

PHIL 102 B1: Introduction to Philosophy - Knowledge and Reality
Winter 2023 - MW 11-11:50 am
Friday discussion session (various times)

Instructor: Prof. Amy Schmitter

Course Description

What is philosophy? Philosophy is many things, but not always what people think it is. Philosophy typically asks about the basic principles, assumptions and nature by which we approach the world around us and ourselves. But just as important is its practice: formulating questions, analyzing and clarifying concepts, giving reasons, and constructing and defending positions in answer to its questions. This course serves as an introduction to some of the problems and techniques in two main areas of philosophy: metaphysics (the study of being or reality) and epistemology (the theory of knowledge), as well as in such related areas as the philosophy of mind. Because it is an introductory survey, we will look at a variety of different issues and approaches; the aim is to develop the craft of asking questions and to refine our sense for what is question-*able*. The way we will do so is by examining selections from many different works by well-known philosophers, written over a period of about 2500 years, in a variety of languages, and from different regions. By trying to figure out their questions, concepts, arguments and accounts, we can develop our own skills. You do not have to decide what your final views are, but you will be expected to work your way towards taking positions about the problems we study and to defend those positions by explaining them clearly, analyzing them thoroughly and by giving reasons that support the points made. (Feel free to change your mind later.)

There are no prerequisites, but expect to do a fair amount of work: the reading is difficult and both active participation and an open mind are required. But if pursued properly, philosophy can help clarify, deepen and strengthen your thinking and build conceptual skills and discipline that will help in just about any field.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, you should:

1. Be able to recognize and develop well-formulated philosophical questions, and to critique badly-formed or biased ones.
2. Be able to identify many of the main questions in metaphysics, epistemology and related sub-fields, such as philosophy of mind and philosophy of religion.
3. Be able to recognize a range of central concepts and distinctions in those fields, such as reality v. appearance, definitions, essences v. accidents, mind v. body, validity and soundness of arguments, belief v. knowledge, justification, teleology, genus v. species, skepticism, or others as is suitable to the readings and interests of the class.

4. Be able to construct and analyze a variety of different kinds of arguments and argumentative forms, such as deductive arguments, arguments by analogy, reductio ad absurdum, etc., as well as to recognize (and avoid) some common formal and informal fallacies.
5. Have improved your expository and analytical writing at every level.
6. Be well-prepared for higher-level courses (200-level and above) in the history of philosophy, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science and philosophy of religion.