

COURSE OUTLINE - Winter 2026

PH1020 (A3/VC): Introduction to Philosophy: Knowledge and Reality - 3 (3-0-0) 45 Hours for 15 Weeks

Northwestern Polytechnic acknowledges that our campuses are located on Treaty 8 territory, the ancestral and present-day home to many diverse First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people. We are grateful to work, live and learn on the traditional territory of Duncan's First Nation, Horse Lake First Nation and Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, who are the original caretakers of this land.

We acknowledge the history of this land and we are thankful for the opportunity to walk together in friendship, where we will encourage and promote positive change for present and future generations.

INSTRUCTOR: Joseph Van Weelden

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OFFICE HOURS Tuesdays and Wednesdays 12:30 pm-2:00 pm, or by appointment

CALENDAR DESCRIPTION: This is an introduction to the classical problems of philosophy through study and critical discussion of selected philosophical classics and contemporary works. Emphasis will be placed on questions of the nature and extent of human knowledge and classic problems about the nature of reality and our place in it.

PREREQUISITE(S):

None

COREQUISITE(S):

None

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

There is no required textbook for this course. All readings and other materials (including the instructor's ppts/handouts) will be made available on myClass.

DELIVERY MODE(S):

On-Campus for students enrolled in Section A3.

Synchronous for students enrolled in Section VC.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

1. Students will use **Communication Skills** in



- Communicating clearly and concisely while employing written and verbal skills appropriate to class assignments and discussion.

- Demonstrating interpersonal skills by listening effectively, establishing rapport, and monitoring non-verbal signals.

- Expressing awareness of and respect for self and others.

2. Students will use **Critical Thinking Skills** in

- Learning how to understand and charitably interpret others' arguments and developing the ability to rearticulate arguments in a philosophical form.

- Analyzing theoretical concepts and examining the connections between them.

- Developing written arguments with strong logical inferences to show support for your claims.

- Critically assessing philosophical theories and arguments in support of these theories.

3. Students will use **Philosophical Reasoning** in

- Applying philosophical reasoning to gain an understanding of important historical and contemporary approaches to epistemology and metaphysics.

- Recognizing and examining multiple perspectives.

- Examining assumptions, values, goals, principles, and actions as they affect our individual and collective understanding of knowledge and reality.

TRANSFERABILITY:

Please consult the Alberta Transfer Guide for more information. You may check to ensure the transferability of this course at the Alberta Transfer Guide main page

<http://www.transferalberta.alberta.ca>

**** For courses with alpha (letter) grading, a grade of D or D+ may not be acceptable for transfer to other post-secondary institutions. Students are cautioned that it is their responsibility to contact the receiving institutions to ensure transferability**

EVALUATIONS:

Class Participation (worth 10%)

4 Personal Reflection Assignments (worth a total of 20%)- Brief (250-500 words) personal reflections on a central argument or theme from one of the course readings. Graded on a pass/fail basis.

4 Quizzes (worth a total of 20%)- Quizzes will consist of a series of basic comprehension questions.

Midterm Exam (worth 20%)- The exam will consist of 4 short essay questions from which each student may select any 2 to answer.

Final Exam (worth 30%)- The exam will consist of 6 short essay questions from which each student may select any 3 to answer.

GRADING CRITERIA:

Please note that most institutions will not accept your course for transfer credit **IF** your grade is less than C-.

Grading Chart

Alpha Grade	4-point Equivalent	Percentage Guidelines	Alpha Grade	4-point Equivalent	Percentage Guidelines
A+	4.0	95-100	C+	2.3	67-69
A	4.0	85-94	C	2.0	63-66
A-	3.7	80-84	C-	1.7	60-62
B+	3.3	77-79	D+	1.3	55-59
B	3.0	73-76	D	1.0	50-54
B-	2.7	70-72	F	0.0	00-49

COURSE SCHEDULE/TENTATIVE TIMELINE:

Topic Title	Week No.	Details	Readings.	Activities	Date (s)
What is Philosophy?	1	Course Outline and Expectations From Students. What do philosophers do?	Post-Reading: Eric Schwitzgebel. 'If You Ask Why, You're a Philosopher and You're Awesome'	A Philosophical Icebreaker	Wednesday, January 7
The Value of Philosophy. The Aims and Methods of Philosophy. The Structure of Philosophical Argument	2	What is the point of doing philosophy? What are the parts of an argument, and how can you identify them? What makes an argument good or bad? Who was Socrates? Why are his life,	Helen De Cruz. 'Perplexity and Philosophical Progress', Handout on Arguments, Plato. <i>Apology</i> (pp.3-18 in Jeff McLaughlin. <i>The Originals. Classic Readings in Western Philosophy.</i>),	Thinking Critically. Finding and evaluating an argument.	Monday, January 12 Wednesday, January 14

		death, and mission important?	Chapter 2 (pp.7-18) in John Holbo and Belle Waring. <i>Reason and Persuasion: Three Dialogues by Plato</i>		
Introduction to Metaphysics. Plato's Allegory of the Cave (and Its Implications!)	3	What does this story tell us about the nature of reality? Are we living in Plato's cave, and if so how can we reach the surface? The Sun, the Divided Line and the Theory of Forms	Chapter 3 (pp.19-44) in Holbo and Waring		Monday, January 19 Wednesday, January 21
Metaphysics in Popular Culture: The Matrix	4	How does the Matrix incorporate philosophical themes?	David Chalmers. 'The Matrix as Metaphysics'	Film Viewing and Discussion: The Matrix	Monday, January 26 Wednesday, January 28
"Plumbing" the Depths of Different Worldviews. A Brief Tour of Classical Indian Metaphysics	5	Philosophy and Plumbing. A Plea for Cross-Cultural Philosophy. The Schools of Classical Indian Philosophy. The Advaita Vedanta school on the fundamental nature of reality. Nāgārjuna and the Madhyamaka School	Helen De Cruz and Johan De Smedt. 'Melioristic Genealogies and Indigenous Philosophies'. Das 'Brahman and Māyā in Advaita Metaphysics', Nāgārjuna. The Fundamental Wisdom of The Middle Way, trans. with commentary by Jay Garfield (dedicatory verses, Chapter I, Chapter V, Chapter XIII, Chapter XV, Chapter XXI, with Garfield's	1 st Personal Reflection on February 2. Quiz 1 on February 4.	Monday, February 2 Wednesday, February 4



			commentary)		
Introduction to Epistemology. Do We Know Anything? Cartesian Skepticism. Responding to Cartesian Skepticism	6	Do we know anything? Descartes' Dreaming and Evil Demon Doubts. The Moorean Shift.	Rene Descartes. Meditations on First Philosophy (First Meditation), G.E. Moore 'Proof of an External World' (read only p.147 and pp.165-170)		Monday, February 9 Wednesday, February 11
How Do We Know Anything? Traditional Epistemology (Empiricism vs Rationalism), Standpoint Epistemology	7	How Do We Know Anything? Locke vs Leibniz on Innate Ideas. Standpoint Epistemology.	John Locke 'On the Foundation of Knowledge' (pp.34-44 in McLaughlin), Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. <i>New Essays on Human Understanding</i> Preface pp.2-5, Chapter 1 pp.17-26, Briana Toole. 'Demarginalizing Standpoint Epistemology'		Monday, February 23 Wednesday, February 25
Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind. Cartesian Dualism and the Mind-Body Problem	8	Descartes' dualism of mind and body. Princess Elisabeth's Challenge, Descartes' Legacy.	Meditations On First Philosophy (Second Meditation). Correspondence between Descartes and Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia.	2 nd Personal Reflection on March 2. Quiz 2 on March 4.	Monday, March 2 Wednesday, March 4
Responses to the Mind-Body Problem. The Hard Problem of Consciousness	9	A Brief History of Reactions to Descartes. Nagel's argument against physicalism, and	Louise Antony 'The Mental and the Physical', Amy Kind 'Nagel's	Midterm Exam on March 11.	Monday, March 9 Wednesday,



		Churchland's response.	"What is It Like to Be a Bat" Argument Against Physicalism', Amy Kind 'Chalmers' Zombie Argument', Patricia Smith Churchland 'The Hornswoggle Problem'		March 11
Personal Identity	10	What am I? Locke's psychological criterion of personal identity, Hume's skeptical challenge. Classical Indian and Chinese views of personal identity	John Locke. Essay Concerning Human Understanding Book II Chapter XXVII, David Hume. A Treatise of Human Nature Book I Part 1 section vi., Anand Vaidya 'By the Light of Brahman', Alexander Douglas 'Essence is Fluttering'	3 rd Personal Reflection on March 18.	Monday, March 16 Wednesday, March 18
Free Will. Meaning in Life.	11	Are we free? Can human lives be meaningful, and what makes them so?	P.F Strawson. 'Freedom and Resentment', Susan Wolf. 'The Meanings of Lives''	Quiz 3 on March 25	Monday, March 23 Wednesday, March 25
Does God Exist?	12	Arguments for God's Existence	St. Anselm and Gaunilo. 'The Ontological Argument', Thomas Aquinas. 'On the Five Ways to Prove God's Existence' (pp.157-158 in McLaughlin),	4 th Personal Reflection on April 1.	Monday, March 30 Wednesday, April 1

			Blaise Pascal 'On the Wager for God's Existence' (pp.160-162 in McLaughlin).		
The Problem of Evil	13	Arguments against God's existence.	Fyodor Dostoevsky "The Problem of Evil", John Hick. "The Problem of Evil".	Quiz 4 on April 8.	Wednesday, April 8
Looking Beyond Western Philosophy of Religion. Open discussion of/reflections on the course/philosophy.	14	Harrison on the philosophical value of 'the strange'. Concluding (but not really!) reflections.	Victoria Harrison. 'What if the Dead are Never Really Dead?'	Revisiting our Icebreaker	Monday, April 13

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:

Maintain an inclusive and respectful classroom environment, where no student is made to feel unwelcome or uncomfortable. Kindness and civility are not only compatible with spirited intellectual debate about controversial topics, but essential to it. Any student caught violating this policy will be asked to leave the class.

Please do extend the courtesy of paying attention to the other human beings around you (especially to your fellow students!) while you are in my classroom. While electronic devices are not forbidden, if I notice that you are spending the class texting your friends rather than listening/thinking/engaging I may ask you to leave the classroom until you are prepared to be genuinely present in it. Even if it does not come to this, which I hope it won't, you are hereby notified that such behaviour *will* be reflected in your end of semester participation grade.

Complete all course readings in advance of the session (s) in which we are to discuss them.

Be an active participant in the course (ideally through your own spoken or written contributions to class discussion etc., but at a minimum by actively listening to what others have to say).

This course includes a videoconference (VC) section. Students registered in the VC section are able to attend lectures and complete all course components without attendance on campus.

Where disruptions or other technological issues occur with institutional or instructor systems on campus or elsewhere, instructors will ensure that appropriate accommodations are made for VC students.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:

Academic Misconduct will not be tolerated. For a more precise definition of academic misconduct and its consequences, refer to the Student Rights and Responsibilities policy available at <https://www.nwpolytech.ca/about/polytechnic-leadership/policies-directory>.

****Note:** all Academic and Administrative policies are available on the same page.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

If you require accommodations for any reason or have any concerns about the classroom environment, please do not hesitate to raise this with me. I am invested in creating a welcoming and accessible space where every student can flourish, and if there is anything holding you back from fulfilling your potential in my classroom I want to know about it as soon as possible.