

COURSE OUTLINE

FOUNDATIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

This course aims to introduce students to the main concepts and ideas of the key thinkers in the history of Western and Continental philosophy. Using extracts from core texts, students will develop an awareness of the important philosophical issues and the responses they have generated.

Central philosophical themes are explored, and the problems raised are studied in relation to these thinkers and ideas. Themes include: Metaphysics, The Existence of God, Existentialism, Empiricism, Rationalism, and Humanism. The writings of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Kierkegaard, amongst others, will be examined. Students are not expected to read key texts in their entirety.

1. **Greek Metaphysics** - The role and nature of 'being' in the works of Plato and Aristotle. The theory of 'forms' and the 'four causes'. The concept of the soul. The relationship between form and matter. The key texts are Plato's *Republic Bks. VII and X* and Aristotle's *Metaphysics Bks. Zeta and Theta*.
2. **Descartes and Locke** – The debate concerning whether or not knowledge is a product of reason (rationalism) or experience (empiricism). The revival of the Classical debate over dualism and materialism. The relationship between concepts and sensations. Descartes' attempts to prove the existence of God. Locke's attack on innateness and the notion that the mind is a 'tabula rasa' at birth. The key texts are Descartes' *Meditations* and extracts from Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
3. **Rationalism vs. Empiricism** - The development of the debate regarding whether or not knowledge is based on reason or experience. Arguments over our knowledge of the external world or, indeed, whether or not a physical world actually exists. This topic will introduce students to Spinoza, Leibniz, Berkeley and Hume. The key text is Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.
4. **Kant and German Idealism** – Resolving the tension between empiricism and rationalism: the special role of consciousness and conceptual frameworks. The limitations of human knowledge and the noumenal. The impact of Kantian metaphysics on ethics. An examination of the development of Kantian ethics into a philosophy of the self in Fichte and Schelling. Extracts are from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.
5. **Hegel and Consciousness** – Hegel's attempt to resolve Kant's critique of metaphysics into a dialectical system of 'absolute' idealism. The demonstration of Hegel's system in the progress of the history of ideas. The importance of the state and participation in it. Influences on Feuerbach, Marx and others. Extracts are from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*.
6. **Subjectivity, the Self and Early Existentialism** - Kierkegaard's response to Hegel's dialectics: the dangers of turning theology into anthropology and the transcendence of God. The importance of the 'individual'. Kierkegaard's attack upon State religion. The divided self. Truth as subjectivity and being as 'becoming'. Christian existentialism. Extracts are from Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death* and *Fear and Trembling*.

7. **Late 19th Century German Philosophy and the Challenge of Nietzsche** – Philosophical pessimism in Schopenhauer. Nietzsche's critique of the history of European philosophy. The relationship between history, philosophy, politics and religion. Atheism and the 'death of God'. The rise of the 'superman'. The key text is Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*.
8. **Existentialism and Phenomenology** – The Heideggerian turn in existentialism to examine the fundamental question of what 'being' is. Heidegger's insistence on the importance of engaging with the fact of our individual mortality and living authentically. The influence of Heidegger upon Sartre. Existentialism, anxiety and responsibility. The significance of self-consciousness to existence and the belief that human nature is defined by activity. The key text is Sartre's *Existentialism and Humanism*.
9. **Personalism and Personhood** – The philosophical trend in continental philosophy from Feuerbach onwards to recognising the status of the other person as 'other' and respecting their autonomy. The notion of inter-subjectivity and not objectifying relationships; the significance of this for ethics and religion. Extracts will be taken from the works of Buber and Levinas.
10. **Analytic Philosophy** - The branches of contemporary philosophy which are distinct from the continental tradition and focus on the demonstrable sciences, language and logic. Austria and the 'Vienna Circle' movement. The verification principle and its application to the philosophy of mind and the meaningfulness of language. This topic will introduce students to Carnap, Ayer, Ryle and Wittgenstein.

Objectives

- To gain some knowledge and understanding of philosophy through the introduction of important philosophical issues and approaches to problems within them.
- To enable the student to develop a critical and constructive approach to problems, and to engage in debates in a rigorous and rational way.
- To foster increased skills in comprehension, interpretation, analysis and evaluation with which to formulate independent opinions supported by viable justification.

Outcomes

- To demonstrate, orally and in written form, knowledge of a range of issues arising in the themes selected for study.
- To show knowledge and understanding of some important positions developed within debates on these themes, and the arguments employed.
- To have acquired knowledge of some major philosophers' ideas and the concepts used within their works.

Credit

This class is normally delivered over one term, with 90 teaching contact hours or equivalent in the Michaelmas term, and 60 teaching contact hours for Hilary and Trinity terms. For students requesting credit, we recommend the transfer of three college credits for Michaelmas and two college credits for Hilary and Trinity, on successful completion of the class.

Assessment Process

Students typically complete 2 substantial essays per term in addition to regular classwork and independent reading preparation. The essay marks, combined with an assessment of student performance in class, make up the final grade for the course.

Assessment breakdown:

- 60% essays
- 30% classwork
- 10% class participation

Example Essay Assignments

1. Can an absolutist theory of values be rationally justified?
2. "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him." Discuss.
3. Discuss the differences between 'I feel certain', 'I am certain' and 'It is certain' with reference to conditions which must be satisfied for there to be knowledge that a proposition is true.
4. "Authority amounts to nothing more than the possession of power." Discuss.

Assessment Criteria

DISTINCTION Grade A	Student clearly demonstrates an ability to analyse, interpret and critically evaluate the issues, and presents relevant evidence supporting his/her own judgements with reasoned and considered argument. The student shows imagination and insight in his/her responses to issues raised in debate.
CREDIT Grade B	Student demonstrates an ability to both analyse and evaluate relevant material and to form judgements with supporting justification.
MERIT Grade C	Student demonstrates a somewhat limited appreciation of the key issues, with supporting material not always well selected, but some relevant material is present. Evaluation is shown but tends to be lacking in depth.
PASS Grade D	Student displays an ability to analyse and interpret a limited range of relevant material. Reasoned criticism will tend to be replaced by the assertion of positions. Problems may be treated as one-dimensional.
FAIL	None of the criteria listed above followed

If you are unable to obtain books locally, they may be ordered from <http://www.bookshop/blackwell.co.uk> or www.Amazon.co.uk