



Shanghai Jiao Tong University

PI900 Introduction to Western Philosophy (Online)

Instructor Information	<p>Marcello Barison Home Institution: University of Chicago Email: marcello.barison@gmail.com</p>		
Term	<p>June 28, 2021 - July 23, 2021</p>	Credits	4 units
Course Delivery	<p>The lessons, each lasting one hour and for a number of five per week, will be held asynchronously and will be uploaded on an online platform (Zoom). Each of them will be accompanied by specific additional interactive material (videos, texts, Power Point presentations, etc.) which will complement the teaching material exposed during the lesson and will in all respects be part of the content of the lesson. It is also planned to activate an online window on a weekly basis (2 hours long) in which students will be able to interact directly with the teacher and the teaching assistant through a special chat to share their questions and observations. The chat will therefore serve both to answer any questions and to replace the discussion in presence. The workload students are expected to complete to properly pass this course is about 12 hours per week.</p>		



<p>Required Texts (with ISBN):</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ RENÉ DESCARTES, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy. With Selections from the Objections and Replies</i>. Trans. by J. Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996). ▪ BENEDICT DE SPINOZA, <i>Ethics</i>. Trans by E. Curley (London: Penguin, 2005), First and Second Part. ▪ I. KANT, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>. Trans. by P. Guyer and A. W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 81-192. ▪ H. MELVILLE, <i>Bartleby, the Scrivener</i>, in <i>Billy Budd, Bartleby, and Other Stories</i> (London: Penguin, 2016). ▪ F. DOSTOEVSKY, <i>Notes From Underground</i>. Trans. by R. Pevear and L. Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1994). ▪ F. NIETZSCHE, <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i>, in <i>The Portable Nietzsche</i>, ed. by W. Kaufmann (London: Penguin, 1982). ▪ M. HEIDEGGER, <i>Nietzsche's word: "God is Dead"</i>, in <i>Off the Beaten Track</i>. Ed. by J. Young and K. Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). ▪ M. HEIDEGGER, <i>The Origin of the Work of Art</i>, in <i>Off the Beaten Track</i>. Ed. by J. Young and K. Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). ▪ M. HEIDEGGER, <i>Being and Time</i>. Trans. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), §§ 1-27
<p>Prerequisite</p>	<p>Open to freshmen</p>



Course Overview

This class considers philosophy in two lights: as an ongoing series of arguments addressed to certain fundamental questions about the place of human beings in the world, and as a historically situated discipline interacting with and responding to developments in other areas of thought and culture. The course will be divided into two fundamental parts, mostly addressing the modern and contemporary philosophical tradition respectively.

In the first part, we explore fundamental philosophical questions as they were formulated by modern philosophers. In terms of historical figures, we will concentrate on Descartes and Spinoza. Our guiding thread through this extraordinarily rich period will be the question: how do our minds represent (or misrepresent) the world? This will lead us into a host of other questions: how can we know anything about how the world is in itself? What (if any) aspects of our experience represent the way world really is? What is the fundamental structure of physical reality? How can we know anything about it?

In the second part of the course, we explore fundamental philosophical questions as they were formulated by contemporary writers and philosophers. Primary attention will be devoted to the problem of nihilism as a persistent theme of modernity, that will be investigated considering a wide range of author, from Nietzsche to Heidegger.

As a general orientation, 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.

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 through the reading and discussion of some of the greatest works in the history of Western Philosophy.



Grading Policy

There will be two exams, a midterm exam and a final exam. Each is worth 40% of your final grade. The remaining 20% is for oral participation and/or use of office hours.

Midterm Examination	40%
Final Examination	40%
Attendance and Oral participation	20%

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 (Subject to Change)

Date	Lecture	Readings
Day 1	Introductory remarks and discussion	No reading
Day 2	- Dream and reality. - <i>Cogito ergo sum</i> : the foundation of human knowledge. - Do I exist?	DESCARTES, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy, Dedicatory letter to the Sorbonne, First Meditation</i> (pp. 3-15)
Day 3	- Descartes conception of the external reality: the <i>extended thing</i> . - What does it mean to perceive? - The meaning of rationalism. On the existence of God.	DESCARTES, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy, Second Meditation</i> (pp. 16-23) DESCARTES, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy, Third Meditation</i> (pp. 16-36)
Day 4	- On the relation between mind and body.	DESCARTES, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy, Sixth Meditation</i> (pp. 50-62)
Day 5		Film: <i>The Matrix</i>
Day 6	- The substance as cause of itself. Totality and infinity.	BENEDICT DE SPINOZA, <i>Ethics, Part I, Concerning God</i>
Day 7	- Another way to conceive the relation between extended and thinking thing: mind and matter.	BENEDICT DE SPINOZA, <i>Ethics, Part II, On the Nature and Origin of the Mind</i>
Day 8	- Beyond rationalism and empiricism.	IMMANUEL KANT, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> , pp. 99-124.
Day 9		Reading Day
Day 10	Midterm Examination	<u>No reading</u>
Day 11	- What does <i>a priori</i> mean? - Space, time, and the scientific revolution.	IMMANUEL KANT, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> , pp. 136-152. IMMANUEL KANT, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> , pp. 172-192.
Day 12	- Is it possible not to be a subject?	H. MELVILLE, <i>Bartleby, the Scrivener</i> .
Day 13	- Introduction to nihilism.	F. DOSTOEVSKY, <i>Notes from Underground</i> .
Day 14	- The vision and the enigma. Beyond a linear conception of time.	F. NIETZSCHE, <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Third Part</i> .
Day 15		Film: <i>The Servant</i> by J. Losey
Day 16	- An outstanding interpretation of Nietzsche.	M. HEIDEGGER, <i>Nietzsche's word: "God is Dead"</i> .
Day 17	- What does it mean for something to be? The question of being.	M. HEIDEGGER, <i>Being and Time</i> , §§ 1-11.



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Day 18	- What does it mean to be a work of art? Art, history, and truth.	M. HEIDEGGER, <i>The Origin of the Work of Art</i>
Day 19		Reading Day
Day 20	Final Examination	<u>No reading</u>