

PHIL 4970: Philosophy Capstone

Spring 2026

Monday/Wednesday 2:00 - 3:20 PM

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philosophers agreeing on the supremacy of philosophy



philosophers defining "philosophy"



Course Description:

What is philosophy? At the beginning of your degree, an introductory course asked this question as a way of getting you started on an activity. Now that you have reached the end of this (first) degree, however, we will ask that question as a way of “thinking what we are doing” (as Hannah Arendt likes to put it). What is one doing when one “does” philosophy? What does it mean to do it well? How do I know if I’m doing it well? How can we (continue to) get better at it?

For those of you who are going on (or even considering going on) to graduate school, this course is designed to “orient you” for advanced study in philosophy: The material is designed to help you develop some skills and background knowledge that you can draw upon on the path ahead. For those of you who are jumping off from a bachelor’s degree in philosophy into a different field or direction, this course is designed as a kind of “finishing school”: The material is designed to help you explicitly take stock of the

distinctive strengths and skills you've built during your undergraduate studies so that you can better leverage them in the next phase of your journey. No matter where your path is leading, however, you are enrolled in this course because you are finishing a bachelor's degree in philosophy. As the "capstone" on that degree, we will spend the semester looking back upon that education to ask *What does it mean?*

Required Course Materials:

All required (and many supplementary) readings have been posted on Canvas in PDF format. You do not have to purchase any texts for this course. You will need to be able to access Canvas, and I also ask that you have the reading we are discussing with you in class each week; so please plan on either printing out the required readings or attending class with a laptop or tablet that will allow you to access the PDF.

Course Projects and Requirements:

1. **Regular attendance and participation in seminar discussions.** This course will run as a seminar. I therefore expect you to attend, remain engaged, and productively participate in the discussion. **(35%)**
2. **Written reflection papers.** Your reflection paper should distill the main arguments of the required readings, and then pick out one or two specific areas or aspects of the assigned readings for closer examination and discussion in class. These may include points of disagreement, particularly impenetrable or confusing claims or passages, or productive connections to other materials in the course. **(35%)**
3. **A 1-2 page prospectus for a term paper on a topic of your choice.** Your prospectus should present your research question/issue along with a core bibliography of scholarship related to this topic. It will be due March 6. **(5%)**
4. **A term paper,** following the plan of an approved prospectus. Your term paper will be due on May 4, the Monday of Final Exams week. **(25%)**

Course Policies

- Reflection papers are graded "complete" or "incomplete." Any reflection paper not handed in by the deadline will be marked incomplete (0 points); you will not receive credit for late work.
- The grading scale I will use in this course is as follows:
A: 90-100% B: 80-89% C: 70-79% D: 60-69% F: below 60
- In accordance with UNT policy 06.003, students are expected to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the University's status as an institution of higher education. A student is responsible for responding to an academic dishonesty report issued by an instructor or other University official. If a student fails to respond after proper attempt at notification have been made, the University may take appropriate academic actions in the absence of the student.
- This course is part of your development as an academic scholar. For this reason, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools like ChatGPT, Grammarly, etc. 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, research, or writing. Using GenAI to complete any part of an assignment or term paper will be considered a violation of academic integrity, as it prevents the development of your own skills, and will be addressed according to the Student Academic Integrity policy.

ADA Accommodation:

The University of North Texas makes reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. To request accommodations, you must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) by completing an application for services and providing documentation to verify your eligibility each semester. Once your eligibility is confirmed, you may request your letter of accommodation. ODA will then email your faculty a letter of reasonable accommodation, initiating a private discussion about your specific needs in the course.

You can request accommodations at any time, but it's important to provide ODA notice to your faculty as early as possible in the semester to avoid delays in implementation. Keep in mind that you must obtain a new letter of accommodation for each semester and meet with each faculty member before accommodations can be implemented in each class. You are strongly encouraged to meet with faculty regarding your accommodations during office hours or by appointment. Faculty have the authority to ask you to discuss your letter during their designated office hours to protect your privacy. For more information and to access resources that can support your needs, refer to the [Office of Disability Access](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access)  (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>) website.

Course Schedule:

Unit 1: Enlightenment

January 12	First Day: <i>"Denken ohne Geländer"</i> Introductions; Syllabus
January 14	Reading: Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?"
January 19	Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (no class)
January 21	Reading: Immanuel Kant, "What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?"
January 26	Kant wrap-up
January 28	Reading: Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?"

Unit 3: Authenticity

February 2	Reading: Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism"
February 4	Sartre wrap-up
February 9	Reading: Somogy Varga, "Models of Authenticity"
February 11	Reading: Judith Butler, "Violence, Mourning, Politics"
February 16	Butler wrap-up
February 18	Reading: Tanya Loughhead, "Maturing as Critical Openness"

Unit 4: The Art of Philosophy

February 23	Reading: Margaret McDonald, "Linguistic Philosophy and Perception" <i>Aeon Magazine:</i> "Philosophy is an art"
February 25	Reading: Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, "What Is a Concept?"
March 2	Reading: Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, "The Plane of Immanence"
March 4	Reading: Alain Badiou, "The Definition of Philosophy"
March 6	Prospectus Due (11:59 PM)
Week of March 9	Spring Break (no class)

Unit 5: What Is Thinking?

March 16	Reading: Hannah Arendt, "Introduction"
March 18	Reading: Martin Heidegger, "Part 1: Lecture I"
March 23	Reading: Martin Heidegger, "Part 2: Lecture I"
March 25	Reading: Hannah Arendt, "Invisibility and Withdrawal"

Unit 6: Metaphor

March 30	Reading: Hannah Arendt, "Language and Metaphor"
April 1	Reading: Hannah Arendt, "Metaphor and the Ineffable"
April 6	Reading: Mary Hesse, "The Cognitive Claims of Metaphor"

April 8	Reading: Jacques Derrida, "On the Obverse" (chap. 1 of <i>White Mythology</i>)
April 13	Reading: Jacques Derrida, "More and No More Metaphor" (chap. 2 of <i>White Mythology</i>)
April 15	Reading: Jacques Derrida, "Ellipsis/Eclipse of the Sun" (chap. 3 of <i>White Mythology</i>)
April 20	Reading: Jacques Derrida, "The Flowers of Rhetoric: The Heliotrope" (chap. 4 of <i>White Mythology</i>)
April 22	Reading: Jacques Derrida, "Metaphysics: The 'Sublation' and Elevation of Metaphor" (chap. 5 of <i>White Mythology</i>)

Wrap-Up

April 27	Reading: Simon Critchley, <i>Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction</i>
April 29	Final Day Wrap-Up, Informal presentation of term-paper topics
May 4	Term Paper Due (11:59 PM)