

Centre for Continuing Education

Introduction to philosophy

Walter Kudrycz

Philosophy is the study of big questions – what we can know, why we are here, and how we should live; in short, about life, the universe and everything. To understand key philosophical issues – and to have some fun – we'll draw examples from real life, books, and movies. The reasoning and writing skills gained during the course will provide a solid foundation for university study. No prior knowledge of philosophy required.

Come explore Plato's cave, and confront Descartes's demon. Wield Occam's razor and Hume's fork, and climb Wittgenstein's ladder. And while you're at it, why not have a flutter on Pascal's wager?

Philosophy is a hunt for big game: answers to the questions to do with life, the universe and everything. In this course we will grapple with many of the classic philosophical problems: How can we know anything at all? Is there a world out there? Why should I act morally? Is there a god? How is my mind related to my body? Why does truth matter? Do I have free will?

We will consider matters of life and death (e.g., abortion, euthanasia, terrorism); confront the twin bogeymen of scepticism and relativism; and delve into the meaning of art and the nature of science.

Required reading:

Walter will provide everyone with a list of weekly readings.

Suggested reading:

There are numerous excellent introductions to philosophy. Here are just three (but please note, consulting them is purely optional).

Philosophy goes to the movies: an introduction to philosophy, Christopher Falzon, 2nd edition, Routledge, 2007

Zeno and the tortoise: how to think like a philosopher, Nicholas Fearn, (Atlantic Monthly, 2002)

Think: a compelling introduction to philosophy, Simon Blackburn (Oxford Uni. Press, 1999)

Essays

You are required to submit three pieces of writing (800, 1200 and 2000 words). Topics will be distributed in class.

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Walter studied and then taught at Sydney University where he completed a BA majoring in history. His honours year thesis dealt with aspects of medieval religiosity and philosophy. As an undergraduate he also studied philosophy and Latin, as well as taking courses in European languages. He commenced his doctoral thesis in 1993 at Sydney University on the history of ideas and the philosophy of history, focussing specifically on changing understandings of the Middle Ages and how these changes can be related to wider philosophical and cultural developments. He is currently writing a book on the relationship between historiography and philosophy.

DATES/TIMES: 6-8pm on 13 Tuesdays & 13 Thursdays from 21 July

FEE: \$795 *no discount*

NB. *Eligibility for undertaking UPS studies requires you to be a permanent resident of Australia and over 21 years of age at the time of enrolment. You may be requested to provide proof of these during your studies.*

COURSE LOCATION: The venue for this course can be found on your tax invoice/receipt (right-hand top corner). Please allow enough time to locate the venue on the first evening.

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PART 1: THIS PHILOSOPHICAL LIFE

1. Introduction: what is philosophy?
2. Presocratic philosophy
3. Socrates
4. The trial of Socrates

First essay due (800 words)

PART 2: GOD, KNOWLEDGE, FREEDOM, AND MIND

5. The existence of God 1
6. The existence of God 2
7. What is knowledge?
8. Descartes's method of sceptical doubt
9. Knowledge and scepticism
10. Free will and determinism
11. The mind/body problem

PART 3: MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH (CASE STUDIES)

12. A taste of ethics: utilitarianism
13. Abortion and infanticide
14. Euthanasia
15. Terrorism

First essay due (1,200 words)

PART 4: PHILOSOPHERS

16. Plato
17. Hume
18. Nietzsche
19. Wittgenstein

PART 5: SOME KNOTTY PROBLEMS

20. Science and pseudoscience
21. Is there a scientific method?
22. Truth and relativism
23. Realism and anti-realism
24. The unreality of time
25. The nature of art
26. The meaning of life

Third (and final) essay due (2,000 words)

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