "The Value of Philosophy," pp. 21-32
Day 3	Philosophy begins in Wonder	Electronic Reserve: Ventura, Heidegger
Day 4	Self-knowledge and philosophy as a way of life	Pojman: Plato's Apology, pp.6-18
Day 5	The Question of Being: Philosophy and Religion	Electronic Reserve: Tillich
Day 6	God and the Meaning of Being	Pojman: pp. 53-58; 100-103; 103-114;
Day 7	Arguments for the Existence of God: Cosmological	Pojman: pp. 58-62; 80-89
Day 8	Arguments for the Existence of God: Teleological	Pojman: pp. 90-92; 93-100
Day 9	Arguments Against God's Existence: Atheism	Electronic Reserve: Nietzsche, Freud
Day 10	The Mind-Body Problem: What is a human being?	Pojman: pp.287-291; 316-330
Day 11	The Mystery of Consciousness	Pojman: Nagel, pp. 341-349; Chalmers, pp. 360-362
Day 12	Midterm Examination	No Reading
Day 13	Freedom and Determinism	Pojman: d'Holbach, pp. 399- 405; Stace, pp. 437-443
Day 14	Epistemology: What do we know and how do we know it?	Pojman: pp. 195-198 Electronic Reserve: Selections from Descartes' Discourse on Method



Day 15	Epistemology: The Nature of Belief; Dismantling Truth	Electronic Reserve: Peirce, “Fixation of Belief”; Pojman: Rorty, pp 247- 255
Day 16	Ethics: How Should I Live?	Pojman: pp. 458-467; Aristotle, pp. 521-531
Day 17	Ethics: Two Alternative Theories	Pojman: Epictetus, pp. 633- 642; Sartre, pp. 560-567
Day 18	The Meaning/Purpose/Value of Life	Pojman: pp. 625-626; Camus, pp. 642-647
Day 19	The Meaning/Purpose/Value of Life	Pojman: pp. 655-659; Electronic Reserve: Tolstoy’s Confession
Day 20	Final Examination	Readings