

INTRODUCTORY PHILOSOPHY 100.11**COURSE OUTLINE**

Prof. C. Byrne

Office: Lane Hall A128

Office hours: 9:15 a.m. to 12:00 noon, Monday to Thursday, except during the A1–3 and B4–6 blocks, or by appointment (867-2119); cbyrne@stfx.ca.

Texts Required for First Term:

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. Translated by F. Philip. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Translated by D. Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Plato. *The Republic*. Translated by A. Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 3rd ed. 2016.

Texts Required for Second Term:

Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method & Meditations on First Philosophy*. Translated by D. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett, 4th ed. 1998.

Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by L. Falkenstein. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2011.

Aristotle. *Introductory Readings*. Translated by T. Irwin & G. Fine. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996.

Grading:

October Mid-Term Test	10%
First-Term Essay	15%
Christmas Examination	25%
February Mid-Term Test	10%
Second-Term Essay	15%
Final Examination	25%

All assignments and tests must be completed in order to receive credit for this course.

No electronic devices (e.g., laptop computers and cell phones) may be used in class, unless required for medical reasons.

Topics:

This course considers some of the central questions from the four sub-fields into which philosophy has traditionally been divided, namely ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, and logic.

- 1) Ethics looks at the standards of human conduct with respect to the good of others.
- 2) Metaphysics looks at what sorts of things, in general, we take to exist, what kind of reality they have, and what criteria we use to make these claims.
- 3) Epistemology looks at the sources and limitations of human knowledge and considers what criteria might be used to distinguish ordinary beliefs from beliefs where we make stronger claims to know, for example, in the areas of natural science and mathematics.
- 4) Logic looks at the standards of correct inference, that is, the claim that one proposition or statement follows logically from others. Logic also considers the difference between correct inference, on the one hand, and truth and consistency, on the other.

These questions will be addressed by reading works written by the authors listed above, together with a handout on the basic concepts of formal logic.

Problems:

We consider two problems in particular: ethical relativism and epistemological relativism; the first will be the focus of the first term, and the second of the second term.

I) Ethical (or Moral) Relativism: Moral Particularism + Moral Subjectivism

- 1) There are no universal moral standards that apply to all persons at all times and places; all moral standards are particular and local (Moral Particularism: all ethics is local).
- 2) It is always and everywhere morally wrong to discriminate against people based on their race.
- 3) Moral rightness or goodness are not objective characteristics of human actions, but are attributed to human actions based on individual, subjective preferences (Moral Subjectivism: all moral judgments are grounded in subjective preferences).
- 4) It is never morally permissible to torture infants and small children, regardless of how useful or desirable it might be, because such conduct is inherently immoral.

II) Epistemological Relativism: Epistemological Particularism + Epistemological Subjectivism

- 5) There are no propositions discoverable by us that apply universally, at all times and places (Epistemological Particularism: all human knowledge is particular and local).
- 6) The laws of nature apply at all time and places to all material objects.
- 7) There is no objective knowledge of the world, independent of our subjective experience and point of view (Epistemological Subjectivism).
- 8) The material world possesses certain objective features, independent of being observed or specified by us.