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Introduction to Philosophy

Teófilo Reis
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INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 10200 – Fall 2020

Instructor: Teófilo Reis

E-mail: treis@gradcenter.cuny.edu

Course Description

Philosophy is a broad field. With more than two thousand years of history, the discipline encompasses a variety of topics. In this course, we will see philosophy both as a method and as a collection of contents. The methodological aspect will guide us through texts from different traditions. As we will see, what they have in common is the careful way of proceeding, of questioning assumptions, of imagining different solutions. In short, all these texts are forms of interrogating the world. This takes us to the content dimension of the discipline. The philosophy canon — the list of philosophical works that are dominantly judged to be of the highest quality and greatest significance— is almost exclusively white, western, and male, and the questions it addresses are usually linked to the interests of these groups. This is the result of a long history of nonwhite, nonwestern, women's (and other marginalized) voices being ignored in academia and beyond. What I hope to demonstrate to you in this course is that philosophy is much more inclusive. A more inclusive syllabus can reveal the links between the dominant texts in philosophy and works from different traditions of thought, from all kinds of people, all over the world. Studying philosophy more inclusively is to remain faithful to the original ideal of love of wisdom that characterizes the discipline.

Course Objectives

The course will help you

- (1) Understand some classic and contemporary philosophical literature and fundamental debates.
- (2) Develop your own opinions about the connections between ideas discussed in the classroom and real-world struggles.

- (3) Improve your reading comprehension and interpretation skills.
- (4) Enhance the clarity and persuasiveness of your written and spoken arguments.
- (5) Learn to identify and correct flawed lines of reasoning.

Grading Scale

Participation.....	20%
Quizzes	15%
Reading reflections	15%
Short essay	20%
Final essay	30%

Course Requirements

Participation (20%) - The discussion aspect of this course is critically important, and as such I take measures to encourage discussion. In order to participate, you need to show up in classes. Part of the grade will be determined by your willingness to engage online and in class discussions. For each assigned reading, we will make a warm up online session in which everyone is expected to participate. Feel free to quote a passage, write a sentence about the text, contribute with clarification questions. All these activities will count towards your participation. In class, I expect you to engage discussions and work with your colleagues in group activities.

Quizzes (15%) – Every other you will have to answer a brief quiz in the beginning of the class. The quizzes will be short and easy: five true or false questions about topics we discussed in the previous week, and it will take no more than 10 minutes.

Reading reflections (15%) – Every other week you will write a reflection about one of the texts we studied. The reading reflections will be short — 300 to 350 words each. They will be pass/fail (that is, you get 100% or 0%). The prompts for the reading reflections will vary along the semester.

Short essay (20%) and final essay (30%): we will discuss in class the topics for the short essay (at least 900 words). The final essay (at least 1500 words) is a philosophical reflection on any topic of your choice.

Safe space

I aim for this class to be an inclusive space for all students and as safe a space as possible; absolutely no discrimination in any form, explicit or subtle, will be tolerated – whether on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, income, mental or physical health, ability, personal characters, or the like. If you feel that something in the classroom atmosphere is making you uncomfortable in any way during the course, please let me know.

As we discuss the texts along the semester, we may address some sensitive issues. Always remember that disagreement does not imply disrespect. In this class we will have room for disagreement, but at no time disrespect will be accepted.

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty

Academic dishonesty is prohibited in The City University of New York. Please refer to the [CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity](#) to find out more about this important topic. Notice that plagiarism is a serious form of academic dishonesty. We will discuss what plagiarism is and how to avoid it in more detail in class.

Absences and late submissions

I expect you to arrive on time. Attendance counts toward your participation grade. The deadlines for this class are hard deadlines, that is, under normal circumstances, I will not accept late submissions. I understand that emergencies or other unpredictable situations occur. In such cases, please let me know as soon as possible so I can make alternative arrangements for you.

Please be aware of the NY State Education Law, which provides that:

- i) Any student in an institution of higher education who is unable, because of their religious beliefs, to attend classes on a particular day or days shall, because of such absence on the particular day or days, be excused from any examination or any study or work requirements.
- ii) It shall be the responsibility of the faculty to make available to each student who is absent from school, because of religious beliefs, an equivalent opportunity to make

up any examination, study or work requirements which they may have missed because of such absence on any particular day or days.

- iii) Any student who is aggrieved by the alleged failure of any faculty or administrative officials to comply in good faith shall be entitled to maintain an action or proceeding in the supreme court of the county in which such institution of higher education is located for the enforcement of their rights.

Accessibility

The AccessAbility Center/Student Disability Services (AAC/SDS) ensures equal access and full participation to all of City College's programs, services and activities. Their resources are available upon request. You can contact AAC/SDS [online](#), at their offices (NAC 1/218) or by phone at 212-650-5913. Once registered, please let me know of your accessibility needs and we can discuss how best to proceed.

Technology

Laptops and tablets are permitted in class for note-taking and to read the assigned texts; phones are not permitted. If you need your phone out for an emergency, please notify me before class. Otherwise, in-class phone usage will count against your participation grade.

Schedule and Reading Assignments

All the readings will be posted on Blackboard as PDFs. I will also post the direct links to assigned videos or podcast episodes. Please bring a copy (printed or otherwise) of the assigned text(s) to class to refer to during discussion.

Walter Mignolo: "Philosophy and the Colonial Difference"

Epistemology

Zhuangzi: "Equalizing Assessments of Things" + René Descartes: excerpts from *Meditations of First Philosophy*

Immanuel Kant: excerpts from *Critique of Pure Reason*

Peter Ikhane: "Epistemic Insight from an African Way of Knowing"

Miranda Fricker: The Central Case of Testimonial Injustice (from *Epistemic Injustice*)

Emallon Davis: excerpts from "On Epistemic Appropriation"

Political philosophy

Plato: discussion about *The Republic*

Thomas Hobbes: excerpts from *Leviathan*

Kim Hall: "Feminist and Queer Intersections with Disability Studies"

Charles Mills: excerpts from *The Racial Contract*

The Racial Contract, The Sexual Contract, The Ability Contract

Pieter Duvenage: "The Politics of Memory and Forgetting After Apartheid"

Ethics and moral philosophy

Aristotle: excerpts from *The Nicomachean Ethics*

John Stuart Mill: excerpts from *Utilitarianism*

Friedrich Nietzsche: excerpts from *The Genealogy of Morals*

Naomi Zack: "The Ethics of Disaster Planning: Preparation vs Response"

Alison Jaggar and Theresa Tobin: "Moral Justification in an Unjust World"

Peter Adamson: "The Ethical Treatment of Animals"

Metaphysics

Helen Beebe: excerpts from *Free Will: An Introduction*

David Hume: "Of Liberty and Necessity"

Satishchandra Chatterjee: excerpts from *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*

Sally Haslanger: "The Sex/Gender Distinction and the Social Construction of Reality"

Derek Parfit: "Personal Identity"