Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy

Fall 2019

Tuesday/Thursday 10:20-11:40AM

South Kedzie Hall Room 538

Professor: Taylor Mills

Pronouns: she/her/hers

Email: [millsta1@msu.edu](mailto:millsta1@msu.edu)

Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 12:00-1:00PM

**Course Description:**

This course will present a survey of topics and ideas most often addressed in the discipline of philosophy. For students interested in philosophy as a major or minor, this course will provide a foundational approach to big discussions in the discipline, and hopefully through a survey of topics, those interested in a particular unit will be able to study this further in other philosophy courses explicitly dedicated to the ideas and authors in that unit. For students who are unsure about their future relationships with philosophy or who just need to meet a general education requirement, this course is designed to make relevant the ideas in philosophy to our day-to-day lives, with each unit focusing on some aspect of “the self” or identity. Students will learn about prevalent discussions in philosophy, practice constructing arguments and philosophical papers, and explore non-canonical thinkers that challenge commonly-accepted approaches, as seen in the works of poets, black feminist epistemology, indigenous and decolonial theories, film, and novels.

**Course Objectives:**

By the end of this course students can expect to have the following:

1. A basic understanding of what the major areas in the discipline of philosophy are (metaphysics, ethics, political philosophy, social philosophies, epistemology, and existentialism).
2. Developed skills in critical thinking, particularly with regard to challenging commonly accepted theories in philosophy as well as practicing charitability to thinkers and peers’ ideas.
3. Improved basic writing skills and developed skills in argumentation.
4. Explored facets of “the self”: one’s identity, positionality, beliefs, and values, in the context of philosophical discourses.

**Required Texts:**

Most texts will be available online in pdf or website link format. The following are books that will be required for this class. If purchasing these is a concern I recommend checking the library for a copy. If there are no available copies please come and talk with me.

* *Borderlands/La Frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa
* *Memory Serves* by Lee Maracle
* *Beloved* by Toni Morrison
* *The Plague* by Albert Camus

**Course Requirements:**

In addition to completing the assigned readings for each week, students will have the following assignments throughout the semester:

* **Weekly Logs**-at the beginning of each week students are to complete a brief summary of the assigned readings for that week, identify what they think is the main thesis, and ask a critical question of the text. Additionally students are asked to briefly answer the questions: “Who benefits from this argument if it is true? What are the ramifications of this argument?” Lastly, students should consider what this author’s work might mean or say for “the self” and how this text might be relevant to their lives personally and their own sense of self. These are due at the beginning of the week with an initial 5 points for completion. They will not be graded until the end of the week, during which time students are encouraged to modify their answers after the week’s discussions. Students will earn a total of 15 points each week for this assignment. 195 pts

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| **Week** | **Summary** | **Thesis** | **Question** | **Who benefits?** | **The Self and Personal Relevance** |
|  | 300-500 words | Restate thesis in 1-2 sentences | Ask a critical question | Who benefits from this argument if it is true? What are the ramifications of this argument? | How might this text be relevant to you personally in terms of your interests, beliefs, values, experiences? |

* **Short Paper Argument Projects**-Throughout the semester students will write two short argument paper projects of 1-2 pages double-spaced, one on a topic during the Ethical Self unit (due the Thursday of Week 6) and one on a topic either from the Political Self unit or the Social/Relational Self unit (due Thursday of Week 13). For these assignments, students will first choose from the list of topic options, presented at the start of each unit. The first version of the paper will argue in support of a particular stance based on the selected topic. The second version of the paper must argue against the prior version’s stance. Both arguments must be well-crafted and considerate. In total students will have four short papers. Each short paper will be worth 30 points. 120 pts
* **Final Project-**Because this course is serving different means for different students, students will have the two options for how to complete this assignment. The focus of the assignment must be in some sense addressing the question, *what is the self?* The rough draft for this project is due Thursday of Week 10, worth 50 points, and the final project is worth 150 points.
  + Track A-For students considering or committed to a philosophy major or minor, or for students considering careers in academic professions, this track requires a standard philosophy paper. To respond to the question of what is the self, students may consider answering this question from the perspective of one of the thinkers from the syllabus, presenting a critical analysis and an argument about whether or not the student thinks this perspective is accurate. Students may also consider responding to the question with their own answer and use at least three thinkers from the syllabus in defense of their position. In these papers, students must consider possible objections to their main claims and respond appropriately. Papers must be between 1200-1800 words, double-spaced, one-inch margins with proper citations and a bibliography (which does not count towards word count).
  + Track B-For students not interested in pursuing philosophy further or who would like to explore the ideas in this course through a more creative lens, this project entails an open-ended creative work. Students are asked to address the prompt question through alternative mediums, including but certainly not limited to: poetry, fine arts, music, dance, short stories, film, or digital creations. Students can incorporate texts and projects outside of this course, but the majority of the final project must include original work (meaning students need to write their own poetry rather than exclusively put together other poets’ works). Accompanying the project should include a brief report (1-2 pages double-spaced) describing how the project answers the prompt question and the influences from the course thinkers.
* **Midterm Exam-**the midterm exam will be an in-class test in which students will be asked a series of questions about one thinker from each of the three units covered thus far, as well as basic definitions of terms used throughout the course. This midterm is worth 85 points.

**Grading:**

**Total Points: 630**

* **Weekly Logs-**195 points total [15 points per week x 13 weeks]
* **Short Paper Argument Projects-**120 points total [30 points per paper x 4 papers]
* **Final Project-**200 points total [rough draft 50 points + final version 150 points]
* **Midterm Exam-**75 points
* **Attendance and Participation-**25 points

Grading Scale: The final number of points will then be converted to a percentage in which a 90%-100% equates to an A (4.0), 85%-89.5% is an A- (3.5), 82%-84.5% is a B (3.0), 77%-81.5% is a B- (2.5), 74-76.5% is a C (2.0), 70%-73.5% is a C- (1.75), 67%-69.5% is a D (1.5), 65%-66.5% is a D- (1.25) and below a 65% is a failing grade (<1.0).

**Attendance and Late Work Policy:**

Attendance is required and will affect students grades after three unexcused absences. Please come talk with me or contact me if there are extenuating circumstances regarding excused absences. Late work will be accepted up to 24 hours after the due date, but will automatically drop the assignment down by the equivalent of one letter grade (A to B, C to D etc.). After three late assignments from a student, late work will not be accepted. If there are extenuating circumstances, talk with me and we can discuss.

**Academic Honesty**:

[*The Spartan Code of Honor*](https://honorcode.msu.edu/)*states, "As a Spartan, I will strive to uphold values of the****highest ethical standard****. I will practice honesty in my work, foster honesty in my peers, and take pride in knowing that****honor is worth more than grades****. I will carry these values beyond my time as a student at Michigan State University, continuing the endeavor to build personal integrity in all that I do." In addition, Article 2.III.B.2 of the*[*Student Rights and Responsibilites (SRR)*](http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/academic-freedom-for-students-at-michigan-state-university)*states that "The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." The (insert name of unit offering course) adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in General Student Regulations 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades; the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations. (See*[*Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide*](http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/)*and/or the MSU Web site:*[*www.msu.edu*](http://www.msu.edu/)*.)  
Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, you are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, lab work, quizzes, tests and exams, without assistance from any source. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course. Also, you are not authorized to use the www.allmsu.com Web site to complete any course work in this course. Students who violate MSU academic integrity rules may receive a penalty grade, including a failing grade on the assignment or in the course. Contact your instructor if you are unsure about the appropriateness of your course work. (See also the*[*Academic Integrity*](https://ombud.msu.edu/academic-integrity/index.html)*webpage.)*

**CLASS SCHEDULE**

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| Week | Tuesday | Thursday |
| **UNIT 1: WHO ARE YOU? & THE PHILOSOPHICAL SELF [Metaphysics]** | | |
| **Week 1** | **Introductions and Syllabus Day** | **Culturally Embedded Self** |
| ***Readings:*** | NA | Gloria Anzaldúa-*Borderlands/La Frontera* (Chapter 2 & 5) |
| ***Learning Outcomes:*** | Start to form a community, start to unpack what philosophy is, and review the syllabus | Think through the different facets of identity and the influences these have on the self (culture, language, gender, sexuality etc.) |
| **Week 2** | **Dualism, Ideal Theory, and the Rational Self** | **Non-Ideal Theory** |
| ***Readings:*** | Rene Descartes excerpts | Charles Mills-*Non-Cartesian Sums,* Federico Garcia Lorca-*El Duende* |
| ***Learning Outcomes:*** | Unpack the basics of Cartesian dualism, ideal theory, and its problems (basic metaphysics) | Non-ideal theory, consider artistic expressions of the self, self as land-based a StoryMap |
| **UNIT 2: THE MORAL SELF [Ethics]** | | |
| **Week 3:** | **Timeline Overview & Colonialism** | **Virtue Ethics** |
| ***Readings:*** | Timeline Summaries & Tuck & Yang | Aristotle & Alasdair McIntyre |
| ***Learning Outcomes:*** | Unpack colonial historical narrative domination of the Western canon, explore other theories of ethics, build a collaborative timeline, discuss decolonialism as part of indigenous ethics | Discuss the main points of virtue ethics in a historical sense from Aristotle, and from a modern perspective of McIntyre |
| **Week 4:** | **Kantian Ethics** | **Kantian Ethics (continued)** |
| ***Readings:*** | Excerpts from Immanuel Kant |  |
| ***Learning Outcomes:*** | Understand the basics of Kantian ethics. |  |
| **Week 5:** | **Consequentialism** | **Feminist Ethics** |
| ***Readings:*** | John Stuart Mill excerpts from *Utilitarianism* | Carol Gilligan “Feminist Ethics: Ethics of Care” |
| ***Learning Outcomes:*** | Work through the basics of consequentialism/utilitarianism | Contrast consequentialism with feminist ethics, particularly care ethics |
| **UNIT 3: THE POLITICAL SELF [Political Philosophy]** | | |
| **Week 6:** | **Intersectionality** | **Feminist Politics** |
| ***Readings:*** | Excerpts from *Sister Citizen*-Melissa Harris-Perry | “Feminist Politics: Where We Stand”-bell hooks, excerpts from *The Meaning of Freedom*: *And Other Difficult Dialogues*-Angela Davis |
| ***Learning Outcomes:*** | Gain a basic understanding of intersectionality and the politics of recognition | An introduction to basic perspectives of feminist politics |
| **Week 7:** | **Western Politics** | **Western Politics (continued)** |
| ***Readings:*** | Excerpts from Rawls and Locke | Excerpts from Rawls and Locke |
| ***Learning Outcomes:*** | What is the veil of ignorance, ideal theory again, social contract theory | What is the veil of ignorance, ideal theory again, social contract theory |
| **Week 8:** | **Project Work and Review Day** | **Midterm** |
| **UNIT 4: THE RELATIONAL/SOCIAL SELF [Philosophy of Language, Art, History]** | | |
| *Part 1: Community* | | |
| **Week 9:** | **Community History** | **Community History** |
| ***Readings:*** | Excerpts from *Memory Serves*-Lee Maracle | “Indigenous science (fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral dystopias”-Kyle Whyte  Brief excerpt from *The Fire Next Time-*James Baldwin (pages 100-125) |
| ***Learning Outcomes:*** | Discuss the concept of history, who writes it, and how memory plays a crucial role in community identity | Address situating oneself/positionality, class activity of tracing one’s own history and the myths surrounding it |
| *Part 2: Communication* | | |
| **Week 10:** | **“Language”** | **Art** |
| ***Readings:*** | Chapters 6&7 of *Borderlands/La Frontera*­-Gloria Anzaldúa, [Overview of Western Philosophy of Language](https://www.iep.utm.edu/lang-phi/) | Excerpts from “But is it art?”-Cynthia Freeland, Collected Poems-Maya Angelou |
| ***Learning Outcomes:*** | Unpack the role of language in community, history, colonialism, and identity | Arts and crafts in class activity; discuss art as a form of communication |
| *Part 3: Love* | | |
| **Week 11:** | **Love, Sex, and Sexuality** | **Environmentalism** |
| ***Readings:*** | *Plato On Love,* “Lesbian ‘Sex’”-Marilyn Frye | *Rabindranath Tagore Poems* |
| ***Learning Outcomes:*** | What is love? What is sex? | Class outside, weather permitting, discuss human relationship to nature in the context of “what is love?” |
| **UNIT 5: THE KNOWING SELF [Epistemology]** | | |
| **Week 12:** | **Buddhism** | **The Knowing Mind** |
| ***Readings:*** | Stanford Encyclopedia on Confucius and on Buddhism | Stanford Encyclopedia on Epistemology |
| ***Learning Outcomes:*** | Unpack the basics of Buddhism and Confucius philosophies | Present the main ideas of Plato, Kant, and Descartes understanding what it means to know; group activity working on these three approaches |
| **Week 13:** | **The Knowing Body** | **Creativity, Imagination** |
| ***Readings:*** | *Sister Outsider*-Audre Lorde, “Felt Theory”-Diane Million | Excerpt from *Beloved-*Toni Morrison, “On intellectual diversity”-Kristie Dotson |
| ***Learning Outcomes:*** | Comparison of what it means to know in the mind to what it means to know with one’s body. | Introduction to black feminist epistemology |
| **UNIT 6: THE EXISTENTIAL SELF [Existentialism]** | | |
| **Week 14:** | **Introduction to Existentialism** | **Nihilism** |
| ***Readings:*** | *The Plague-*Albert Camus | “Nihilism in Black America”-Cornel West, *Mr. Nobody* video |
| ***Learning Outcomes:*** | Introduction to existentialism, what is absurdism and nihilism | Application of existentialist concepts to intersectional racial identity politics |
| **Week 15:** | **Project Work and Review Day** | **Final Day Reflections** |

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

*(from the*[*Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD):*](http://counseling.msu.edu/)*Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at rcpd.msu.edu. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a Verified Individual Services Accommodation ("VISA") form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc.). Requests received after this date may not be honored.*

**Limits to confidentiality**

*Essays, journals, and other materials submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University's student record policies.  However, students should be aware that University employees, including instructors, may not be able to maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues to protect the health and safety of MSU community members and others.  As the instructor, I must report the following information to other University offices (including the*[*MSU Police Department*](http://police.msu.edu/)*) if you share it with me:*

*--Suspected child abuse/neglect, even if this maltreatment happened when you were a child,*

*--Allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment when they involve MSU students, faculty, or staff, and*

*--Credible threats of harm to oneself or to others.*

*These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared.  In almost all cases, it will be your decision whether you wish to speak with that individual.  If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting you are encouraged to make an appointment with the*[*MSU Counseling Center*](http://counseling.msu.edu/)*.*