

# INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

Jerry Piven, Ph.D.

In case of *emergencies*, I can be reached at (201) 936-5843, or email me at [jerry.piven@rutgers.edu](mailto:jerry.piven@rutgers.edu)

*For herein is the evil of ignorance,  
that he who is neither good nor wise is nevertheless satisfied with himself: he has no  
desire for that of which he feels no want.*

*Know thyself!*

-Plato

Philosophy is the love of wisdom. Over the eons great minds have contemplated the nature of the soul, the genesis of good and evil, the existence of God, the workings of the universe, and the way we perceive, reality. How does one know good from evil? Are we really social animals? Can one prove or disprove the existence of God? Is there a soul distinct from the body? Does one truly have free will? This course introduces students to some of the great ideas in world philosophy, exploring the metaphysics and ethics of the Greeks, the skepticism of Descartes, the transcendental philosophy of Kant, the atheism of Nietzsche, and the existentialism of Sartre.



### **Required Texts:**

**\*Available on course site\***

Nagel: *What Does It All Mean?*  
 Bonjour & Baker: *Philosophical Problems*  
 Assorted classics in philosophy

### **Assignments and Grading:**

In addition to the required reading, the students will be assigned:

- **1) Weekly Journals** (40% of total grade)

*These papers should be 1-3 paragraphs, focusing on the **central ideas** of the text and your **thoughts/ questions** about them.*

- **2) Online Discussion & Participation** (20% of total grade)

- **3) Final Philosophical Project** (40% of total grade)

**Grading** will be determined by the effort of the student, her/his evidence of having carefully read and contemplated the material, and her/his expression of independent thought on the ideas.

**Reflections** are due each Monday unless otherwise specified. Late assignments will suffer one-half letter grade per day and will not be accepted after the Friday of the week they are due.

**Reflection rubric** will be uploaded to the class website that should tell you how to write your reflections (and how not to)....

**Online Forum participation** consists of your own ideas, analysis, and questions. You must take the initiative, post your thoughts, and engage in philosophical discussion with other students. Your posts must be serious attempts to express and articulate concepts, not just perfunctory notions you toss out there for credit. You are expected to post on an average of once per week (or more if you are interested). Again, these must be sincere philosophical discussions. Random comments, jokes, and other glossolalia don't suffice to warrant credit. You are not expected to know everything – just to engage in sincere conversation and make real attempts to discuss the ideas.

## **IMPORTANT:**

**Class Credo and Ethic:** Like all classes, philosophy is about the free exchange of ideas as well as relentless questioning of beliefs and concepts. You are entitled to your beliefs but in a philosophy class *no idea is spared* from questioning or examination. If you do not want your beliefs or faith questioned, you are *strongly* advised to enroll in other classes more suitable to your beliefs and temperament.

### **Participation and Conduct:**

**Cell phones, computers, MP3 players, video games, and other non-class-related accouterments will absolutely be turned off during class.**

There will be no web surfing, instant messaging, texting, tweeting, game playing, or any similar activities during class. These activities are disrespectful and disrupt the instructor and your fellow classmates. Students ignoring this rule will be considered absent, and it will impact your class participation grade.

Students are expected to engage in lively discussion and spirited exchange. They need not agree with one another and they are encouraged to question ideas, but they must also be respectful towards other students and the instructor. You can argue forcefully for or against an idea, but are required to comport yourselves with civility.

### **Masks and Distancing:**

**You are expected to wear effective masks and engage in social distancing while in my classroom.**

The university requires that you wear masks in all university buildings. *This is university policy and is non-negotiable.* If you do not wish to wear a mask for the entirety of your time inside, do not enter. If you refuse to wear a mask or wear it ineffectively (below your nose, etc.) you will summarily be asked to leave the classroom. Or I will simply call campus security and have you escorted out of the building and removed from the class roster. You may believe that you have the constitutional freedom or god-given right not to mask, but this doesn't give you the moral right to violate university policy or place others at risk.

**Note well:** The only acceptable masks allowed in my classroom will be medical, multi-layer, N95, KN95, and other similar masks demonstrated by the available science to be effective in stopping the spread of virus particles. Masks with valves do NOT protect others and are not acceptable. Bandanas, scarves, shirts, balaclavas, ninja masks, and other coverings proved scientifically ineffective will NOT be allowed. If you find this oppressive, offensive, conspiratorial, and so on, your freedom gives you the right to take classes elsewhere, but NOT to impose your beliefs on others or endanger them. **This is non-negotiable.**

### **Communications:**

You may email me with concerns and questions, but do not expect me to recapitulate class lectures or discussions. Feel free to email to make an office hours appointment (via Zoom, phone, or on campus meeting) if you wish to discuss the ideas or other issues.

### **Academic Honesty:**

Violations of Rutgers policies on academic honesty will not be tolerated in this course. Plagiarism and cheating will be grounds for failure, if not expulsion from the university.

## **COURSE OUTLINE:**

### **I. INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY**

Overview and Course

Goals What is Philosophy?

The Six Branches of Philosophy

Why do we do Philosophy?

Readings:

- Nagel: Introduction
- Baker: Introduction to Philosophical Thinking
- Russell: The Value of Philosophy

### **II. BELIEF & KNOWLEDGE**

Epistemology & Metaphysics

Rationalism & Empiricism

Correspondence and Coherence

Perceptions, Essences, and Things

Readings:

- Nagel, chapter 2: How Do We Know Anything?
- Plato: *Theaetetus*
- Descartes: *Meditations on First Philosophy*
- Locke: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Excerpts)
- Kant: *Critique of Pure Reason* (Preface to the 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)

Suggested Readings – Optional! For your interest and edification only:

John Locke: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

Errol Harris: *Fundamentals in Philosophy*

William James: *The Will to Believe*

Edmund Husserl: *Cartesian Meditations*

Linda Alcoff: *Real Knowing*

*Epistemology: The Big Questions*

Christopher Norris: *Epistemology: Key Concepts in Philosophy*

William Alston (Ed.): *Realism and Antirealism*

Paul Boghossian: *Fear of Knowledge*

### **III. PHILOSOPHY OF MIND**

The Mind-Body Problem

Consciousness, Dualism, and Materialism

Identity, Self, and No-Self

Free Will & Determinism

Readings:

- Nagel, chapters 3, 5, 6: Other Minds; The Mind-Body Problem; Free Will
- Bonjour, chapter 3: Minds and Bodies (Searle, 180-186; Fodor & Searle, 188-

- 191; Nagel, 192-197)
- Bonjour, chapter 4: Personal Identity & Free Will (Parfit, 237-247; Edwards, 271-274)

Suggested Readings:

Hume: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*  
 Schopenhauer: *The World as Will and as Representation*  
 Nietzsche: *Beyond Good & Evil*  
 D.L. Miller: Nothing Almost Sees Miracles! Self & No-Self in Psychology & Religion  
 David Loy: *Lack and Transcendence*  
 Ron Leifer: *The Happiness Project*  
 R.D. Laing: *The Divided Self*  
 C.G. Jung: *The Undiscovered Self*  
 Wilhelm Reich: *Character Analysis*  
 Walter Davis: *Inwardness and Existence*

#### **IV. MORALITY & ETHICS**

The Good & The Just  
 Individual and Social Responsibility  
 Categorical Imperative & Relativism  
 Utilitarianism  
 Objective & Subjective Morality  
 Morality Without Theology

Readings:

- Nagel, chapter 7: Right and Wrong
- Nagel, chapter 8: Justice
- Mill: *Utilitarianism*
- Bonjour, chapter 5: Morality and Moral Problems (Aristotle, 396-405; Kant, 353-362; Mill, highlights, 329-335; Singer, 348-352)
- Rachels: The Challenge of Cultural Relativism
- Feinberg: Psychological Egoism
- Bonjour, chapter 6: The Legitimacy of Government and the Nature of Justice (Hobbes, 449-458; Locke, 459-468; Rawls, 483-494)

Suggested Readings:

Plato: *The Republic*  
 Aristotle: *Nichomachean Ethics*  
 Immanuel Kant: *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*  
 Friedrich Nietzsche: *Beyond Good & Evil*  
 Simone de Beauvoir: *The Second Sex*  
 Dietrich Bonhoeffer: *Ethics*  
 Alasdair MacIntyre: *After Virtue*  
 Hannah Arendt: *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*  
 Richard Bernstein: *The Abuse of Evil*  
 Peter Singer (ed.): *Ethics*  
 Carol Gilligan: *In a Different Voice*

John Caputo: *Against Ethics*

## **V. PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION**

Epistemology & Metaphysics Revisited

Cosmological, Ontological, and Teleological Arguments

Belief & Disbelief

The Meaning of Faith

The Death of God

Readings:

- Nagel, chapter 9: Death
- Bonjour, chapter 7: God and Faith (Aquinas, 518-520; Hume, 524-526, 538-549; Anselm, 554-555; Kant, 558-559; Mackie, 570-575)
- Nietzsche: *The Gay Science* (sections 108-125) & *The Antichrist* (selections)

Suggested Readings:

David Hume: *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*

Immanuel Kant: *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*

Saint Augustine: *Confessions & The City of God*

Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologiae*

Friedrich Schleiermacher: *The Christian Faith*

Ludwig Feuerbach: *The Essence of Religion*

Soren Kierkegaard: *The Sickness Unto Death*

William James: *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

Sigmund Freud: *The Future of an Illusion & Civilization and Its Discontents*

Bertrand Russell: *Why I Am Not a Christian*

Weston La Barre: *The Ghost Dance*

Paul Kurtz: *The Transcendental Temptation*

William Alston: *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*

J.Z. Smith: *Relating Religion*

Slavoj Zizek: *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*

## **VI. MEANING, EXISTENCE, & MOTIVATION**

Existentialism

Essence and Existence

Significance & Insignificance

Love, Despair, & Faith

Morality Without God

Readings:

- Nagel, chapter 10: The Meaning of Life
- Sartre: The Humanism of Existentialism / Freedom and Responsibility
- Nishitani: *Religion and Nothingness*, chapter 1: What is Religion?

Suggested Readings:

Simone de Beauvoir: *The Ethics of Ambiguity*

*The Second Sex*



*All Men Are Mortal*Maurice Friedman: *The Worlds of Existentialism*Albert Camus: *The Myth of Sisyphus*Jean-Paul Sartre: *Being and Nothingness**Nausea**No Exit*Ralph Ellison: *Invisible Man*William Barrett: *Irrational Man*Herbert Marcuse: *One Dimensional Man*Don Browning: *Generative Man*Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*Julia Kristeva: *Black Sun*Martin Buber: *I and Thou*Ernest Becker: *The Birth & Death of Meaning*Walter Davis: *Deracination**Inwardness and Existence*Solomon, et al.: *The Worm at the Core*Gordon: *Existence in Black**Fear of Black Consciousness*Murakami: *Kafka on the Shore***VII. CONCLUSIONS**

The Wisdom Gleaned

Further Explorations: Philosophy at the Dawn of a New Century

Modernism &amp; Postmodernism

Deconstruction &amp; its Opponents

A Few Final Suggestions – *By No Means Complete* – For Future Reading (not for the faint at heart, but you have your whole life for this!):

Lewis Gordon: *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy**Freedom, Justice, and Colonialization*Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Truth and Method**Philosophical Hermeneutics*Paul Ricoeur: *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences**Freud and Philosophy*Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology**The Post Card*Rodolphe Gasche: *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection**Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida*Jean-Francois Lyotard: *The Postmodern Condition*Christopher Norris: *What's Wrong With Postmodernism?**Deconstruction: Theory and Practice**Against Relativism*Emmanuel Levinas: *Basic Philosophical Writings**Totality and Infinity**Alterity and Transcendence*

Richard Rorty: *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*

*Truth and Progress*

Willard Quine: *Quintessence: Basic Readings from the Philosophy of W. V. Quine*

*Ontological Relativity*

Hilary Putnam: *Reason, Truth, and History*

*Ethics Without Ontology*

Judith Butler: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*

Linda Alcoff: *Feminist Epistemologies*

Charles Winquist: *Desiring Theology*

Masao Abe: *Zen and Comparative Studies*

*Zen and Western Thought*

Kitaro Nishida: *An Inquiry Into the Good*