



# Short Syllabus



## Course Title

**Fundamental Concepts in Philosophy**

## Lecturer

**Dr. Adrian Sackson**

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## Semester

Fall 2021

## Short Description

What is truth, and how can we know it? What is reality? How should we live our lives? How can we determine what is morally good? How should societies be organized? These are some examples of fundamental questions that lie at the heart of the discipline of philosophy. In this course, we will be introduced to the practice of philosophy in a thematic way. We will begin by asking: What is philosophy? How is it different from other forms of inquiry, thought, and reflection? We will then explore several main areas of the field: logic, epistemology (including philosophy of science), metaphysics (including questions relating to philosophy of religion and philosophy of mind), ethics, and politics. In each area, we will examine several key concepts and big questions, and we will be introduced to some important debates and influential thinkers. Some of the questions we will explore in these sub-fields include:

**Logic:** What are rational ways to think, argue, and justify beliefs? What are not?

**Epistemology and Philosophy of Science:** What does it mean for something to be true? When are we justified in saying we know something, and what does that mean? What makes some knowledge 'scientific'? What is the difference between science and pseudo-science?

**Metaphysics, Philosophy of Religion, and Philosophy of Mind:** Can belief in God be rationally justified? How are thoughts connected to physical reality? Could a machine have conscious experiences?

**Moral & Political Philosophy:** Are there moral absolutes or is morality relative? How can one determine what is right and wrong morally? What is a justly governed society? How should material goods, rights, and liberties be allocated?

## Final grade components

### **Short Assignments [4 x 2 pages each] (4 x 10% = 40%) :**

At the end of each unit, students will submit a short, written assignment responding to questions which will be provided in advance. These assignments are intended to help students understand, interpret, and internalise central ideas and debates that we are studying.



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## **Philosophical Essay [6-8 pages] (50%):**

At the end of the semester, students will write a **philosophical essay** in which they will engage more deeply with a topic of their choosing. (Questions are provided, but students may choose to formulate their own topic). In this longer essay, students will engage *critically* with some of the texts and arguments we have been studying, and will practise formulating their own philosophical arguments and ideas clearly, in conversation with those texts.

## **Participation (10%):**

Attendance is mandatory. Participation will be assessed on the basis of the student's *serious engagement* with the class on a weekly basis.

## **Attendance**

Attendance is mandatory. Students are permitted a maximum of three absences without penalty. Any additional absences will affect the final grade and may result in failure of the course.

## **Academic Conduct**

Plagiarism is taken extremely seriously. Any instance of academic misconduct which includes: submitting someone else's work as your own; failure to accurately cite sources; taking words from another source without using quotation marks; submission of work for which you have previously received credit; working in a group for individual assignments; using unauthorized materials in an exam and sharing your work with other students, will result in failure of the assignment and will likely lead to further disciplinary measures.