

Philosophy Across the Globe

A sample syllabus by Tiina C Rosenqvist

[This syllabus outlines an introductory philosophy course from a cross-cultural perspective.]

1. Course Description

This course offers an introduction to philosophy through a rich and diverse cross-cultural perspective. We will engage with philosophical texts and ideas from Chinese, Indian, Islamic, African, and Native American traditions, alongside canonical and contemporary works from the Western tradition. When relevant, we will create dialogues between these diverse philosophical traditions, highlighting their unique contributions and common themes.

The course content is organized into six modules. The first module deals with *metaphilosophy*: we will explore what philosophy is, how it distinguishes itself from science and religion, and why there is a growing call for diversification within academic philosophy. The second module traces the *historical* developments that led to the exclusion of non-Western thinkers from the philosophical canon. The third module, focusing on *metaphysics*, examines the concept of personal identity through European, Native American, and Buddhist perspectives. The fourth module covers two major *epistemological* issues: skepticism and the nature of knowledge. This includes discussions on the skeptical scenarios posed by al-Ghazālī and Descartes, and a critical look at traditional analyses of knowledge through thought experiments from both Western and Indian traditions. In the fifth module we will compare and contrast ethical theories from around the world. The sixth module is dedicated to review.

Through these modules, we will gain a deeper appreciation of philosophy as a global discipline, understand the importance of inclusive philosophical inquiry, and develop the skills to critically engage with complex philosophical ideas from multiple cultural perspectives.

2. Course Objectives

Through active participation in this course, you will develop an understanding of a number of important issues and debates in philosophy, improve your overall critical thinking skills, and learn to construct and evaluate philosophical arguments. You will practice close reading and interpretation of primary texts, construct comparative analyses of philosophical views, engage in collaborative learning activities, and hone your philosophy writing skills.

3. Course Structure

In-person sessions:

The standard format for the in-person sessions is lecture and discussion. There will also be occasional group work. You are expected to do the assigned readings before class and participate actively in discussions and other in-class activities.

Out-of-class activities:

You are required to make one discussion board contribution for each required reading. To get full credit, you need to submit your contributions *before* the relevant in-person session and demonstrate meaningful engagement with the text in question. Each discussion contribution should be at least three sentences long. You can ask developed questions, agree/disagree with reasons, draw connections to other course readings, etc. Late contributions are accepted for up to seven days, for half credit.

You are also required to write three short papers, take one short quiz and one longer cumulative exam, and give a group presentation.

4. Assignments & Evaluation

- Attendance & Participation — 10%
- Discussion Board Contributions — 10%
- Module I Reflection Paper (300-500 words) — 5%
- Module II Quiz— 10%
- Module III Argumentative Paper (800-1000 words) — 15%
- Module IV Argumentative Paper (800-1000 words) — 15%
- Module V Group Presentation — 10%
- Exam — 25%

5. PHILSKILLS Workshops

Throughout the semester, we will focus on developing and refining the essential skills required for success in this course. These workshops, labeled “PHILSKILLS” on the class schedule, will help you practice the following: reconstructing and evaluating arguments, reading and interpreting philosophical texts, writing clear and persuasive philosophy papers, engaging in thoughtful discussions and debates on philosophical topics.

Whether this is your first philosophy course or you have previous experience, these workshops are designed to enhance your skills and deepen your understanding. Don’t worry if you are new to philosophy; I do not expect you to already know how to do these things. For those with a background in philosophy, there’s always room for growth!

6. Course Policies

[omitted]

7. Resources

[omitted]

8. Class & Readings Schedule

Note on terminology:

- “**Required**” readings are the ones you are expected to read *before* the relevant in-class session. I have kept the required readings short, and I ask that you really engage with those texts. Read them carefully, preferably multiple times. Take notes and write down any questions that come to mind.
- “**Recommended**” readings/podcasts/videos will give you a fuller understanding of the topic under discussion. They will likely be useful to you when writing papers.
- “**Optional**” readings/podcasts/videos are extra materials for when you are particularly interested in a topic, or when you are struggling with a difficult reading.

Module I. Getting Started: Metaphilosophy

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In this module we will explore what philosophy is, how it distinguishes itself from science and religion, and why there is a growing call for diversification within academic philosophy
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- (1) Metaphilosophy: What is Philosophy? **PHILSKILLS:** What is an Argument
 - **Required:** Metcalf (2020), “What is Philosophy?” *1000-word Philosophy*
- (2) Metaphilosophy: Eurocentrism
 - **Required:** Coleman: “Philosophy is dead white—and dead wrong,” *World.edu*
 - **Required:** Garfield & Van Norden: “If Philosophy Won’t Diversify, Let’s Call it What it Really Is,” *New York Times*
- (3) Metaphilosophy: Diversifying Philosophy
 - **Required:** Struhl (2010): “No (more) philosophy without cross-cultural philosophy,” *Philosophy Compass*
 - **Optional:** Mitchell (2018), “The Dimensions of Diversity, Teaching Non-Western Works in Introductory Philosophy Courses,” *Dialogue*.
 - **Optional:** Edelglass & Garfield (2011), “Introduction” in *The Oxford Handbook of World Philosophy*.

Module I Reflection Paper—5%

Module II. The Canon: How Did We Get Here?

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In this module we will trace the historical developments that led to the exclusion of non-Western thinkers from the philosophical canon
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(4) Canon Formation #1

- **Required:** Park (2013), *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Modern Canon, 1780-1830*. Ch. 1 (excerpts)

(5) Canon Formation #2

- **Required:** Park (2013), *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Modern Canon, 1780-1830*. Ch. 4 (excerpts)

(6) Gatekeeping #1; **PHILSKILLS: How to Read Philosophy**

- **Required:** Cordova (2001), "What is Philosophy?" *APA Newsletter on American Indians in Philosophy*, pp. 14-16
- **Recommended:** Pryor, "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy"

(7) Gatekeeping #2

- **Required:** Dotson (2012), "How is This Paper Philosophy?" *Comparative Philosophy* (excerpts)

(8) *Module II Quiz – 10%*, **PHILSKILLS: How to reconstruct an argument**

Module III. Metaphysics: Personal Identity

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In this module we will focus on metaphysics and examine the concept of personal identity through European, Native American, and Buddhist perspectives
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(9) What is Metaphysics?; The Problem of Personal Identity

- **Required:** Sider (2005), "Personal Identity" in *Riddles of Existence: A Guided Tour of Metaphysic*.
- **Recommended:** Vance (2014), "Personal Identity: How We Exist Over Time," *1000-word Philosophy*.

(10) Locke vs. Reid

- **Required:** Locke (1690), "The Prince and the Cobbler" in *Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy*.
- **Required:** Reid (1785), "Of Mr. Locke's Account of Our Personal Identity" in *Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy*.

(11) American Indian View of Personal Identity

- **Required:** Norton-Smith (2010), *The Dance of Person and Place: One Interpretation of American Indian Philosophy*, Ch. 5: An Expansive Conception of Persons (excerpts)

(12) Buddhism: No-Self and the Skandha Theory; *Module III Paper Topics Distributed*

- **Required:** *Milindapanha* (Milinda's Questions) in *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*.
- **Recommended:** Parfit (1987), "Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons" in *Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy*.

(13) Review; **PHILSKILLS: How to Write a Philosophy Paper**

- **Required:** Pryor, "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper"

Module IV. Epistemology: Knowledge & Skepticism

In this module we will cover two major epistemological issues: skepticism and the nature of knowledge. This includes discussions on the skeptical scenarios posed by al-Ghazālī and Descartes, and a critical look at traditional analyses of knowledge through thought experiments from both Western and Indian traditions

(14) Introduction to Epistemology; What Can We Know?

- **Required:** Pojman, *What Can We Know: An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (excerpts)
- **Recommended:** Metcalf (2020), "Epistemology, or Theory of Knowledge," 1000-word *Philosophy*.

(15) Skeptical Challenges: Dreams and Demons

- **Required:** Al-Ghazālī's *Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error* (excerpt)
- **Recommended:** Descartes (1641), *Meditations on First Philosophy*, First Meditation: What Can Be Called Into Doubt?
- **Optional:** Moad (2009), "Comparing Phases of Skepticism in al-Ghazali and Descartes: Some First Meditations on Deliverance from Error," *Philosophy East & West*

(16) Responses to Skepticism; **PHILSKILLS: How to Talk Philosophy**

- **Required:** Feldman (2003), *Epistemology* (excerpt)
- **Optional:** Vogel (1990), "Cartesian Skepticism and Inference to the Best Explanation," *The Journal of Philosophy*
- **Optional:** Nagel (2019) "Classical Indian Skepticism: Reforming or Rejecting Philosophy," *Comparative Philosophy*.

(17) The Traditional Account of Knowledge: Justified True Belief

- **Required:** Feldman (2003), *Epistemology*, Ch. 2: The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge
- **Optional:** Potter (1984), "Does Indian epistemology concern justified true belief?" *Journal of Indian Philosophy*.

(18) Dharmottara & Gettier; *Module IV Paper Topics Distributed*

- **Required:** Dreufys (1997), *Recognizing Reality: Dharmakīrti's Philosophy and Its Tibetan Interpretations*, pp. 292-293 (on Dharmottara)
- **Required:** Gettier (1963), "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis*.

(19) Responses to Gettier

- **Required:** Feldman (2003), *Epistemology*, Ch. 3: Modifying the Traditional Account of Knowledge
- **Optional:** *Wi-Phi: Epistemology* Ch. 6 Analyzing Knowledge 2: No-False-Lemma and No-Defeater Approaches (Jennifer Nagel)

Module V. Normative Ethics

In this module we will compare and contrast ethical theories from around the world.

(20) Introduction to Ethics; Deontology & Virtue Ethics

- **Required:** Kant, "The Good Will and the Categorical Imperative" in *Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy* (excerpt)
- **Required:** Aristotle, "Virtue and the Good Life" in *Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy* (excerpt)
- **Optional:** Chapman (2014), "Deontology: Kantian Ethics." *1000-word Philosophy*.

(21) Utilitarianism

- **Required:** Mill (1879), "Utilitarianism" in *Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy* (excerpt)
- **Optional:** Gronholz (2014), "Consequentialism and Utilitarianism," *1000-word Philosophy*.

(22) Indian Mahayana Buddhist Ethics: The Way of the Bodhisattva

- **Required:** Śāntideva, *The Way of Bodhisattva* (excerpts)
- **Recommended:** Garfield, Jenkins & Priest (2016), "The Śāntideva Passage: Bodhicaryavatara VIII. 90-103" in *Moonpaths* (excerpts)

(23) African Social Ethics: Reciprocity and Interdependence

- **Required:** Gyekye (2010), "African ethics." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Sections 4-8
- **Optional:** Hallen (2011), "African Philosophy" in *Oxford Handbook of World Philosophy*
- **Optional:** Metz (2019), "The African Ethic of Ubuntu," *1000-word Philosophy*.

(24) Confucian Role Ethics

- **Required:** Ramsey (2016), "Confucian Role Ethics: A Critical Survey," *Philosophy Compass*

(25) Module Review; Preparation for Group Presentations, *Group Presentation Topics Distributed*

(26) *Module V Group Presentations (10%)* in class

Module VI. Wrapping Up

This module is dedicated to review. We will address any remaining questions and consolidate our understanding of the course materials.

(27) Final Exam Review Session

(28) *Final Exam (25%) in Class*