



**COURSE SYLLABUS FOR**  
**A BRIEF HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY**  
**(A glimpse into European Intellectual Legacy)**

**Professor**

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**Course description**

This course provides a general overview of the main philosophical topics discussed from Socrates to Sartre. The course develops historically the most important subfields of philosophy: philosophy of nature, philosophy of mind, metaphysics, ethics, epistemology (theory of knowledge), aesthetics and philosophy of history. We successively discuss Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Aquinas, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Sartre. Because the course is intended for students of fields other than philosophy (as well as for its short duration), the discussion focuses on only one of the most relevant ideas of each mentioned European philosophers, instead of exploring their entire system of thought. Students are required to follow the class and take notes, to answer comprehension questions, to write a short essay and to participate in class debates.

**Course prerequisites**

The course is delivered entirely in English language. Students must possess a B2 level of English (European Framework for Languages). None other requisite is contemplated.

**Learning objectives**

After this course, students should be able to:

1. Understand the main traditions in the history of Western philosophy
2. Read extracts from original sources and put them into their appropriate historical context
3. Write an essay on a philosophical topic
4. Discuss philosophical ideas and express his/her own position

**Number of weeks and distribution**

It is a 16 weeks course. A lesson of 1 and ½ hour per week. And it is divided in two periods:

- 6 lessons - a review week - Mid-term test (it covers the first 6 lessons period)
- 6 lessons – a review week – Final Test (it covers the second 6 lessons period)

## Course schedule and content

Week	Topic	Description	Activities	Texts
1	Socrates and the idea of Philosophy	<p>-The origins of rational thought in opposition to mythical and religious explanations of reality in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC: the mystical figure of Pythagoras, and the philosophers of Nature.</p> <p>-Origins of Philosophy in Athens, 5th century BC, with Socrates, in opposition to Sophists (Protagoras, Gorgias and so on).</p> <p>-Socrates' life and mission. The mission of the philosopher. Search for wisdom. Questioning method as a method for revealing one's own ignorance and enacting our search for knowledge (beyond the given).</p> <p>-Socrates' teachings: examine your own life, the care for the soul as opposite to material ambitions, the good person cannot be harmed by the bad one.</p>	<p>-Multiple-choice Q&amp;A on students' prior knowledge related to Western thinkers and philosophical ideas in general.</p> <p>-Professor's lecture on Socrates and the origins of philosophy.</p> <p>-Comments on a text and discussion in pairs prompted by worksheets addressing the content and implications of the text. Comparing with Chinese thought (Aided by Feng Youlan's book).</p>	<p>Athens, historic, cultural context, in Kenny (2006), pp. 24-28.</p> <p>Socrates' life, in Lawhead (2011), p. 17; about the mission of the philosopher, in Lawhead (2011), pp. 19-21; about Socrates' teachings, in Lawhead (2011), pp. 28-30.</p>
2	Plato and the idea of Justice	<p>-Plato's life and relevance in the Western tradition together with Aristotle as two poles of a dialectical thinking (deductive/inductive; metaphysical/empirical). Historical and cultural context of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.</p> <p>- Plato's theory of Forms or ideas). The sensible objects partake of their idea in order to be. The knowing of the idea or form is what makes us recognize and identify objects as pertaining to a category.</p> <p>-The controversy already in the classic Greek about the definition of Justice.</p>	<p>-Multiple-choice Q&amp;A to check students' prior knowledge on previous topic (origins of philosophy).</p> <p>-Professor's lecture on Plato and the idea of justice.</p> <p>-Comments on a text and discussion in pairs prompted by questions addressing the content and implications of the text. Comparing with Chinese thought (Aided by Feng Youlan's book).</p>	<p>Discussion between Socrates and Thrasymachus on the idea of Justice (<i>Republic</i>) in Lawhead (2011), pp. 24-28.</p> <p>Theory of idea (<i>Phaedo</i>), in Lawhead (2011), pp. 78-79.</p>

		<p>Explanation and comments of the main arguments in the debate between Socrates (Plato's master) and Thrasymachus.</p> <p>-The idea of Justice as the harmony of the parts within the whole and fulfilment of virtues. To this idea is opposed Thrasymachus in the book I of Republic. The disciple of Gorgias defends Justice as the rule of the strongest.</p>		
3	Aristotle and the idea of Happiness	<p>-Aristotle's life and general position towards his master Plato. Brief historical and Cultural context of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC.</p> <p>-The Nicomachean Ethics, the two types of virtues: moral virtues and intellectual virtues.</p> <p>-Virtues have the mission of leading human beings to the fulfilment of their nature or essence.</p> <p>-The fulfilment of human beings essence is what Aristotle calls happiness.</p> <p>-Happiness is the end of human beings' life (this is called the <i>eudaimonia's</i> theory). Happiness is our <i>telos</i> or end. Teleology.</p> <p>-The perfect happiness is contemplative and rational activities; reason is the essential feature of human beings. Some critical remarks can qualify this Aristotelian claim.</p>	<p>-Multiple-choice Q&amp;A to check students' prior knowledge on previous topic (Plato and the idea of justice)</p> <p>-Professor's lecture on Aristotle and the idea of happiness.</p> <p>-Comments on a text and discussion in pairs prompted by questions addressing the content and implications of the text. Comparing with Chinese thought (Aided by Feng Youlan's book).</p>	<p>Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>, on Happiness (<i>eudaimonia</i>), in Lawhead (2011), pp. 515-516.</p>
4	Epicurus and the idea of pleasure as ultimate good	<p>-Philosophical thought after Aristotle. The Hellenic period (from 3<sup>th</sup> century BC to 1<sup>st</sup> century AD). The three schools of philosophy during that period: Epicureism, Stoicism and Scepticism.</p> <p>-Epicurus' life and general doctrine.</p>	<p>-Multiple-choice Q&amp;A to check students' prior knowledge on previous topic (Aristotle and the idea of happiness).</p> <p>-Professor's lecture on Epicurus and the idea of pleasure as the ultimate good,</p>	<p>Cicero, <i>De finibus bonorum et malorum</i>, (translated into English). New York: MacMillan. Extract on epicureism from</p>

		<p>-Epicurus' moral theory: The hedonism. Pleasure is the ultimate good. Human life and moral behaviour have as its only goal to procure the greatest pleasure.</p> <p>-Discussion on hedonist moral theory. Cicero's opinion against Epicurus' hedonism and the arguments deployed by the hedonist philosophers.</p> <p>-Influence and impact on other philosophers (such as the British utilitarian tradition Stuart Mill and Bentham)</p>	<p>the end of people's life.</p> <p>-Comments on a text and discussion in pairs prompting by questions addressing the content and implications of the text, which is not written by Epicurus but by Cicero in discussion with an Epicurus follower in the times of the Romans. Comparing with Chinese thought (Aided by Feng Youlan's book).</p>	<p>Book I, vii-x, pp. 33, 35. On epicureist moral philosophy, in Kenny (2006), pp. 94.</p>
5	Aquinas and the idea of God	<p>-Aquinas' life and general doctrine. Historical and cultural context of 13<sup>th</sup> century.</p> <p>-Aquinas importance in the history of philosophy and the Western tradition.</p> <p>-Aquinas theology and the idea of God.</p> <p>-Aquinas arguments to prove the existence of God: cause argument and contingency argument.</p> <p>-Aquinas argument and the definition of philosophical concepts such as existence, essence, contingency and necessity, and contingent beings/necessary being.</p> <p>-Western attempt to combine reason and faith. Saint Anselm argument. Against the attempt to prove the separation between faith and reason (Kierkegaard).</p>	<p>-Multiple-choice Q&amp;A to check students' prior knowledge on previous topic (Epicurus and the pleasure)</p> <p>-Professor's lecture on Aquinas and the idea of God.</p> <p>-Comments on a text and discussion in pairs prompting by questions addressing the content and implications of the text. Comparing with Chinese thought (Aided by Feng Youlan's book).</p>	<p>Arguments demonstrating the existence of God. <i>Summa Theologica</i>; cause argument and contingency argument in Lawhead (2011), pp. 327 – 329.</p>
6	Descartes and the idea of scientific method	<p>-Descartes' life and general approach to philosophy. Historical and cultural Context of the Modernity (17<sup>th</sup> century).</p> <p>-Descartes idea of method. The application of scientific method of the time to philosophical truth.</p> <p>-The method and the</p>	<p>-Multiple-choice Q&amp;A to check students' prior knowledge on previous topic (Aquinas and the idea of God)</p> <p>-Professor's lecture on Descartes and the idea of a scientific method for searching philosophical truth.</p>	<p>Descartes, <i>Discourse on Method</i> (1637), about the scientific method for philosophy (rationalism), in Lawhead (2011), pp. 65-69; about the mind-body</p>

		<p>universal doubt. The will to put every given opinion and tradition between brackets, to suspend the philosophical judgment until the investigation on truth is finished.</p> <p>-Certainty as ultimate goal. The refusal to accept what is not distinct and evident.</p> <p>-The method and the four certainties: I exist; I am thinking activity (I exist insofar as I am thinking activity); God exists; the world exists (insofar as God exists).</p>	<p>-Reflection on Magritte's painting <i>The human condition</i> (to apply Descartes' insight).</p> <p>-Comments on a text and discussion in pairs prompting by questions addressing the content and implications of the text. Comparing with Chinese thought (Aided by Feng Youlan's book).</p>	<p>relation or dualism that justify his method, in Lawhead (2011), pp. 220-224.</p>
<b>7</b>	<b>Review week</b>	<b>Review week</b>	<b>Review week</b>	<b>Review week</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Mid-term Test</b>	<p>The test consists of multiple-choice questions, binary question (truth/false), fill in the gaps questions, pictures and/or a text with some prompts related to its tradition, main ideas, arguments, and its relation and/or its opposition to other philosophical tradition or authors.</p>		
<b>9</b>	Hume and the idea of causality	<p>- Hume's life and general approach to philosophy. Historical and cultural context of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.</p> <p>-Hume's intention of applying Newton's scientific achievement to the studies on human nature.</p> <p>- Hume's division of knowledge between matter of facts (empirical sciences) and relation between ideas (formal sciences).</p> <p>-Hume's critique to the principle of causality based on the two knowledge described. Causality is not a matter of fact but relation between ideas, led by a mental habit.</p> <p>Hume's criticism to causality</p>	<p>-Multiple-choice Q&amp;A to check students' prior knowledge on previous topic (Descartes and the idea of method)</p> <p>-Professor's lecture on Hume and the idea of causality.</p> <p>-Comments on a text and discussion in pairs prompting by questions addressing the content and implications of the text. Comparing with Chinese thought (Aided by Feng Youlan's book).</p>	<p>Hume, <i>A treatise on Human Nature</i> (1738); about the idea of causality, in Lawhead (2011), pp. 108-110; 112-114. Two types of knowledge, pp. 107-108.</p>

		brings science close to psychology: the reduction of causality to a psychological principle that makes us project our causal relation between ideas to matters of fact. -Hume's influence on Kant's epistemology and relevance in the history of science and philosophy.		
10	Kant and the idea of moral categorical imperative	Kant's life and general doctrine. Historical and cultural context of Enlightenment (Late 18 <sup>th</sup> century). - Kant's moral theory and the principle of duty. -Kant's definition and formulation of the categorical imperative as the moral order that reason gives itself. Moral behaviour is that which is motivated by a rational principle of obeying the duty. -Kant's and the empirical imperatives as flawed principles to justify morality, for empirical imperatives are empirically motivated by interests. -The moral act is that in which coincide the individual's will or intention and the duty formulated by the categorical imperative in terms of acting always as if the maxim of our behaviour could be implemented as the maxim of everybody's behaviour (first and second formulation). -The third formulation of the categorical imperative: do not take a person as a means (as an object to fulfil your interest), yet always as an end of your actions.	-Multiple-choice Q&A to check students' prior knowledge on previous topic (Hume and the idea of causality)  -Professor's lecture on Kant and the moral categorical imperative.  -Comments on a text and discussion in pairs prompting by questions addressing the content and implications of the text. Comparing with Chinese thought (Aided by Feng Youlan's book).	Kant, <i>Critique of Practical reason</i> (1788). Texts on categorical imperative and the moral principle, in Lawhead (2011), pp. 496, 498, 500.
11	Hegel and the idea of spirit of history	-Hegel's life and general doctrine and significance in the history of Western	-Multiple-choice Q&A to check students' prior knowledge on previous topic	Hegel, <i>Philosophy of History</i> (1837).

		<p>thought. Historical and cultural context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.</p> <p>-Hegel's concept of spirit as what constitutes and homogenised the periods of history.</p> <p>-History as the development of reason, the topic of progress of humanity (critical remarks on his eurocentrism).</p> <p>-The concept of spirit of history and the spirit of each nation. Spirit as a phase or moment of the development of the reason. Remarks on the spirit of our times.</p> <p>-The concept of spirit and the term "absolute idealism": history is the development of an idea or plan which aims to an end as the final satisfaction of reason in the world.</p> <p>-Some brief remarks on Marx's reading of Hegel: Marx's task of turning Hegel's idealism upside down: historical materialism.</p>	<p>(Kant and the categorical imperative).</p> <p>-Professor's lecture on Hegel and the idea of spirit of history.</p> <p>-Comments on a text and discussion in pairs prompting by questions addressing the content and implications of the text. Comparing with Chinese thought (Aided by Feng Youlan's book).</p>	<p>Text on the idea of spirit, in Kenny (2006), p. 300. Text on the evolution of world history as evolution of reason, in Hegel (1837), p. 22-23.</p>
12	Nietzsche and the idea of perspectivism	<p>- Nietzsche's life and general approach to philosophy and culture. Historical and cultural context of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.</p> <p>-Nietzsche's idea of perspectivism. His refusal of Plato's theory of forms and the entire Western philosophical tradition. Life and sensible knowledge is human being's only possibility to know something. Rejection of reason and abstract ideas. Life is the foundation of knowledge. Language and concepts deceive us with an apparent reality, while the only real is the world of senses and biology (Nietzsche's scientific</p>	<p>-Multiple-choice Q&amp;A to check students' prior knowledge on previous topic (Hegel and the idea of the spirit of history).</p> <p>-Professor's lecture on Nietzsche and the idea of perspectivism.</p> <p>-Comments on a text and discussion in pairs prompting by questions addressing the content and implications of the text. Comparing with Chinese thought (Aided by Feng Youlan's book).</p>	<p>Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> (1886). Texts on perspectivism and truth, in Lawhead (2011), pp. 146-148.</p>

		dogma). -Nietzsche's relativism as subjective relativism. Truth is not one but plural, each life is a perspective on the universe (as Ortega y Gasset reinterpreted after).		
13	Wittgenstein and the idea of language games	-Wittgenstein's life and general approach to philosophy and reality. Historical and cultural context of the early 20 <sup>th</sup> century. -Wittgenstein's defence of truth as correspondence between language and reality ( <i>Tractatus</i> ). -Wittgenstein's influence in the logical positivism. -The turn to a pragmatic approach to language and culture with his <i>Philosophical investigation</i> . The idea of languages games. Language doesn't represent reality but it is a sort of game with rules. Language is communication according to social and cultural rules: the form of life. -The influence of the conception of language games in pragmatic linguistic and anthropology.	-Multiple-choice Q&A to check students' prior knowledge on previous topic (Nietzsche and perspectivism).  -Professor's lecture on Wittgenstein and the idea of language games.  -Comments on a text and discussion in pairs prompting by questions addressing the content and implications of the text. Comparing with Chinese thought (Aided by Feng Youlan's book).	Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> (1953). Texts on language games, in Kenny (2006), pp. 376, 377, 379. On logical positivism and <i>Tractatus</i> , in Kenny (2006), pp. 365-368.
14	Sartre and the idea of existential freedom	-Sartre's life and general approach to philosophy and reality. Historical and cultural context to late 20 <sup>th</sup> century. -Sartre's idea of existential freedom. To exist is to decide at every second what to do and how to live; by deciding and acting, the human being build his/her own personality and essential being: for Sartre, the existence is prior to the essence. -Sartre's idea of "bad faith" in relation to existential freedom: human being is always free, even when it is	-Multiple-choice Q&A to check students' prior knowledge on previous topic (Wittgenstein and the language games).  -Professor's lecture on Sartre and the idea of existential freedom.  -Comments on a text and discussion in pairs prompting by questions addressing the content and implications of the text. Comparing with Chinese thought (Aided by Feng Youlan's book).	Sartre, <i>Being and Nothingness</i> (1943). Texts on existential freedom, in Lawhead (2011), pp. 299-230.



		<p>order to do something. In ultimate instance, the human being is responsible of its own actions and life; to justify its actions by accusing some external influence, that is, to not recognize that it is him or her who decides is to act in bad faith.</p> <p>-Sartre's influence in his time and after. The collaboration and aid of Simone de Beauvoir. The existential movement. Albert Camus and the absurdity of life.</p>		
<b>15</b>	<b>Review week</b>	<b>Review week</b>	<b>Review week</b>	<b>Review week</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>Final Test</b>	<p>The test consists of multiple-choice questions, binary question (truth/false), fill in the gaps questions, pictures and/or a text with some prompts related to its tradition, main ideas, arguments, and its relation and/or its opposition to other philosophical tradition or authors.</p>		

### Course materials

Textbook: Handouts provided by the instructor. The handouts are copies (printing) of the slides used in class. The students will be provided with the handouts a week ahead. The class slides (Power Point) are the main material students should use to study the course. These slides have been prepared using a number of sources and books that are also encouraging to consult.

### Reference books and sources

Kenny, Anthony. 2006. *An Illustrated Brief History of Western Philosophy*. Malden: Blackwell.

Kenny, Anthony. 2012. *A New History of Western Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lawhead, William. 2011. *The Philosophical Journey. An Interactive Approach*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Russell, Bertrand. 1945. *A History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Simon and Schuster Inc.

Shand, J. 2003. *Philosophy and Philosophers*. London: UCL Press.

Tubbs, Nigel. 2009. *History of Western Philosophy*. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy ([plato.stanford.edu](http://plato.stanford.edu)).

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy ([iep.utm.edu](http://iep.utm.edu))

### **Extracts from primary sources in the History of Western Philosophy (in chronological order)**

Plato [400 BC], extracts from *The Republic, Phaedo, Apology*.

Aristotle [350 BC], extracts from *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Cicero [45 BC], *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* (extract on epicureanism).

Aquinas, Thomas [1267-1273], extracts from *Summa Theologica*.

Descartes, René [1637], extracts from *Discourse on Method*.

Hume, David. [1738], extracts from *A Treatise on Human Nature*.

Kant, Immanuel [1788], extracts from *Critique of Practical Reason*.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich [1837], extracts from *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*.

Nietzsche, Friedrich [1886], extracts from *Beyond Good and Evil*.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig [1953], extracts from *Philosophical Investigations*.

Sartre, Jean-Paul [1943], extracts from *Being and Nothingness*.

### **Course assessment**

The students will be evaluated on the basis of their performance as follows:

- ✓ Midterm examination 35%
- ✓ Essay on a philosophical topic 20%
- ✓ Class Attendance and Performance 10%
- ✓ Final examination 35%

TOTAL 100%

### **Description of activities and grading criteria**

The course is thought to stimulate student's thinking. The presentation of the topics intends to be critical. Students are going to be encouraged to participate and leave their comfort zone. The class dynamics are to follow a template with three clear parts: 1. the beginning of the lesson (the starter) is reserved to questions-answer technique. Every lesson will open reviewing the topic and ideas studied in the previous class. These activities are to check their comprehension and memory, and it would consist in answering multiple-choice questions or binary question (15 minutes). 2. The second part of the class is covered by the professor's exposition of the lesson's topics (45 minutes). 3. The last section or plenary is devoted to the application of the topic (a main idea within the History of Western tradition) to texts or a pictures, students will be encouraged to discuss in small groups or pairs and share with the rest of the class (30 minutes).

The assignment is a short essay of between 500-1000 words. Students will be provided with 4 extracts (texts related to topics discussed in class) at the beginning of the semester, they must choose one of them and write a critical essay that consists of three parts: 1. General context of the extract (period and philosophical tradition) 2. Life and thought of the author (a classic philosopher) 3. Description of the idea supported in the text and the arguments deployed 4. Discussion of the ideas and arguments from student's cultural and generational background. The assignment counts for 20% towards the final grade.

The mid-term exam and the final exam consist of questions which will cover the class material, including the handouts and the primary sources (texts reviewed and analyzed in class). As part of

the exam, students will also receive an extract (or extracts) from a primary source which was not discussed in class.

### **Grading criteria for written assignments**

The following criteria will be applied in assessing student's written work (essay):

- ability to correctly and critically use philosophical concepts and theories;
- ability to analyze contemporary moral issues using relevant theoretical frameworks;
- ability to write a good introduction and a clear conclusion.

### **Additional course policies**

Students are expected to attend all classes. If a student cannot attend, then he/she is responsible for catching up by consulting fellow class mates. At the beginning of every class, absences will be taken.

Students are expected to be active in class (taking notes, participating in the whole group tasks, asking questions, and so on). Respectful behaviour towards the professor and other students are also expected. Out of respect, no sleeping on tables, no cutting finger nails, no distracting others by chatting and so on will be tolerated in the class setting.

The deadline for submitting the final essay is the final review class, week 15. The students are expected to visit the professor during his office hours or at the end of class to discuss the progress of the essay and any doubt or difficulty they may have.