Philosophy without Borders: Self and World, East and West

COURSE DESCRIPTION
What is the nature of the self? What can I know? What really exists and what is it like? This course will explore how philosophical luminaries from diverse cultural and historical backgrounds have tackled some of the great questions of philosophy. We will proceed by topic, covering issues including external world skepticism, the question of the existence and nature of the self and person, the problem of induction, and the nature the mind and mental content. For each of topic, we will read, analyze, and critically assess influential arguments from both Early Modern European philosophers as well as Indian Buddhist philosophers. Along the way, we will also discuss the potential benefits, risks, and challenges of cross-cultural philosophy. Much like contemporary efforts to resolve philosophical puzzles benefit from a variety of perspectives, bringing into conversation diverse voices from the history of philosophy promises to stretch our intellectual imaginations and might just foster new ways of approaching classic philosophical problems.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Weekly Argument Maps
I. The readings for this course are challenging, but rewarding. They are best read slowly, carefully, and more than once. Optional commentaries are provided for background and further reading, which may also serve as helpful sources for your papers.

To help you digest, organize, and preserve what you’ve understood from the weekly readings, you will prepare a short reconstruction of the central argument (or one important sub-argument) from the week's assigned text. What form the argument map takes is up to you. It can be a formal reconstruction, an outline, a (hand-drawn or electronic) diagram, a flow chart, a YouTube tutorial, a mock-Wikipedia article, a PowerPoint presentation, a teaching plan, a letter to the author, or anything helps you to organize and think through the key concepts and arguments of the text.

Some questions to consider as you prepare your reconstructions: What philosophical problem/question is this argument seeking to resolve/answer? What background presuppositions does the author bring? How might the author's dialectical context figure into the argumentative structure and strategy? Which of your own presuppositions does this argument challenge, and are they justified? What clarificatory or substantive questions would you like to ask the author?

II. Submit (together with the assignment or separately) one question, issue, or puzzle that you hope to discuss during our class meeting.

Although these assignments will not be graded, submitting argument maps for at least seven of the weekly readings is required to pass the course. Submitting a discussion question every week is encouraged in order to help facilitate the best class experience. Due by 9pm the evening before the class meeting.
Papers
In order to give you a chance to explore topics in greater depth and to improve your philosophical writing skills, two short papers (3-5 double-spaced pages each) and one final paper (10-12 double-spaced pages) will be assigned over the course of the semester. Due dates, topics, and strategies for writing papers will be discussed in class.

GRADES
Grades will be determined based on attendance, participation, weekly argument maps, and papers:

- Attendance and Participation: 15%
- Weekly Argument Maps: 20%
- First Short Paper: 15%
- Second Short Paper: 15%
- Final Paper: 35%

COURSE SCHEDULE

I. EXTERNAL WORLD SKEPTICISM

Week 1: Descartes' Dream Argument

Required Reading: Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Synopsis, Meditation 1, Objections & Replies selections for Meditation 1, in *Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, & D. Murdoch (Cambridge).

Optional Commentary:
- Gary Hatfield, *Descartes and the Meditations* (Routledge, 2003), ch. 3.

Week 2: Vasubandhu's Dream Argument

Required Reading: Vasubandhu, *Twenty Verses (Viṃśīkā)*, verses 1–8 with auto-commentary.

Optional Commentary:

II. ESCAPE FROM SOLIPSISM

Week 3: Descartes's Escape from Solipsism and the Case for the Existence of God

Required Reading: Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditations 2, 3, and 5, Objections & Replies for Meditation 3 (on the idea of God); Objections & Replies for Meditation 5 (on whether God's essence implies his existence); Principles Part I.13-21

Optional Commentary:
- Gary Hatfield, *Descartes and the Meditations* (Routledge, 2003), chs. 5 & 7.

**Week 4: Vasubandhu’s Escape from Solipsism and Case Against the Existence of God**

**Required Reading:** Vasubandhu, *Twenty Verses* and selections from *Treasury of Metaphysics with Autocommentary* (*Abhidharmakosabhāṣya*)

Optional Commentary:

**III. THE SELF**

**Week 5: Descartes on the Cogito, Sum Res Cogitans, and Dualism, and Elisabeth of Bohemia on Dualism and its Problems**

**Required Reading:** Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, reread Meditation 2, Meditation 4, 6; Objections & Replies for Meditation 2; *Principles of Philosophy* Part I.7-12; Objections & Replies for Meditation 6; Principles of Philosophy Part I.47-74; Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*, ed. and trans. Lisa Shapiro (Chicago, 2007).

Optional Commentary:
- Gary Hatfield, *Descartes and the Meditations* (Routledge, 2003), ch. 4 and ch. 8.

*First Short Paper Due*

**Week 6: Vasubandhu’s Case against the Self**

**Required Reading:** *Treatise on the Negation of the Person* (*Pudgalapratisādhaparakarana*) from his auto-commentary to the *Treasury of Metaphysics* (*Abhidharmakosabhāṣya*) in Matthew Kapstein, trans., *Reasons Traces* (Wisdom, 2001), 350–75.


Optional Commentary:
Week 7: Hume on the Self as a Bundle of Perceptions


**Optional Commentary:**

Week 8: Candrakīrti on Selflessness

**Required Reading:** Candrakīrti, *Introduction to the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakāvatāra*), Chapter 6 (selections) and *Clear Words* (*Prasannapada*, selections) in James Duerling (trans.), *The Refutation of the Self in Indian Buddhism: Candrakīrti on the Selflessness of Persons* (Routledge, 2012), 55–89.

**Optional Commentary:**

IV. THE MIND AND THE WORLD

Week 9: Berkeley’s Case against Matter


**Optional Commentary:**

**Second Short Paper Due**

Week 10: Dignāga’s Investigation of the Percept

**Required Reading:** Dignāga, *Investigation of the Percept* (*Ālambanaparīkṣā*) in Douglas Duckworth et al., *Dignāga’s Investigation of the Percept* (Oxford, 2016), 38–47.

**Optional Commentary:**

Week 11: Leibniz on Immaterial Substances


**Optional commentary:**

Week 12: Śāntarakṣita’s Case against Material and Immaterial Substances


Optional Commentary:
James Blumenthal, The Ornament of the Middle Way: A Study of the Madhyamaka Thought of Śāntarakṣita: Including Translations of Śāntarakṣita’s Madhyamakālāmārka (The Ornament of the Middle Way) and Gyel-tshab’s Dbu ma rgyan gyi brjed byang (Remembering “The Ornament of the Middle Way”) (Snow Lion, 2004).

V. FROM SKEPTICISM TO NATURALISM AND PRAGMATISM

Week 13: Hume on Skepticism and Naturalism

Required Reading: Treatise 1.4.1 and 7 and An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, ed. T. Beauchamp (Oxford, Clarendon edition), Enquiry 7 and 12

Optional Commentary:

Week 14: Nāgārjuna on Sources of Knowledge and Candrakīrti’s Pragmatism


Optional Commentary:
Jay Garfield, Engaging Buddhism: Why it Matters to Philosophy (Oxford, 2015), ch. 7
Jan Westerhoff, Dispeller of Disputes, 43–129.

Final Paper Due