

## **Problems of Philosophy**

---

### **COURSE OUTLINE**

This course is an introduction to some of the most fascinating problems of philosophy. Through the reading and discussion of selected texts, we will investigate how these problems impact on our everyday life. Some of the central questions we will address are the following: What can we know about what exists? What does that say about us? What makes us the persons we are? What is the moral good? Are we responsible for our actions? What does feminism mean? How is the state constituted? How do political institutions raise racial issues? How should cultural minorities be taken into account into contemporary democracies?

Throughout the course, students will be familiarized with some of the core areas of philosophy (metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, feminism, political theory). They will also develop reading and argumentative skills that are useful inside and outside philosophy – in particular: how to analyze and critically assess a complex argument.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- (i) Identify and explain some of the main areas of philosophy (metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, feminism, political theory)
- (ii) Communicate philosophical ideas in writing
- (iii) Summarize and explain the main theories and concepts studied throughout the course
- (iv) Provide a critical analysis of a philosophical argument
- (v) Apply core philosophical ideas to a case study

### **EVALUATION**

- (10%) A 700-word analysis of a philosophical problem drawn from Descartes' text  
*This assignment works toward objectives (ii) and (iii).*

You will be required to reconstruct and analyze the main steps of Descartes' argument.

- (20%) Case study  
*This assignment works toward objectives (ii), (iii) and (v).*

The case study must be completed in teams of three or four. Each team will be required to explain and apply the views of either Locke or Schechtman on personal identity to a case study provided by the instructor.

- (25%) A 1200-word critical response to one of Holroyd's arguments  
*This assignment works toward objectives (ii) and (iv).*

## Charlotte Sabourin

Sample syllabus: introductory course

You will be required to summarize and carefully explain Baron's argument. You will also have to provide a criticism of the argument.

- (30%) Final exam

*This assignment works toward objectives (i), (ii), (iii) and (v).*

The in-class exam will consist of short open questions about material covered during the lectures and of another case study based **either** on hooks' conception of feminism **or** on Mills' epistemology of ignorance.

- (15%) Participation

*This assignment works toward objectives (i) and (iii).*

You are required to come to class having read the reading assigned for that day, and prepared to discuss it. You will also be expected to turn in written responses to weekly questions on the readings.

## READING SCHEDULE

### Week 1: Incitement to philosophy

Russell, Bertrand. 1997. "The Value of Philosophy". In *The Problems of Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

### Week 2: Knowledge (I)

Descartes, René, and John Cottingham. 2013. *Meditations on First Philosophy: with Selections from the Objections and Replies*. New York: Cambridge University Press. [excerpts]

### Week 3: Knowledge (II)

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, and D. A. Landes. 2012. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge. [excerpts]

### Week 4: Consciousness

Nagel, Thomas. 1974. "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?". *The Philosophical Review* 83 (4): 435-450.

### Week 5: Personal identity (I)

Locke, John. 2008. "Of Identity and Diversity". In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (ed. P. Phemister). Oxford, England; New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

### Week 6: Personal identity (II)

Schechtman, Marya. 2005. "Personal Identity and the Past". *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 12 (1): 9-22.

### Week 7: Moral responsibility (I)

Kant, Immanuel, Mary J. Gregor, and Jens Timmermann. 2012. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [excerpts]

### Week 8: Moral responsibility (II)

Baron, Marcia. 2001. "Crime, Genes, and Responsibility". In D. Wasserman & R. Wachbroit (Eds.), *Genetics and Criminal Behavior*. Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press.

## **Charlotte Sabourin**

Sample syllabus: introductory course

### **Week 9: Implicit bias**

Holroyd, Jules, et al. 2017. "What Is Implicit Bias?". *Philosophy Compass*. 12 (10).

Lee, Carole J. 2014. "Asian Americans, positive stereotyping, and philosophy". Newsletter, The American Philosophical Association: Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies 14 (1): 2-7.

### **Week 10: Feminism (I)**

Truth, Sojourner. "Ain't I a Woman?" – speech delivered at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, on May 29, 1851.

Bartky, Sandra Lee. 1975. "Toward a Phenomenology of Feminist Consciousness". *Social Theory and Practice* 3 (4): 425-439.

### **Week 11: Feminism (II)**

hooks, bell. 2015. "Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression". In *Feminist Theory : From Margin to Center*. New York: Routledge.

### **Week 12: The social contract**

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 2006. *The Social Contract*. New York: Penguin Books. [excerpts]

### **Week 13: The racial contract and the epistemology of ignorance**

Mills, Charles W. 1997. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. [excerpts]

### **Week 14: Multiculturalism**

Taylor, Charles, and Amy Gutmann. 1992. *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition": An Essay*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. [excerpts]