

Teaching Dossier

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1 Teaching Philosophy

My objective as a philosophy instructor is to cultivate a blend of intellectual humility and confidence in my students through the practice of critical thinking. In many cases, students enter my classroom without prior exposure to philosophy, and they encounter a unique opportunity to genuinely assess what they know, identify gaps in their understanding, and confidently fill those gaps through inquiry. This skill is fundamental to philosophy and applicable to all areas of life.

A key element of my teaching is presenting paradoxes—sets of individually reasonable but collectively incompatible claims. For example, rather than presenting the problem of evil as an argument against the existence of God, I frame it as a paradox. This approach engages students by requiring them to reject a claim in order to maintain rational consistency. I pair this with the think-pair-share technique, where students first reflect independently, then discuss ideas with peers, and finally engage in a broader class discussion.

To further engage students and make learning enjoyable, I incorporate multimedia and interactive activities into my lectures. When covering Parfit's arguments in the philosophy of mind, for instance, I include video interviews with split-brain patients, paired with real-time polls that provide immediate feedback on class opinions and intuitions.

In my Introduction to Philosophy course, I organize the curriculum around four major questions: *Does God exist? What should you do? What kind of thing are you? What do you know?* Each

lecture explores a different answer to one of these questions. In smaller classes, I include a mini-conference as a capstone project, where students present arguments and answer questions from their peers. In my Introduction to Logic course, I emphasize hands-on learning through chalkboard proofs and conclude with an escape room activity, where students work together to solve deductive puzzles in preparation for the final exam.

To assess comprehension, I use reading quizzes, exams, and an “exit ticket” system, where students submit an answer to a core question on a notecard before leaving the classroom. After a lecture on Descartes’ *Meditations*, for example, I might ask, “Why does Descartes doubt his senses?” Reviewing these responses allows me to address misconceptions before the next class.

Over time, I’ve adapted my teaching to various contexts—from non-major courses at Indiana University South Bend to an Honors Logic course at UT Austin and summer seminars at the Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth. This range has taught me to be flexible, emphasizing foundational material in some cases, while diving into more advanced topics with students ready for deeper exploration.

Ultimately, I aim for my students to leave my courses with the skills to critically and confidently approach any topic, grounded in both intellectual humility and confidence. Through the use of paradoxes, multimedia, and interactive assessments, I create a learning environment that not only deepens their understanding of philosophy but also hones skills that will serve them in many areas of their lives.

2 Sample Syllabi

2.1 Introduction to Philosophy Syllabus

Course Description

In this course, you'll learn how to think critically about abstract topics like the nature of God, morality, personal identity, and existence. In particular, you'll evaluate arguments that attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Does God exist?
2. What should I do, ethically speaking?
3. What kind of thing am I?
4. What exists, in the most general sense?

Unlike your grades in other courses, your grade in this course will not depend on whether you can provide the correct answers to these questions. Your grade will depend instead on (i) your understanding of competing answers to these questions and (ii) your ability to justify these answers with arguments. This doesn't automatically mean that there are no correct answers to philosophical questions, more generally. I'll try to convince you throughout the course that, on the contrary, the correct answers to these questions are difficult to find, and both disagreements and uncertainty are natural consequences of this.

The first goal of this course is to introduce you to, and to hopefully incite your lifelong interest in, the practice of philosophy. The second goal of this course is to make certain intellectual tools available to you; these tools will help you to think more critically, independently, and fairly. The ultimate goal of this course is not, therefore, for you to learn a collection of facts; it's for you to learn how to think with more clarity and confidence about any topic you might encounter whatsoever.

Final Grade

20% Quizzes (4 x 5% each): 10 multiple choice questions for each section in syllabus.

35% Course Paper: 1500 word essay presenting an argument from class in premise-conclusion form and responding to it. Writing workshop will be mandatory.

35% Final Exam: Cumulative, short answers. Study guide will be made available.

10% Attendance & Participation

Attendance & Participation

Learning philosophy requires doing philosophy. Attendance will be taken each day, and after the second absence, 2 points will be deducted for every subsequent absence from the Attendance & Participation grade. Do contact me, however, in extenuating circumstances.

In this course, it's perfectly normal – and encouraged – to do the following:

- Ask questions in the middle of lecture when you are confused.

- Be dissatisfied with an explanation and ask for another.
- Disagree with something and present a problem or worry about it.
- Agree with something and present further justification for it.
- Be unconfident about a point you'd like to make, but try to make it anyway, even if you abandon the attempt halfway through.
- E-mail me, talk with me before and after class, or visit my office hours with questions, thoughts, comments, and concerns you have about the course material.

Learning Success Statement

Your success is important to me. If you encounter any challenges that hinder your learning, or you feel excluded in any way, please reach out to me as soon as possible. Together, we can create strategies to ensure both your needs and the course requirements are met effectively.

Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading
1/11	Introduction to the Course	
1/13	Tools for Philosophy: Validity, Soundness, Necessary and Sufficient Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edward Craig, <i>Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction</i>, Ch.1 (9 pages)
<p>Section 1: Does God exist? <i>Philosophy of Religion</i></p>		
1/20	The Problem of Evil: "No!"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" (11 pages)
1/25	The Free Will Response: "Yes!"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter van Inwagen, <i>The Problem of Evil</i>, Ch. 8 (30 pages)
1/27	A Priori Arguments for God's Existence: "Yes!"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Thomas Aquinas' 2nd Way (1 page) • Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy V</i> excerpt (2 pages)

2/1	A Posteriori Arguments for God's Existence: "Yes!"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Thomas Aquinas' 5th Way (1 page) • William Paley, <i>Natural Theology</i>, Ch. 1-3 (7 pages)
2/3	Euthyphro's Dilemma: <i>Segue into Morality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> excerpt (4 pages)
<p>Section 2: What should you do? <i>Ethics</i></p>		
2/8	Utilitarianism: "Maximize pleasure!"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Stuart Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i>, Ch. 2 excerpt (6 pages) • Judith Jarvis Thomson, "Killing, letting die, and the trolley problem" (14 pages)
2/10	Deontology: "Follow the rules!"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onora O'Neill, "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics" (6 pages) • Christine M. Korsgaard, "The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil" (11 pages)
2/15	Moral Relativism: "Depends who's asking!"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ruth Benedict, "Anthropology and the Abnormal" excerpt (7 pages) • Kwasi Wiredu, "Are there cultural universals?" (14 pages)
2/17	Moral Luck: "Get lucky!"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas Nagel, <i>Mortal Questions</i>, Ch. 3 "Moral Luck" (15 pages)
2/22	Free Will & Determinism: "Does it even matter?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter van Inwagen, <i>Metaphysics</i>, Ch. 11 "The Powers of Rational Beings: Freedom of the Will" excerpts (13 pages)

Section 3: What kind of thing are you? <i>Philosophy of Mind</i>		
3/7	Dualism: <i>"An immaterial thing!"</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● René Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy II</i> excerpt (2 pages) ● Elisabeth, Princess of Bohemia, "Correspondence with Descartes" (4 pages)
3/9	Materialism: <i>"A material thing!"</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Peter van Inwagen, <i>Metaphysics</i> Ch. 10 "Dualism and Personal Identity" (20 pages) ● Frank Jackson, "What Mary Didn't Know" (1 page)
3/21	Realizability & Functionalism: <i>"A glorified calculator!"</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● David Anderson, "Introduction to Functionalism" (7 pages) ● David Cole, "The Chinese Room Argument" in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, §1–3 (6 pages)
3/23	Psychologism: <i>"A bunch of memories!"</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● John Locke, <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i>, "Of Identity and Diversity" excerpt (3 pages) ● Bernard Williams, "The Self and the Future" excerpt (1 page)
3/28	Eliminativism: <i>"Nothing!"</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Derek Parfit, "Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons" (7 pages)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larissa Macfarquhar, “Two Heads: A marriage devoted to the mind-body problem” excerpt (5 pages) • Amber Carpenter, <i>Practice and Theory of No Self</i> excerpt (5 pages)
<p>Section 4: What do you know? <i>Epistemology</i></p>		
3/30	Skepticism: “Nothing!”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Pollock, “A Brain in a Vat” (4 pages) • René Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy I</i> excerpt (8 pages)
4/4	Implicit Bias “You’d be surprised!”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jennifer Saul, “Skepticism and Implicit Bias” (21 pages)
4/6	JTB: “Justified, true beliefs!”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plato, <i>Theateatus</i> excerpt (5 pages) • Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” (3 pages)
4/11	Common Sense: “A lot!”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • G. E. Moore, “A Defence of Common Sense” excerpt (15 pages)
4/13	Contextualism “Depends who’s asking!”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kieth DeRose, “Contextualism and Knowledge Attributions” excerpt (13 pages)

Late Work & Quiz Make-ups

Late work will receive a 10% overall deduction for each 24 hour period of lateness. Quizzes can be made-up during my office hours; if you miss a quiz, email me for more details.

Other Important Dates

February 15: Check 'Grades' on Canvas to see if I have any concerns about your performance in the course. This is a good time to come talk to me about how you are doing in the course so far.

March 15: Make an appointment with your advisor to plan for the upcoming semester(s).

March 22: Last day to withdraw with an automatic W. After this date, students can only withdraw under exceptional circumstances and need permission from the Dean's Office and the instructor.

April 1: Continuing student enrollment for Summer and Fall starts. Check your student portal for the exact date and time.

Zero Tolerance of Cheating & Plagiarism

Plagiarism means using words, ideas, or arguments from another person or source without citation. Cite all sources consulted to any extent (including material from the internet), whether or not assigned and whether or not quoted directly. For quotations, four or more words used in sequence must be set off in quotation marks, with the source identified. Any form of cheating will immediately earn you a failing grade for *the entire course*. By remaining enrolled, you consent to this policy.

Accommodations for Disabilities

If you have a disability or need assistance, special arrangements can be made. Contact the Director of Disabled Student Services as soon as possible to work out the details. Once the Director has provided you with a letter attesting to your needs for modification, bring the letter to me. For more information, please visit the website for the Office of Disabled Student Services.

Policy on Sexual Misconduct

UT Austin does not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment and all forms of sexual violence. If you have experienced sexual misconduct, or know someone who has, the University can help. It is important to know that federal regulations and University policy require faculty to promptly report complaints of potential sexual misconduct known to them to the Deputy Title IX Coordinator(s) on campus to ensure that appropriate measures are taken and resources are made available. The University will work with you to protect your privacy by sharing information with only those that need to know to ensure the University can respond and assist. If you are seeking help and would like to speak to someone confidentially, you can make an appointment with a Mental Health Counselor on campus.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed, and that the diversity that students bring to

this class can be comfortably expressed and be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit to all students. Please come to me at any time with any concerns.

Religious Observances

A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable period after the absence. A reasonable accommodation does not include substantial modification to academic standards, or adjustments of requirements essential to any program of instruction. Students and instructors who have questions or concerns about academic accommodations for religious observance or religious beliefs may contact the Office for Inclusion and Equity. The University does not maintain a list of religious holy days.

Names & Pronouns

Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's chosen (not legal) name, if you have provided one. If you wish to provide or update a chosen name, you can add your pronouns to Canvas.

2.2 Logic & Scientific Reasoning (Honors Intro to Logic)

The following syllabus omits boilerplate and policy sections.

Description

This course is a philosophical introduction to formal logic and probability theory – their methods, applications, and foundations. In the first half of the course, we'll study the syntax and semantics of sentential and predicate logic. This involves constructing mathematical structures that formally represent, to some degree of abstraction, the meanings of sentences in natural languages, such as English. In the second half of the course, we'll study different kinds of probability theories and the laws that govern them. Learning about the core principles of deductive and inductive logic will strengthen our ability to think critically and with less susceptibility to fallacies.

Texts

The texts for the course are:

- *The Logic Book 6th Edition (TLB)*, by Bergmann, Moor & Nelson
- *An Introduction to Probability & Inductive Logic (PIL)*, by Ian Hacking

Final Grade

- 10 Weekly Problem Sets: 5% each (for a total of 50%)
- 2 Exams: 23% each (for a total of 46%)
- Participation: 4%

Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading
Tue 8/23	Introduction to the Course	
Section 1. Deductive Logic		
Thu 8/25	Concepts of Deductive Logic	TLB 1.1–1.3, PIL 1
Tue 8/30	Sentential Logic (SL) Syntax	TLB 2.1–2.2, 2.4, p. 54
Thu 9/1	Sentential Logic (SL) Semantics	TLB 3.1–3.5
Tue 9/6	Sentential Derivations (SD)	TLB 5.1
Thu 9/8	More Sentential Derivations (SD+)	TLB 5.3, 5.4
Tue 9/13	Predicate Logic (SL) Syntax	TLB 7.1–7.3
Thur 9/15	Predicate Logic (PL) Semantics	TLB 7.5 (stop at p. 319), 8.1 (stop at p. 337), 8.2–8.4
Tue 9/20	Predicate Derivations (PD)	TLB 10.1–10.2
Thur 9/22	More Predicate Derivations (PD+)	TLB 10.3
Section 2. Inductive Logic		
Tue 10/4	Concepts of Inductive Logic	PIL 2 & 3
Thu 10/6	Calculating Probabilities I	PIL 4 & 5

Tue 10/11	Calculating Probabilities II	PIL 6 & 7
Thu 10/13	Decision Theory I	PIL 8
Tue 10/18	Decision Theory II	PIL 9
Thu 10/20	Decision Theory III	PIL 10
Tue 10/25	Kinds of Probability	PIL 11 & 12
Thu 10/27	Probability as Measure of Belief I	PIL 13 & 14
Tue 11/1	Probability as Measure of Belief II	PIL 15
Thu 11/3	Probability as Frequency I	PIL 16 & 17
Tue 11/8	Probability as Frequency II	PIL 18 & 19
Thu 11/10	Problem of Induction	PIL 20–22
Optional Section: Intermediate Topics		
Tue 11/29	Intermediate Topic #1*	TBD
Thur 12/1	Intermediate Topic #2*	TBD

*Examples of intermediate topics:

- Meta-theory of sentential and predicate logic, soundness & completeness
- Modal logic, tense logic, epistemic logic, doxastic logic
- Second-order logic, Kaplan-Geach sentences, ontological commitment, higher-order logic
- Non-classical logics, vagueness, multi-valued logics, paraconsistency
- Application to linguistics: truth-conditions, compositionality, intensional logic

3 Student Evaluations

3.1 Primary Instructor

Course	School	Term	Instructor Rating	Max
Intro to Philosophy	IUSB	Spring 2016	4.6	5
Intro to Philosophy	IUSB	Spring 2016	4.5	5
Logic & Scientific Reasoning	UT Austin	Spring 2022	3.6	5
Intro to Philosophy	Johns Hopkins CTY	Summer 2014, Summer 2015	*	
Intro to Logic	Johns Hopkins CTY	Summer 2016, Summer 2017	*	
Philosophy of Mind	Johns Hopkins CTY	Summer 2018	*	

*Courses offered to academically gifted youth ages 13-16, with no official administrative survey.

3.2 Teaching Assistant / Reader

Course	School	Term	TA Rating	Max
Intro to Philosophy (Sean Kelsey)	Notre Dame	Fall 2014	3.93	4
Intro to Philosophy (Jeff Speaks)	Notre Dame	Spring 2015	3.93	4
Intro to Philosophy (Chris Shields)	Notre Dame	Fall 2015	4.8	5
Intro to Philosophy (Richard Cross)	Notre Dame	Spring 2016	4.46	5
Intermediate Symbolic Logic (Josh Dever)	UT Austin	Fall 2016	*	
Minds and Machines	UT Austin	Spring 2017	4.5	5

(David Beaver)				
Intro to Philosophy (Dan Bonevac)	UT Austin	Fall 2017	*	
Introduction to Symbolic Logic (John Litland)	UT Austin	Spring 2018	5	5

*I was a Reader, not as a TA, for these courses. Since Readers do not lead discussion sections, UT Austin does not have students survey the course Readers.

3.3 Qualitative Feedback Examples

“This course has been very informative. It was an interactive experience and I felt like the professor truly cared about if the students actually understood the material.”

“...was really easy to understand, and made it personable and enjoyable in class. This is how every class should be taught.”

“...explained the material in depth and answered all questions the class had. He is on top of grading assignments in a timely fashion and responds quickly to emails when you have a question. Definitely a great overall professor. I enjoyed his class!”

“...is phenomenal at thinking of real life examples to compare philosophical concepts to. It made these things much easier to understand, and he was able to incorporate humor into the lessons, too!”

“His strength is in taking complex topics, making them simpler to understand, and relating them to our lives.”

“...encourages all students to discuss arguments and ask questions instead of simply lecturing the whole time. He also explains arguments in terms of metaphors that are easy for philosophy-novices to understand.”

“...is very clear in his communication and manages to keep the class engaged very well. Very personable and makes sure we aren’t intimidated to ask questions.”

“...was my favorite professor this semester. He is very down to earth and dedicated to helping us learn. He wants to make sure we understand the material.”

“...not only was very good with remarks on finalized written assignments, but he was also very open to giving constructive criticism beforehand, as well – his workshop-style remarks on papers were invaluable.”

“...helped me realize that I can do philosophy, and that I like it, too!”

“...balances his own opinions and openness to other opinions perfectly. He provides us with good study tools, like the worksheets. I look forward to coming to class every week, and he has greatly increased my interest in philosophy.”