

Course Syllabus

PHIL 1305: Philosophy and Critical Thinking

Instructor

If you enrolled prior to May 2025: Dr. Audrey McKinney (amckinney@txstate.edu)
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If you enrolled after June 2025: Dr. Ellen Stansell (ebs22@txstate.edu (<mailto:ebs22@txstate.edu>))

Meet the Course Author

Audrey McKinney received her B.A. from the University of Delaware and her Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. She is Associate Professor of Philosophy Emerita at Texas State University and is the author of articles on logic, feminist theory, ethics, and the phenomenology of love.

A transplanted "Yankee," Dr. McKinney enjoys the delights of the Austin area, especially the cooling waters of Barton Springs, and travels yearly to West Texas to hike in Big Bend National Park and swim among the turtles, tetras, and catfish at Balmorhea State Park.

Meet the Course Instructor

Dr. Ellen Stansell is Associate Professor of Instruction in the Department of Philosophy at Texas State. Her teaching interests are competency-based education and online education, and her research interests are Indian philosophy and cyberethics. She was a 2003 recipient of the Distinguished Teacher Award at the University of Texas at Austin. She is an organizer of the TXST Conference on Traditional Yoga.

Scope & Nature of the Course

Philosophy is the study of fundamental questions about human experience: what are the reliable foundations for my knowledge? What is the true nature of my existence? Can I survive my bodily death? Is there a creator of the universe? How should I decide what is right? What makes my life meaningful?

Philosophers regard the methods by which these questions are explored to be as important as the questions themselves. Since the time of Socrates in Ancient Greece, philosophers have sought to base their views on arguments that can withstand scrutiny; philosophers want to be able to show others the truthfulness of their beliefs. Learning about philosophy, then, requires learning about reasoning: when do I have enough evidence for my beliefs? What is the right sort of evidence to construct? How do I distinguish good reasoning from bad reasoning?

This course is divided into six lessons; to access lesson content, click Modules in the left navigation.

Lesson 1 will provide an overview of the terrain of philosophy and of the methods of logical reasoning. Lesson 2 will focus on the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates, who provides us with a marvelous model of an engaged thinker. Lessons 3 through 6 deal with important topics from various areas of philosophy. Lesson 1 will require you to read about 50 pages from the textbook; each of the remaining lessons will require you to read about 100 pages.

Content Outline

Lesson 1: The Terrain of Philosophy

This lesson covers the definition of philosophy, the various areas of philosophy, the role of argument in philosophy, and fallacious forms of argument.

Lesson 2: Socrates and the Examined Life

This lesson focuses on Socrates, his willingness to go against public opinion, and his eloquent defense of his teachings during his trial.

Lesson 3: The Nature of the Self

This lesson is an examination of the nature of the mind. Is our rich subjective experience nothing but the product of physical processes? Or, is there a self that can continue on even after our physical self perishes?

Prep for the Midcourse Exam

Preparing for the midcourse exam; exam tips; sample questions.

Lesson 4: Are There Moral Truths?

This lesson introduces foundational questions about morality. Is there an objective standard for morality, or are individuals or societies the creators of their own moralities? If there is an absolute standard, on what will it be based?

Lesson 5: What Are Right Actions? Constructing an Ethical Theory

This lesson explores five ethical theories and examines their views on the importance of character, happiness, duty, emotion, and individual agency in moral decision-making.

Lesson 6: What Is Social Justice?

This lesson explores the relationship between the individual and the larger community. When is a society fully just for all of its members? What are the justifications for and limitations of governmental authority over the individual?

Prep for the Final Exam

Preparing for the final exam; exam tips; sample questions.

Required Materials

The required textbook for this course is:

Chaffee, John. (2011). *The Philosopher's Way: A Text With Readings* (3rd ed.). Boston: Prentice Hall.

ISBN 13: 978-0-205-77699-3

ISBN 10: 0-205-77699-X

I have chosen this text for several reasons. The writings of philosophers can be very difficult, replete with abstract ideas and concepts. In a lecture-based course, I would have the opportunity each class session to explain difficult concepts and help you to see the arguments that the philosophers are putting forward. The author of our text does a wonderful job combining primary source material passages from the writings of philosophers both past and present, with explanations of key concepts and helpful background information. Professor Chaffee's approach also allows you to see a very important feature of philosophical exploration: philosophy is a conversation stretching over centuries. The organization of this textbook around central philosophical themes shows that philosophers across historical eras often address similar concerns; many of the arguments tackled by contemporary philosophers have roots in the works of the philosophers of ancient Greece. Issues pondered by the ancients are alive today! One final reason I have chosen this text is that Professor Chaffee has included works that point to limitations of the emphasis placed by many philosophers on discursive argumentation. This will allow us to explore whether the way in which the Western philosophical canon has been constructed is too focused on a specific kind of reasoning that, by its exclusion of certain voices and approaches, unintentionally impedes the philosopher's quest for truth.

Course Goals

After you have completed this course, you should be able to do the following:

- demonstrate improvement in your critical and moral thinking skills;
- demonstrate the foundational and synoptic nature of philosophical inquiry;
- identify some of the seminal figures in the history of philosophy;
- show your understanding of at least four areas of philosophical investigation;
- explain the methods used by philosophers;
- identify connections between philosophical theories and everyday life;
- recognize fallacious forms of inference;
- express and defend your own views on philosophical issues;
- recognize when your beliefs are inconsistent or in need of further justification; and
- appreciate the limits as well as the scope of the Western philosophical tradition.


Course Procedure

This course will consist of six lessons and two exams. You may access the lessons by clicking Modules in the left navigation. Each lesson includes the following elements:

- a reading assignment from your textbook,
- objectives,
- key terms,
- content that contains explanations of the material covered,
- a self-assessment, and
- an assignment to be submitted for grading.

Be sure to complete all the steps in the lesson, including the textbook reading assignment, before beginning the assignment that ends each lesson.

The course also includes a midcourse exam that covers Lessons 1 through 3 and a final exam that covers the remaining three lessons, Lesson 4 through 6.

To help you plan out your progress throughout the course, complete the [Course Study Schedule](https://canvas.txstate.edu/courses/1366988/files/124181903/download?wrap=1) (<https://canvas.txstate.edu/courses/1366988/files/124181903/download?wrap=1>)  (https://canvas.txstate.edu/courses/1366988/files/124181903/download?download_frd=1) before you begin your first lesson and submit it within the first 7 days of the course via Modules.

Assignments

The assignments are designed to help you develop your grasp of the key concepts. Try to complete the assignments using your own words; don't just parrot back a definition or rely too extensively on quotations from the textbook. One helpful strategy that you can use when trying to determine how well you understand a concept is to imagine yourself *explaining* the concept to a friend. What examples might you use to illustrate the concept? What questions might your friend ask to gain a clearer meaning of the concept? How would you answer these questions?

When assessing the assignments and essays on the exams, I'll be looking to see whether your responses are clearly written and correct, but I'll also be looking for a thoughtful engagement with the material: have you just given the barest possible answer and simply skated over the surface of the theories, or have you tried to understand the implications of the concepts? On occasion, I'll provide sample answers to give you an idea of the sort of response that would receive full credit.

It's best to try to answer the assignment questions from what you remember of the reading assignment rather than to copy out an answer from the text. Then you can check the text to see if you have gotten it right. This process will be a good indicator to you of whether you are really understanding the material.

I don't recommend that you use any sources other than the textbook and your own mind when preparing the assignments. You may be tempted to consult encyclopedias or Internet sites, but these often prove more confusing than helpful, and they might impede you from expressing yourself in your own words and that is what I am looking for. If you find yourself stumped by one of the writing assignments, feel free to email me: I'll give you some hints and guidance (but only that!) for how to proceed. Also, if there is a topic you'd like to pursue further after having completed a writing assignment, let me know; I'd be

delighted to point you to some additional readings on the Internet or in hardcopy.

All assignments will be submitted via Modules. When submitting assignments, note that I will not accept any file types other than .doc, .docx, and .rtf. Also note the following:

- **Do not submit more than one assignment per week.**
- **Do not resubmit an assignment after it has been graded.**

Exams

There are two exams: the midcourse exam will cover Lessons 1 to 3, and the final exam is not cumulative and will cover only Lessons 4 to 6. After you submit Assignment 3, you will take the midcourse exam, and after you submit Assignment 6, you will take the final exam. The exams will each be worth 100 points, and each exam will be worth 35 percent of your final course grade. Both exams are closed-book and will consist of 20 multiple-choice questions and a series of short essay questions. The self-assessments and writing assignments in each lesson are designed to help you prepare for the exam; you'll also find specific review information for each exam later in this course.

Information on arranging for a proctor and scheduling the exams is available on the [Correspondence Course Testing page](https://www.distancelearning.txst.edu/self-paced/registering-for-correspondence/course-procedure.html#:~:text=Most%20Texas%20State%20online%20self-paced%20courses%20require%20a,higher%20on%20that%20exam%20to%20pass%20the%20course.). [➡ \(https://www.distancelearning.txst.edu/self-paced/registering-for-correspondence/course-procedure.html#:~:text=Most%20Texas%20State%20online%20self-paced%20courses%20require%20a,higher%20on%20that%20exam%20to%20pass%20the%20course.\)](https://www.distancelearning.txst.edu/self-paced/registering-for-correspondence/course-procedure.html#:~:text=Most%20Texas%20State%20online%20self-paced%20courses%20require%20a,higher%20on%20that%20exam%20to%20pass%20the%20course.)

Grading Criteria

- **The average score for your midcourse and final exams must be 60 percent or better for you to pass this course.** So, if you scored 50 percent on the first exam, you would have to make at least 70 percent on the final to pass the course, regardless of the grades on your assignments.
- **To receive a passing grade in the course, you must complete and submit all assignments!**

If you have submitted all assignments and have a 60 percent average on your two exams, **then** your grade will be calculated as follows: each exam will constitute 35 percent of your final grade, and the assignments, taken together, will constitute 30 percent of the grade. Since there are six written assignments, each one will contribute to 5 percent of your final grade.

| Assignment/Exam | Percent of Final Grade |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| Assignment 1 | 5 percent |
| Assignment 2 | 5 percent |
| Assignment 3 | 5 percent |

| | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| Midcourse Exam | 35 percent |
| Assignment 4 | 5 percent |
| Assignment 5 | 5 percent |
| Assignment 6 | 5 percent |
| Final Exam | 35 percent |
| Total | 100 percent |

Grades will be assigned according to the following range:

A: 90-100 percent

B: 80 - 89 percent

C: 70 - 79 percent

D: 60 - 69 percent

F: 0 - 59 percent

Faculty-Student Contact

Even though this is a correspondence course, I encourage you to contact me if you have any concerns, questions, or problems. You are welcome to e-mail me by using the Email tool in the left menu bar. (It is important to keep all mail related to this course contained within this Canvas site.) I will always seek to reply within 24 hours of your email.

I am also available by request to have a phone or video chat. And I have specifically set aside Tuesdays 4-5 pm as "office hours" for the course.

Students Requiring Accommodations

Online and Extended Programs is committed to helping students with disabilities achieve their educational goals.

A disability is not a barrier to correspondence study, and we provide reasonable accommodations to individuals in coursework and test taking.

Students who require special accommodations need to provide verification of their disability to the [Office of Disability Services \(http://www.ods.txstate.edu/\)](http://www.ods.txstate.edu/), Suite 5-5.1 LBJ Student Center, 512.245.3451 (voice/TTY).

Students should then notify the [OXP \(http://www.correspondence.txstate.edu/\)](http://www.correspondence.txstate.edu/) at [corrstudy@txstate.edu \(mailto:corrstudy@txstate.edu\)](mailto:corrstudy@txstate.edu) of any disability-related accommodation needs as soon as possible to avoid a delay in accommodations.

Academic Integrity


The [Texas State Academic Honor Code \(https://www.txstate.edu/honorcodecouncil/\)](https://www.txstate.edu/honorcodecouncil/) applies to all Texas State students, including correspondence students. The [Honor Code \(https://policies.txstate.edu/university-policies/07-10-01.html\)](https://policies.txstate.edu/university-policies/07-10-01.html) serves as an affirmation that the University demands the highest standard of integrity in all actions related to the academic community. As stated in the [Texas State Student Handbook \(https://studenthandbook.txstate.edu\)](https://studenthandbook.txstate.edu), [Violation of the Honor Code \(https://studenthandbook.txstate.edu/rules-and-policies/academic-honor-code.html\)](https://studenthandbook.txstate.edu/rules-and-policies/academic-honor-code.html) includes, but is not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work, plagiarism, collusion, and the abuse of resource materials.

Study Tips

While clear definitions for all of the important concepts will be found in the textbook or the study guide, it is not enough for you to *memorize* the definitions. Memorization can be an important first step, but a true understanding of a concept requires that you recognize how to *apply* the concept in relevant situations. For example, one concept we will be exploring at length is *mind-body dualism*, the view that the mind is distinct from the body and, unlike the body, is a non-physical substance. But what does this mean exactly? What are we saying about persons if we say their minds are non-physical? What possibilities are open that are closed if persons are simply physical beings? By answering these questions, you will arrive at a rich appreciation for the concept of dualism.

FREE TUTORING RESOURCES

A variety of free tutoring resources are available for students enrolled in correspondence courses. You may access tutoring through Tutor.com by clicking on Tutor.com: 24/7 Online Tutoring in the left menu of this course. Then just respond to the questions to start tutoring. If you need help with writing specifically, then choose Writing as your topic.

Free online tutoring for writing-related assignments is also available from the University Writing Center. For information on accessing these resources, please visit Online and Extended Program's [Free Tutoring](https://www.distancelearning.txst.edu/self-paced/student-information-guide/resources/tutoring.html)  [\(https://www.distancelearning.txst.edu/self-paced/student-information-guide/resources/tutoring.html\)](https://www.distancelearning.txst.edu/self-paced/student-information-guide/resources/tutoring.html) page. Currently-enrolled, degree-seeking students able to visit the Texas State campus are eligible for free in-person tutoring from the [Student Learning Assistance Center \(SLAC\) \(http://www.txstate.edu/slac/\)](http://www.txstate.edu/slac/) on the fourth floor of Alkek Library

Final Comments

The study of philosophy can be both exciting and challenging. You will likely find that on occasion a philosopher expresses views that are in direct opposition to some of your most cherished beliefs. Your job will be to understand the reasoning that lies behind the position taken by each philosopher. The goal

of this course is *not* to have you change your fundamental beliefs, but rather to have you gain a richer understanding of the foundation and implications of your views. The philosopher Socrates enjoins us to "know ourselves," and by learning about philosophy, you can come to learn a great deal about yourself, your worldview, and your values.