

**University of North Texas**  
**Introduction to Philosophy**  
**PHIL 1050.007**

Instructor: Ben Larsen, he/him  
Email: ben.larsen@unt.edu  
Class time: T/R 12:30-1:50pm  
Class location: ENV 115  
Office hours: Wednesdays, 10:00-Noon  
Office location: ENVS 372

**I. Rationale and course outline:**

This course is an introduction to the rich heritages of the world's philosophical traditions. Rather than assuming or maintaining a particular definition of philosophy, this course will engage "philosophy" as an ongoing site of contestation and debate: What is philosophy? Who counts as a philosopher? What can be recognized as a serious philosophical endeavor? How does philosophy intersect and differ from theory, critique, belief, science, and ethics? What is philosophy for and can it make any difference in the world? None of these are settled questions, but reflect ongoing debates with material consequences. Congruent with the aim of opening rather than closing or assuming the question of "philosophy" this course engages multiple cultural perspectives and approaches.

The course begins where philosophical questions often first confront us: in the middle of everyday life as we ask questions about how we should live and how we know what is right or good. From there we often move to questions of society: how do we live well together, what makes a society just, what is justice and is it possible given the complexities of life? Reflecting on what is right and just leads to questions of truth and how we can have knowledge. If we are going to explore what it means to have good or true knowledge then we will also need to ask questions of the real: what is reality, what is it composed of, what makes it up, how do we distinguish reality from illusion? Finally we will conclude the class with questions of identity, subjectivity, and embodied life: who am I, what am I, how should or can I relate to human and more-than-human others?

**II. Course Outcomes:**

By the end of the course students should be able to demonstrate the ability to:

- accurately and fairly represent the thoughts and ideas of another
- think critically about a text or set of ideas
- clearly and compellingly communicate their own conclusions in conversation with others
- articulate what social and personal responsibility looks like in particular circumstances

**III. Format and Procedures:**

This class will be fully in person with some lecture to introduce, contextualize, and clarify readings. Students should expect to actively engage with the material and class time will focus on small and large group discussion, application exercises, low-stakes in-class projects, and creative activities.

#### **IV. Course Requirements:**

##### **1. Class attendance, discussions, and communication policies:**

###### **Attendance:**

You are expected to be on time and attend every class meeting. Attendance will be taken **5 minutes** after the start time of class. If you are not present when attendance is taken, you will be counted absent for the day. Excessive absences will significantly affect your grade.

Owing to the contingencies of life, **you are permitted 3 “free” absences**, which will not count against your attendance score. After those “freebies” have been used up, with each subsequent absence you will lose one point from your total attendance grade, which is given out of 25 points.

If you miss a class, there is no need for documentation explaining the absence—all absences will be treated the same, meaning there is no difference between “excused” and “unexcused” absences. If you miss a class, you are responsible for class content, assignments missed, and upcoming due dates. If you do not stay for the entirety of class, you will be counted absent. You will also be counted absent if you are wearing earphones during class without ODA permission or spend excessive time on your phone; please be aware that you may be asked to leave the classroom if you engage in these activities.

###### **Discussions:**

In the second week of class, students will be divided into four “Discussion Groups” consisting of roughly 10 students each. Throughout the semester, each Discussion Group will be assigned 3 separate class meetings during which they are responsible for bringing reading questions and directing class discussion of the assigned readings. Each person’s participation score reflects their individual attendance and engagement on days when their Discussion Group is assigned to direct class. For more information about this component, please see the “Discussion Groups” assignment sheet in Canvas.

###### **Communication:**

Communication regarding course information will be handled through Canvas. If you have questions or concerns at any point during the term and wish to contact the instructor via email, please contact him using the address listed above. The instructor will do his best to respond within 24 hours Monday-Friday and may take longer to respond on days when class does not meet. Emails pertaining to information that is already available to you on Canvas or on the syllabus may not be responded to at all.

###### **Emergency communications:**

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials. If Canvas is not accessible during the emergency, contact me via email for more information.

##### **2. Course readings:**

- Required text: Kessler, Gary, *Voices of Wisdom: A Multicultural Philosophy Reader*, 9th edition.

- Other reading selections will be provided as .PDF files on Canvas.

### 3. Assessments:

Final grades will consist of the following:

Attendance	30%
Discussions	20%
Reading Quizzes	30%
Assignments	20%

## V. Grading Policies and Procedures

Final course grades will reflect the following scale:

A=90%+    B=80-89%    C=70-79%    D=60-69%    F=0-59%

**LATE WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.** If something comes up, you must communicate with me ahead of the deadline, and I will determine whether an exception to this policy is warranted.

## VI. Academic Integrity

Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a "0" for that particular assignment. Additionally, the incident will be reported to the Dean of Students, who may impose further penalty.

According to the UNT catalog, the term "cheating" includes, but is not limited to:

- use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations;
- dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments;
- the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty or staff member of the university;
- dual submission of a paper or project, or resubmission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructor(s); or
- any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage.

The term "plagiarism" includes, but is not limited to:

- the knowing or negligent use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment; and
- the knowing or negligent unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

**Statement on Generative AI tools:** In this course, I want you to engage deeply with the materials and develop your own critical thinking skills. For this reason, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools like Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini is not permitted. While these tools can be helpful in some contexts, they do not align with our goal of fostering the development of your independent thinking. Using GenAI to complete any part of an assignment or coursework will be considered a violation of academic integrity, as it replaces the development of your own skills, and will be addressed according to the Student Academic Integrity policy.

## VII. Acceptable Student Behavior

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at <http://deanofstudents.unt.edu>.

### **VIII. Accommodations for students with disabilities (ADA statement)**

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information, refer to the Office of Disability Access website at <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>. You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323.

### **IX. Inclusivity, chosen names, and pronouns**

UNT students represent a variety of backgrounds and perspectives. The professor is committed to providing an atmosphere for learning that respects diversity. In the classroom and online, students are expected to

- share their unique experiences, values and beliefs
- be open to the views of others
- honor the uniqueness of their colleagues
- value each other's opinions and communicate in a respectful manner
- keep confidential discussions that the community has of a personal nature

*Chosen Names:* A chosen name is a name that a person goes by that may or may not match their legal name. If you have a chosen name that is different from your legal name and would like that to be used in class, please let the instructor know. You can also change your display name in your Canvas account settings.

*Pronouns:* Pronouns (she/her, they/them, he/him, etc.) are a public way for people to address you, much like your name, and can be shared with a name when making an introduction, both virtually and in-person. Just as we ask and don't assume someone's name, we should also ask and not assume someone's pronouns. You can [add your pronouns to your Canvas account](#) so that they follow your name when posting to discussion boards, submitting assignments, etc.

### **X. Retention of Student Records**

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers

submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Blackboard online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. You have a right to view your individual record; however, information about your records will not be divulged to other individuals without the proper written consent. You are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the university's policy in accordance with those mandates at the following link:  
<http://essc.unt.edu/registrar/ferpa.html>

## **XI. Succeed at UNT**

UNT endeavors to offer you a high-quality education and to provide a supportive environment to help you learn and grown. And, as a faculty member, I am committed to helping you be successful as a student. Here's how to succeed at UNT: Show up. Find Support. Get advised. Be prepared. Get involved. Stay focused. To learn more about campus resources and information on how you can achieve success, go <http://success.unt.edu/>.

## **XII. Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT)**

Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. This short survey will be made available at the end of the semester to provide you with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught.

### XIII. Course Schedule

Week 1, January 14 & 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kessler, <i>Voices of Wisdom</i> (VoW hereafter):             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"What is Philosophy?" (p. 1-6, stop at the heading, "What is Rationality?")</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Welcome, introductions</b>  <b>In Class, Assignment 1, "What is Philosophy?"</b>
<b>Unit 2</b>	<b>How should one live?</b>	
Week 2, January 21 & 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Midgley, "Philosophical Plumbing" [PDF on Canvas]</li> <li>VoW:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Buddha (p. 54-56)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Reading Quiz due Monday</b>  *Last day to drop a course without it appearing on transcripts, 1/25
Week 3, January 28 & 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VoW:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confucius (p. 58-60)</li> <li>Plato (p. 62-76)</li> <li>Aristotle (p. 78-84)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Reading Quiz due Monday</b>  <b>Discussion Group 1: 1/30</b>
Week 4, February 4 & 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" [PDF on Canvas]</li> <li>VoW:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bhagavad-Gita (p. 86-92)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Reading Quiz due Monday</b>  <b>Discussion Group 2: 2/6</b>
<b>Unit 3</b>	<b>How can I know what is right?</b>	
Week 5, February 11 & 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VoW:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kant (p. 116-120)</li> <li>Mill (p. 122-129)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Reading Quiz due Monday</b>  <b>Discussion Group 3: 2/13</b>  Attendance Grade Updated
Week 6, February 18 & 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kimmerer, "The Gift of Strawberries" [PDF on Canvas]</li> <li>VoW:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Al-Ashari (139-40)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Reading Quiz due Monday</b>  <b>Discussion Group 4: 2/20</b>

Week 7, February 25 & 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held, “The Ethics of Care as Moral Theory” [PDF on Canvas]</li> <li>• Nussbaum, “Judging other cultures: The case of Genital Mutilation” [PDF on Canvas]</li> </ul>	<b>Reading Quiz due Monday</b> <b>Discussion Group 1: 2/27</b>
<b>Unit 4</b>	<b>What makes a just society?</b>	
Week 8, March 4 & 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VoW: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rawls (p. 192-205)</li> <li>• MLK (p. 216-226)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Reading Quiz due Monday</b> <b>Discussion Group 2: 3/6</b>  <b>Assignment 2 due 3/7</b>
<b>Spring Break (March 10 – March 16)</b>		
Week 9, March 18 & 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Todd, “Fish, Kin and Hope” [PDF on Canvas]</li> <li>• VoW: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• West (p. 239-243)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Reading Quiz due Monday</b> <b>Discussion Group 3: 3/20</b>  Attendance Grade Updated
<b>Unit 5</b>	<b>Is justice possible for all?</b>	
Week 10, March 25 & 27	In Class: Watch Film (TBA)	
<b>Units 5 &amp; 6</b>	<b>Is justice possible for all? &amp; Is knowledge possible?</b>	
Week 11, April 1 & 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VoW: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pharr (p. 243-249)</li> <li>• Williams (p. 250-260)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Reading Quiz due Monday</b> <b>Discussion Group 4: 4/3</b>
<b>Unit 6</b>	<b>Is knowledge possible?</b>	
Week 12, April 8 & 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VoW: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Al-Ghazali (p. 315-322)</li> <li>• Descartes (p. 325-332)</li> <li>• Hume (p. 335-341)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Reading Quiz due Monday</b> <b>Discussion Group 1: 4/10</b>  *Last day to withdraw from a course, 4/11

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clifford (p. 343-345)</li> </ul>	
<b>Units 6 &amp; 7</b>	<b>Is knowledge possible? &amp; What is really real?</b>	
Week 13, April 15 & 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VoW: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Koller (p. 351-356)</li> <li>Laozi (p. 427-433)</li> <li>Plato (p. 436-443)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Reading Quiz due Monday</b>  <b>Discussion Group 2: 4/17</b>
<b>Unit 7 &amp; 8</b>	<b>What is really real? &amp; What am I? Who am I?</b>	
Week 14, April 22 & 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VoW: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shankara (p. 445-452)</li> <li>Berkeley (p. 455-459)</li> <li>Buddha (p. 528)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Reading Quiz due Monday</b>  <b>Discussion Group 3: 4/24</b>
<b>Unit 8</b>	<b>What am I? Who am I?</b>	
Week 15, April 29 & May 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anzaldua [PDF on Canvas]</li> <li>VoW: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dennett (p. 532-541)</li> <li>McCloskey (p. 558-562)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Reading Quiz due Monday</b>  <b>Discussion Group 4: 5/1</b>  Attendance Grade Updated
Week 16, May 3 – 9 <b>FINALS WEEK</b>  No office hours this week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NO CLASS ON TUESDAY</li> <li>Final is in ENV 115 on Thursday, May 8, from 10:00am-Noon</li> </ul>	<b>Final Exam (Assignment 3: “What is Philosophy?”)</b>