

# PHIL 11001: Introduction to Philosophy

## Spring 2025 □ WEB COURSE □ No Fixed Meeting Times

**Professor:** Dr. Gina Zavota

**Office:** 320 Bowman Hall, Room G

**Office Hours:** MW 1:00-2:15 & 3:45-4:15 (in person)  
T 4:00-5:00 (Teams); and by appointment

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### Graduate Assistants

### Email

### Office Hours

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F 10:00-1:00

Deirdre Jenkins

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TTh 2:00-3:30

**Remote Office Hours Procedure:** All office hours for this course will be held in Teams unless otherwise specified. The links to access Dr. Zavota's and the Graduate Assistants' office hours can be found on the home page for this course on Canvas.

The times listed above are the hours we'll definitely be available to meet with you. You don't need to make an appointment to meet with us at those times; just come to the office or join the Teams meeting. If those times aren't good for you, we'd be happy to schedule a different time to meet. We look forward to seeing you during office hours, whether in person or remotely!

## Course Description and Learning Outcomes

**Welcome to Introduction to Philosophy!** This course will be organized around several questions that have been central to the development of philosophy over the last 2,500 years, such as: *Who am I? What is the nature of reality? Is it possible to know anything with certainty? Can I prove that God exists?* Drawing on both historical and contemporary readings from a range of cultures and perspectives, we will explore the variety of answers that philosophers have given to these and other questions, as well as the types of reasoning that have led them to their answers. In the course of our investigations, we will also begin to develop our own responses to these long-debated philosophical problems and will practice the critical thinking, reading, and writing skills that are central to philosophical discourse.

**Learning Outcomes:** This course has several distinct but related learning outcomes. In particular, **after successfully completing this course, you should be able to:**

- **understand the nature of philosophical reasoning and critical thinking**, and recognize both strong and weak arguments about philosophical topics
- **recognize some important philosophical issues** and the various positions people might take when they discuss these issues
- **construct strong, rational arguments** in defense of your own positions, applying principles learned from studying different philosophical theories
- **critically read texts** containing philosophical arguments, analyze the strengths and weaknesses of those arguments, and respond to them with a well-reasoned argument of your own
- **engage in rational discussions** of important philosophical issues and respond respectfully to challenges to your own position
- **appreciate the diversity of philosophical theories and views**, even those you disagree with

The critical thinking, reading, writing and argumentation skills that you will acquire in this course will benefit you no matter what your major is or what type of career you choose to pursue.

**Diversity Element:** This course may be used to satisfy 3 credits of the University Global Diversity Requirement. It will include philosophical works written from feminist, BIPOC, and non-Western perspectives.

**Kent Core:** This course may be used to satisfy 3 credits of the Kent Core Humanities requirement.

**Prerequisites:** There are no prerequisites for this course.

## Structure of the Course

**Course Modules:** This course has 16 weekly modules, each of which will consist of the following components:

- **Study questions** designed to help you study for the quiz. While the quiz questions will not be identical to the study questions, the quiz will not cover any material not addressed by the study questions. Thus, if you are able to answer all of the study questions, you should be able to do well on the quiz.
- **One or more readings** in PDF format
- **A PowerPoint video or videos with narration**, which will serve as your “lecture(s)” for the week
- **A quiz** which you will need to take by the end of the week
- **A discussion board** where you will post a response to that module’s discussion question and reply to other students’ responses, **or a brief writing assignment** to complete; the writing assignments are designed to help you practice constructing philosophical arguments in a more formal context than the discussion boards

Since this is an entirely asynchronous online course, you are responsible for completing the weekly readings on your own time. I strongly suggest that you read through the readings once, then watch the narrated PowerPoint(s), and then work through the readings again while answering the study questions, before beginning the quiz.

**I expect students to observe normal rules of etiquette when posting on the discussion boards.** It goes without saying that no offensive language will be tolerated and that students should treat each other with respect. Do not share anything from this class with others who are not in the class; similarly, do not communicate anything confidential or private within the class. In addition, you should write in complete sentences, as if you’re writing a paper for a class or a professional document, not like you would write in a social media post or text. Any posts that do not comply with these guidelines may be removed.

## Required Texts and Assignments

**Required Text:** All readings will be made available on Canvas; you are not required to purchase any texts.

**Assignments:** All assignments, feedback, and grades will be made available on Canvas. A running total of your weighted average in the course will also be available on the “Grades” page in Canvas throughout the semester. Grades will generally be posted approximately a week after the due date for the assignment.

Your final grade in the course will be based on your performance on the following:

- 1) **Quizzes** (*graded out of 10 points*): quizzes will include multiple-choice, multiple answer, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, matching, and short answer questions

- each week's quiz will become available only **after you click through the week's study questions, readings, and narrated PowerPoint lecture(s)**
- you will have **30 minutes** to complete each quiz, starting when you begin the quiz
- **you will not be able to pause the quiz in the middle or restart it**, so you should make sure that you have an uninterrupted 30 minutes to take the quiz before starting it
- **you will not be able to go back and change your answer to a question once you've moved on to the next one**
- **your lowest quiz grade will be dropped**

2) **Discussion Board Posts and Replies** (10 points total, including post (7 points) and two replies (1½ points each))

- a) **Post:** you will be required to respond to several discussion questions over the course of the semester
- each week's discussion will be open **from noon Monday to 11:59pm the following Sunday**
  - you must answer all parts of each discussion question; for multi-part questions, you should devote a roughly equal number of words to each part of the question
  - your response must be **at least 300 words** in length (this is roughly equivalent to one double-spaced typed page)
  - your response must contain your own original thought and a well-reasoned argument in support of your position and must demonstrate that you have understood the reading(s)
  - **you will not be able to edit your response after posting it**, so be sure to proofread and edit carefully before posting
  - your posts will be graded based on how well you demonstrate your understanding of the material, as well as how thorough, complete, clear, and well-reasoned they are
  - **you should not use any outside sources in your response**; you will lose points if you discuss concepts that were not in the readings or lectures, even if these concepts are described accurately

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** You will not be able to see or reply to other students' posts until you have posted your own response to the discussion question. The discussion board is set up this way to ensure that each student posts their own original reply to the question, without seeing how others have responded. As a result, **you will only be allowed to post one response to the discussion question. If you post a blank or incomplete post, that will be counted as your response.** I recommend that you type out your response in a different app and cut and paste it into the discussion board to minimize the possibility of errors.

- b) **Replies:** you will also be required to write **two brief replies to posts** each week; **at least one of the replies must be a reply to an original post from a classmate** (in other words, not a reply to a reply)
- **you will not be able to see or reply to other students' posts until you have posted your own response to the discussion question** (see (a) above)
  - your replies must be **at least 150 words** long each (roughly equal to ½ a double-spaced page)
  - your replies must be substantive and contain the following components:
    - a brief statement of the point made by the person you're replying to
    - a statement of whether or not you agree with the poster's point or position
    - an explanation of *why* you agree or disagree

3) **Writing Assignments:** four times during the semester, instead of a discussion forum, you will be required to complete a brief writing assignment designed to teach you some of the basics of philosophical writing. This will prepare you to write strong argumentative texts in future courses and in professional settings.

- You will have two chances to upload a file, but this is only in case you upload the wrong file or forget to attach a file the first time. If you upload two versions of the assignment, only the second one will be read and used to calculate your grade.
- **Late assignments will be accepted, but will be marked late and penalized as described below.**

## Grading Practices

Your final grade will reflect your performance on the various types of assignments as explained above. The percentages are summarized in the table below.

Assignment	Percentage of Final Grade
Quizzes	50%
Discussion Board Posts & Replies	30%
Writing Assignments	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

Total Points	Final Grade
93-100	A
90-92.99	A-
87-89.99	B+
83-86.99	B
and so on...	
67-69.99	D+
60-66.99	D
<60	F

**Late or Missed Assignments:** If you think that you will not be able to complete an assignment on time, you will be allowed to turn the assignment in late with no penalty **only if** (1) you have an acceptable reason for the delay (see below), **and** (2) you provide documentation of whatever caused you to miss the assignment. **You must contact me before the due date to request an extension if you meet criteria (1) and (2) listed above.**

- **Students who miss a quiz or discussion assignment due to an unexcused reason will receive a grade of zero on the missed assignment, and no makeups will be allowed.**
- **Students who turn a writing assignment in late due to an unexcused reason will be penalized 10% of the possible point total for each 48-hour period (or part of such period) that the assignment is late.**

**Acceptable reasons for a late assignment** include illness or a medical or family emergency. Documentation is required for an extension on the assignment to be granted, either prior to the due date or as soon as possible after it. Situations where documentation is impossible will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

## Technology Requirements

**Internet Access:** This is a fully online course with no fixed meeting times or face-to-face component. As a result, it is extremely important that you ensure that you have regular access to a laptop or desktop computer with consistent, reliable internet access, as well as a backup plan if your Wi-Fi goes out or your computer breaks.

**Computer malfunction or lack of internet access will not be accepted as an excuse for not completing an assignment or taking a quiz on time.** Further information regarding technology requirements for online courses can be found on the [Getting Started in Your Online Course](#) web page.

**Canvas:** This is the official platform for this class, so you should familiarize yourself with it before the start of the semester. In order to login to Canvas, you will need a Kent State FlashLine User ID and password. You can access Canvas at <https://canvas.kent.edu> or through FlashLine. Canvas works best using the latest version of Chrome, Safari, or Firefox. Do not use Internet Explorer. **Students have reported issues with the Canvas mobile app, so it is recommended that you complete the assignments for this course in a web browser.**

**Email:** A university-assigned student e-mail account is the official university means of communication with all students at Kent State University. Students are responsible for all information sent to them via their university-assigned e-mail account. If you choose to forward information in your university e-mail account, you are still

responsible for all information, including attachments, sent to any other e-mail account. To stay current with university information, you should check your official university e-mail account on a frequent and consistent basis.

Dr. Zavota and the Graduate Assistants will communicate with the class through the Announcements function in Canvas, so make sure that your Canvas account is configured to notify you whenever there is a new announcement in this course.

We will check our email at least once per day Monday through Friday, and at least once during the weekend. **We will generally respond to all emails within 24 hours during the week, and within 48 hours on the weekend.** If there are special circumstances that will delay responses, I will make an announcement to the class.

**Technology Help:** Kent State University offers 24/7 technology support to all students. For technical issues with your computer, any KSU-supported software, Canvas, FlashLine, or your kent.edu email, please contact Information Services via phone, email, or Live Chat. More information, including contact information, is available on the [Information Services](#) web page. Students can access tech help day or night by calling 330-672-HELP. **Please contact the Helpdesk for technical assistance; we will not be able to assist you with technical issues.**

## University Policies, Procedures, and Resources

**Students with Disabilities:** University policy 3-01.3 in the *University Policy Register* requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. Please note that you must first verify your eligibility through Student Accessibility Services (contact (330) 672-3391 or visit <http://www.kent.edu/sas> for more information on registration procedures).

**Academic Dishonesty:** University policy 3-01.8 in the *University Policy Register* deals with the problem of academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism. None of these will be tolerated in this class. The sanctions provided in this policy will be used to deal with any violations. It is recommended that students familiarize themselves with this policy at <http://www.kent.edu/policyreg/administrative-policy-regarding-student-cheating-and-plagiarism>. Note that, per this policy, **any use of generative AI (GAI) in a class is considered cheating, unless explicitly allowed by the instructor.** If you have any questions, please feel free to ask.

**Academic Complaint Procedure:** The Philosophy Department Grievance Procedure for handling student grievances is in conformity with the Student Academic Complaint Policy and Procedures set down as University Policy 4-02.3 in the *University Policy Register*, which can be found at <http://www.kent.edu/policyreg/administrative-policy-and-procedure-student-academic-complaints>. For information concerning the details of the grievance procedure, please see the departmental chairperson.

**Add/Drop and Withdrawal Deadlines:** The official registration deadline for this course is **January 19, 2025**. The last day to drop the course without a “W” appearing on your record is **January 26, 2025**. The withdrawal deadline for this course is **March 30, 2025**. University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they are attending. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published deadlines should not be attending classes and will not receive credit or a grade for the course. Students must confirm enrollment by checking their class schedule in FlashLine prior to the deadline indicated. Registration errors must be corrected prior to the deadline.

**Intellectual Property:** Any intellectual property displayed or distributed to students during this course (including but not limited to PowerPoint presentations, notes, quizzes, examinations) by the professor/lecturer/instructor remains the intellectual property of the professor/lecturer/instructor. This means that the student may not distribute, publish, or provide such intellectual property to any other person or entity for any reason, commercial

or otherwise, without the express written permission of the professor/lecturer/instructor. Additionally, students may not distribute or publish recordings and/or links to live classroom presentations, lectures, and/or class discussions. **Please respect the intellectual property of your instructor by not posting class materials online.**

**Academic Support:** Kent State recognizes that many students face challenges, and we are committed to supporting your academic journey when you need help. Whether you are struggling in a course or need help writing a paper or working to achieve your goals, use the resources below to start building your support system:

- Where can I go if I need assistance with how to study and meet my academic goals?
  - Academic Coaching ([www.kent.edu/coaching](http://www.kent.edu/coaching))
- Who can review my writing and help me properly cite my work?
  - Writing Commons ([www.kent.edu/writingcommons](http://www.kent.edu/writingcommons))
- Where should I go when I don't know where to go?
  - Academic Advising ([www.kent.edu/university-advising](http://www.kent.edu/university-advising))
  - TRIO Student Support Services ([www.kent.edu/student-support-services](http://www.kent.edu/student-support-services))

**Mental Well-Being Support:** Mental health challenges may also make it difficult for students to reach their full potential. KSU's mental health and wellness resource page provides information on education and awareness, mental health services, and advocacy intervention. To learn more, please visit Kent State's mental health resources and support website at <https://www.kent.edu/mentalhealth>.

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** Kent State University is committed to the creation and maintenance of equitable and inclusive learning spaces. This course is a learning environment where all will be treated with respect and dignity, and where all individuals will have an equitable opportunity to succeed. The diversity that each student brings to this course is viewed as a strength and a benefit. Dimensions of diversity and their intersections include but are not limited to: race, ethnicity, national origin, primary language, age, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, mental and physical abilities, socio-economic status, first-generation student status, family/caregiver status, and veteran status.

**Land Acknowledgment Statement:** We acknowledge that the lands of Kent State University were the previous homes of people who were removed from this area without their consent by the colonial practices of the United States government. Before removal, these groups created networks that extended from Wyoming to the Florida Coast and Appalachia and to the northern reaches of Lake Superior. These societies included people of the Shawnee, Seneca-Cayuga, Delaware, Wyandots, Ottawa and Miami. We honor their lives – both past and present – and strive to move beyond remembrance toward reflection and responsibility through honest accounts of the past and the development of cultural knowledge and community.

**Accommodations for Religious and Spiritual Beliefs:** In accordance with House Bill 353, KSU permits students to request class absences, without penalty, for up to three days per term in order to participate in organized activities conducted by a religious or spiritual organization. The request must be made to your instructor, in writing, during the first fourteen (14) days of the semester and must include the date(s) of each proposed absence. The request must clearly state that the proposed absence is to participate in religious activities and must describe the particular accommodation(s) you desire. For further information, please contact the Student Ombuds at [ombuds@kent.edu](mailto:ombuds@kent.edu).

**This syllabus and reading & assignment schedule may be subject to change; any changes will be communicated via the Announcements function in Canvas.**

# Reading and Assignment Schedule

**Notes: All readings are available on Canvas in the weekly modules.**

**Remember that you will also have a weekly quiz that will be due by Sunday at 11:59pm each week (except Spring Break)!**

**All times are US Eastern Time.**

TOPICS AND READINGS	DISCUSSIONS & WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (WAs)	DUE DATE (all are due at 11:59pm)
<b>Introduction:</b> <i>Why should I study philosophy?</i>		
<b>Week 1:</b> Russell, "On the Value of Philosophy"	Discussion #1	Sunday, Jan 19
<b>Epistemology:</b> <i>What is truth? What is knowledge? Is it possible to know anything with certainty?</i>		
<b>Week 2:</b> Descartes, "Meditations I and II"	NONE	Sunday, Jan 26
<b>Week 3:</b> Hume, "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding"	WA #1	Sunday, Feb 2
<b>Week 4:</b> al-Ghazali, "Deliverance from Error" (up to "The True Nature of Prophecy")	Discussion #2	Sunday, Feb 9
<b>Week 5:</b> Code, "Knowledge and Subjectivity" Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief" (up to "...let him consider it.")	NONE	Sunday, Feb 16
<b>Philosophy of Science:</b> <i>Are scientific claims "true"? What does this even mean?</i>		
<b>Week 6:</b> Popper, "Conjectures and Refutations"	Discussion #3	Sunday, Feb 23
<b>Week 7:</b> Kuhn, "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" (up to Sec. X) Appiah, "Old Gods, New Worlds"	WA #2	Sunday, Mar 2
<b>Philosophy of Religion:</b> <i>Can I prove that God exists (or doesn't exist)?</i>		
<b>Week 8:</b> Anselm, "The Ontological Argument"	Discussion #4	Sunday, Mar 9
<b>Week 9: SPRING BREAK</b>	NONE	

**Week 10:** Aquinas, “The Five Ways”  
The Dalai Lama, “The Role of Religion in Modern Society”

**WA #3**

**Sunday, Mar 23**

**Metaphysics:** *What types of things exist? What is the nature of reality?*

**Week 11:** Plato, “The Republic”

**Discussion #5**

**Sunday, Mar 30**

**Week 12:** Shankara, “The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination”  
Cole, “Body, Mind, and Gender”

**NONE**

**Sunday, Apr 6**

**Week 13:** Laozi, “Dao De Jing”

**WA #4**

**Sunday, Apr 13**

**Philosophy of Mind and Personal Identity:** *Am I my body, my mind, or something else? What is a mind, and who has one?*

**Week 14:** Searle, “Can Computers Think?”

**Discussion #6**

**Sunday, Apr 20**

**Week 15:** Classical Buddhist Texts: “False Doctrines about the Soul,” “The Simile of the Chariot”  
Anzaldúa, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue”

**NONE**

**Sunday, Apr 27**

**Week 16:** Dennett, “Brainstorms”

**Discussion #7**

**Sunday, May 4**

**THERE IS NO FINAL EXAM IN THIS COURSE**



