

# INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

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**Brandeis University**  
**Fall 2009 [Phil 1A]**

## **I. Introduction**

The course seeks to grasp as well as answer a number of central questions in philosophy through the writings of contemporary and major Western philosophers as well as through the close study of several fundamental issues that have arisen in the course of the development of the Western philosophical tradition, such as free will, our knowledge of the "external" world, and the meaning and value of truth and justice.

Readings will be drawn from the writings of major philosophers such as [Plato](#), [Aristotle](#), [Anselm](#), [Aquinas](#), [Descartes](#), [Locke](#), [Berkeley](#), [Hume](#), [Leibniz](#), [Kant](#), [John Stuart Mill](#) and [Bertrand Russell](#) as well as prominent contemporary philosophers such as [Peter Singer](#), [John Rawls](#), [Daniel Dennett](#), [Martha Nussbaum](#), [John Searle](#), [Bernard Williams](#), [Judith Jarvis Thomson](#), [Hilary Putnam](#) and [Thomas Nagel](#) .

The main focus of the course, however, will be on the questions: Why be good? What is consciousness? Do persons have rights? If so, in virtue of what do they have them? What do human beings know, if anything, about the world they inhabit and how do they know it? Is there a G-d? The course is more about thinking and thinking things through than it is about coverage or the memorization of a bunch of facts.

Topics will include arguments for and against the existence of God, the value of religious belief and faith, the problem of evil, the nature of scientific explanation, perception and illusion, minds, brains and programs, personal identity ("who am I?"), freedom and determinism, moral "truth" v. moral relativity, forgiveness and justice, and what makes life worth living . . . to name a few.

The course is designed to be an introduction to philosophy and its problems and as such it is not intended to be comprehensive or exhaustive. The classic materials are selected to provide a basis for understanding central debates within the field.

The course is divided into four sections and each section is devoted to a key area within Western philosophy, in the areas, for example, somewhat fancily put, of epistemology, general metaphysics, ontology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of religion, and ethics:

**I. GOD & RELIGION**

**II. MIND & BODY**

**III. KNOWLEDGE & REALITY**

**IV. ETHICS, JUSTICE & THE GOOD LIFE**

In its aim and format the course is more an invitation to do philosophy than an introduction. Introductions seek to map out a territory or lay the groundwork for more detailed study. There will be some of that here, but insofar as invitations beckon and introductions point, the course beckons students to the study of philosophy rather than points the way.

The Syllabus for the Introduction to Philosophy class has been listed among the top ten most popular philosophy syllabi in the world for a number of years now.

See the "Ten Most Popular Philosophy Syllabi in the World".  
[http://www.dancohen.org/blog/posts/10\\_most\\_popular\\_philosophy\\_syllabi](http://www.dancohen.org/blog/posts/10_most_popular_philosophy_syllabi)

## II. Class Times

The course will meet on Tuesdays & Fridays from 12:10 to 1:30 PM.

## III. Course Requirements and Reading

Course Requirements will also be handed out on the first day of class, but the requirements will remain more or less the same as in prior years. This summer Professor Teuber is teaching the course at Harvard University and the course at Brandeis will be using the same introductory text in the Fall: **INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY: Classical and Contemporary Readings**, 5TH EDITION, edited by John Perry, Michael Bratman and John Martin Fisher, Oxford University Press, 2009.

As explained above the course is divided into four sections, focusing on central topics and debates within philosophy. After a brief Preamble, the first section is devoted to *God and Religion*, the second to *Mind and Body*, the third to *Knowledge and Reality*, and the fourth and final section to *Ethics, Justice and the Good Life*. Reading assignments will be blocked out week by week for each section. See the current Syllabus Online for the course as it is being taught this summer at Harvard:

### Readings for the Course

<http://courses.dce.harvard.edu/~phils4/Intro2009readings.pdf>

A number of articles, handouts and supplementary materials will also be passed out in class and available Online.

## IV. Writing

Three papers are required on topics growing out of the readings and class discussions. The papers should be about 6 pages in length. Paper topics will be available at least seven (7) days before a paper is due. It is wise to make a copy of a paper before handing in the original. If you are working on a computer, make a back-up.

## V. Rewriting

You will be given the opportunity to **rewrite** two of the three papers. **Rewrites** must be accompanied by a copy of the original paper with the comments, plus a cover sheet, attached to the original and the rewrite, stating how you have improved the paper and spelling out in detail, but simply and clearly, what you have done to make your paper, now a **rewrite**, that much more wonderful. The grade you receive on your **rewrite** will be the grade you receive for the **rewrite**. The grade will not be an average of the grade on the original and the **rewrite**. More will be said about **rewriting** in class and at the time papers are handed back.

## **VI. Examinations**

There will be one quiz in class. There will be no other written examination of any kind.

## **VII. Journals and Class Participation**

You shall also be asked to keep a journal. The journal should not be used for note-taking or for jotting down quotations or for making commentaries on the readings (although you may wish to use a separate note-book for these tasks), but should be reserved exclusively to give and develop your own answers to certain basic questions in philosophy. Questions will arise and be identified during the course of lectures and discussion and a list of questions will be handed out at various times and on various occasions. You may also meet this requirement by participating in class discussions, attending discussion sessions or by engaging in a combination of all four.

## **VIII. Attendance**

Attendance is required. You are allowed one unexcused absence. Otherwise, if you miss a class, you will need a documented excuse. Any undocumented absences over and above the one unexcused absence will have an impact on your final grade. Since Brandeis allows a shopping period, the attendance requirement will not "kick in," until the start of the second week of classes.

## **IX. Grading**

There are six primary pieces of work for the course: four 6 page papers, the journal or participation requirement and the quiz. For the four papers, the grading will be broken down as follows: 30% for your strongest effort, 25% for your next best effort, 20% for your next best effort after that, and 15% for the one which is least successful of the four. The journal and participation in class and discussion sessions will count 5% and the quiz 5%.

## **X. Teaching Fellows**

The Teaching Fellows will be primarily responsible for reading the papers and making comments on them as well as participating in and leading discussions on the readings and questions that come up in class. They will also be available to discuss your ideas for a paper with you. I shall look at all the papers before grades are handed out. If you are convinced an error has been made, first talk with the teaching fellow with whom you have been working. If you are still not satisfied, you may bring your paper to me.

## **XI. Course Web Site**

The Brandeis Course will have its own [Web Site modeled on the current Web Site at Harvard](#):

**[Introduction to Philosophy \(2009\)](#)**  
<http://courses.dce.harvard.edu/~phils4/>

## **XII. Office Hours**

I will hold office hours on Tuesdays and Fridays from 1:45 p.m. until 2:30 p.m. and by appointment. If you wish to leave messages for me, send an e-mail to me at [teuber@brandeis.edu](mailto:teuber@brandeis.edu). The Teaching Fellows will also hold office hours. Those times will be announced.

**NOTE:** If you a student with a documented disability on record and you would like to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY, please contact me as soon as possible.