

Philosophy P100

Introduction to Philosophy

a learning guide
(3 credit hours)

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Introduction

Philosophy P100

Introduction to Philosophy

Course Objectives and Content

So you want to study philosophy! Well, you have come to the right place, for this course introduces you to the field. We assume you have probably not had any formal training in philosophy, you're studying it for the first time. You probably want to learn what philosophy is all about, and wonder how studying it can benefit you. The course's very accessible textbook will help to satisfy your curiosity in as interesting a way as possible. Professor Velasquez organizes *Philosophy: A Text with Readings* around the notions of self-discovery and autonomy. If these notions mean little to you now, don't worry; you'll understand them by the end of the course. Each chapter in the textbook and each lesson in your learning guide deals with one or both of these notions. Thus they will help you gain knowledge about yourself and the world.

We begin with a broad introduction to the nature of philosophy by addressing its meaning, conduct, and value. The first lesson also introduces you to the principal divisions of philosophy and to "the father of philosophy," Socrates. The next lessons introduce various responses to such basic philosophical questions as:

What am I?

What is the relationship between philosophy and God?

What is the nature of reality?

What are the sources and limits of our knowledge?

What is truth?

What is right and good conduct?
What is the role of the individual in society?

If these questions don't interest you, this course isn't for you. But even if they interest you only moderately, you're taking the right course. As you read, study, and think about philosophers' and others' responses to these questions, you'll grow increasingly interested in pursuing them. Actively pursuing philosophical questions is quite addictive!

Nonetheless, philosophical inquiry is difficult for most students in the beginning, partly because of the nature of its questions. Most people haven't spent much time pondering, say, the nature of truth, but once you get into the spirit of responding to such questions, you'll feel increasingly comfortable in searching for suitable answers to them. And like it or not, as you read and think about these issues you'll gain self-knowledge. This result is one of the course's major objectives—perhaps the most crucial one.

You'll get to know the work of many thinkers here. You needn't remember what they've all written, or everything critics have said about them. But do approach the course materials with an open mind. Study the readings closely and carefully. You'll probably need to read each selection at least twice. Trust us, it *is* better the second time!

Required Texts

Manuel Velasquez. *Philosophy: A Text with Readings*, 8th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2002.

This jargon-free textbook, covering most of the important philosophical topics, includes examples summaries of its chapters. Marginal definitions and a glossary will help you grasp unfamiliar philosophical terminology.

The book offers selections from the great philosophers and information about their lives and ideas. It also contains some fictional readings. These pieces raise issues like those presented earlier in the chapters in an expository style.

Course Organization

In lesson 1 we explore the meaning, conduct, and value of philosophy. You'll encounter epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics as the principal divisions of philosophy. Also, several figures from the history of philosophy appear, such as Socrates, Voltaire, Jiddu Krishnamurti, some of the pre-Socratics, and some early Indian philosophers.

Lesson 2 explores several responses to the question, *What am I?* These include the rationalist, Western religious, scientific, existential, and Eastern responses. Here we also examine the feminist challenge to the rationalist view of human nature. We ponder

whether we are made of minds and bodies, other ways we can answer the What am I? question, and the implications of answers for our lives. Some thinkers covered are Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Confucius, and Elizabeth Spelman.

Lesson 3 provides responses to the question, *What is reality?* The metaphysical positions you'll study belong to materialism, idealism, pragmatism, phenomenology, existentialism, and free will versus determinism. You'll read selections from the works of Thomas Hobbes, George Berkeley, Jorge Luis Borges, and A. A. Luce.

Lesson 4 is your last assignment before the midterm exam. There you'll consider the nature of religion, proofs for the existence of God, alternatives to monotheism, the nature of belief, "radical" Western theologies, Eastern religions, and feminist theology. Some philosophers whose work we consider are Thomas Aquinas, René Descartes, and Anne Conway.

Lesson 5 is the midterm, and lesson 10 is the final exam. Both consist of essays only. You'll answer four of the ten possible exam questions given in this learning guide. You'll have thirty minutes to respond to each question.

The sources of knowledge is the subject of lesson 6. Here you'll study rationalism, empiricism, transcendental idealism, and the scientific method. The philosophers David Hume, John Locke and Immanuel Kant provide focal points. The lesson also features readings from James Joyce and Thomas Nagel.

Lesson 7 deals with three theories of the nature of truth and three corresponding approaches to science. The former are the correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic theories of truth; the latter are the instrumentalist, realist, and conceptual relativist approaches to science. In this lesson you'll read about the difficulty of interpreting texts and evidence in the realms of literature and science. The work of Immanuel Kant is primary here.

Ethics is the subject of lesson 8, the last lesson before the final exam. Here you'll study several ethical distinctions and theories, including egoism, utilitarianism, and divine command theory. We look at Aristotle's virtue theory and Kant's categorical imperative. This lesson features Friedrich Nietzsche and Mary Wollstonecraft.

Lesson 9, the last one before the final exam, concerns social philosophy. Here we explore various theories of the interaction between an individual and society. Topics include the contract theory, anarchism, totalitarianism, and individualism. These theories try to answer questions about what gives a state authority over a person, and what constitutes justice. You'll read works by William Williams, John Hospers, and Malcolm X.

The Lesson Design

At the beginning of each lesson, you'll see lesson objectives and the reading assignment. While doing the reading assignment, you will encounter lists of questions. Treat these questions as an opportunity to test yourself. Write responses to them if time permits, or at least think through how you'd respond if you had the time to do so. Writing out answers, while time-consuming, helps you understand and retain the material. Beyond serving as a good learning tool, these questions also prepare you for the kinds of questions you'll answer in the written assignments and exams. So you'll focus on what you have just read and should remember.

The Exam Design

One aim of this course is to foster your writing abilities—in particular, your ability to write critical essays on philosophical topics. The exams test this ability. They require you to explain some of the philosophical positions you've studied and evaluate them critically. The four questions on both exams come from the list of ten essay questions you've already seen in previous lessons. If you prepare in advance for each of the ten sample questions, you'll be well-prepared for the exams. It's best to make an outline of how you would respond to each question. You'll have thirty minutes for each question. Do use all of this time.

Grading Standards

The midterm (lesson 5) and the final examination (lesson 9) are each worth 30 percent of your final grade. The other seven lessons are worth a combined total of 40 percent of your final grade. That comes to a little over 5 percent of your final grade per lesson. The written assignments in lessons 1 through 4 and 6 through 9 *must* be typed or word-processed. Your instructor will evaluate your written work for clarity, completeness, development, accuracy, and organization. **To pass this course in compliance with the Independent Study Program's academic policies, your two exam grades must average at least a D-.** Even if your written assignment grades are excellent, you will not pass unless you fulfill this requirement.

Plagiarism

As stated in Indiana University's *Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct* (Art. III, §A3), "A student must not adopt or reproduce ideas, words, or statements of another person without an appropriate acknowledgment. A student must give due credit to the originality of others and acknowledge an indebtedness whenever he or she does any of the following:

- a. quotes another person's actual words, either oral or written;

- b. paraphrases another person's words, either oral or written;
- c. uses another person's idea, opinion, or theory; or
- d. borrows facts, statistics, or other illustrative material, unless the information is common knowledge."

Contacting Your Instructor

With each lesson you must submit an assignment cover sheet. Every cover sheet has a space for your questions and comments; please do use this space. If problems arise between assignments, you may write to your instructor at the Independent Study Program. Many instructors also use e-mail with students. Please check the information booklet you received with your enrollment materials for the complete listing of instructors with e-mail addresses. You may also reach most instructors by calling our toll-free number.

Please refer to the contact information on the back cover of this learning guide for addresses and telephone numbers.