



Course Syllabus: Modern & Contemporary Philosophy

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

PHIL-2513/4513 Section 101

Fall 2026

Contact Information

Professor: Dr. Tyler M. Williams

Office location: Bea Wood 236

Office hours: TR 10:00-11:00, 1:00-2:00; W 1:00-2:00; & by appointment

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Class Information

Course title: Modern & Contemporary Philosophy (PHIL-2513/4513)

Classroom location: Prothro-Yeager Hall, PY-205

Class meeting times: Tues/Thurs 2:00-3:20 p.m.

Course Catalogue Description

This course provides a historical and theoretical overview of Western philosophy from the early modern period through the present.

THECB Course Objectives and Assessments

- Critical Thinking Skills
 - To assess the student's critical thinking skills, the Writing Assignment Common Rubric will be applied to the final Writing Assignment at the end of the term.
- Communication Skills
 - To assess the student's written communication skills, the Writing Assignment Common Rubric will be applied to the final Writing Assignment at the end of the term.
- Personal Responsibility
 - To assess ethical use of sources as a measure of personal responsibility, the Writing Assignment Common Rubric will be applied to the final Writing Assignment at the end of the term.
- Social Responsibility
 - To assess the student's ability to understand differing points of view, the Engagement Response Common Rubric will be applied to the final Engagement Response assignment.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

Course objectives for PHIL-2513/4513 are:

1. To help students learn, understand, and evaluate the basic issues of the history of philosophy from both a historical and theoretical perspective.
2. To help students gain familiarity with various pivotal texts in the history of philosophy.
3. To help students develop their skills in interpreting and critically analyzing texts.
4. To help students develop their skills in identifying and evaluating arguments as well as in formulating their own arguments through the effective and responsible use of evidence.
5. To help students improve their ability to read and write clearly and critically.
6. To help students appreciate the relevance of philosophical in public and private life and to gain a greater understanding of their personal philosophical commitments.
7. To inculcate students with a love of wisdom and a desire to live a philosophical life.

Curriculum Statement

This course is dual listed as PHIL-2513 and PHIL-4513. Students taking this course to satisfy the “Language, Philosophy & Culture” requirement of the Core Curriculum must be registered for PHIL-2513. Students enrolled in PHIL-4513 should be advised that this is an upper-level course that is officially recognized by the university as “Writing Intensive.” Students enrolled in PHIL-4513 will have their written work and their in-class discussion skills evaluated to a higher standard. Students concerned about these standards are encouraged to speak with the instructor during the first week of the course.

Textbook & Instructional Materials:

Textbooks have all been ordered through the Follett Campus Bookstore. However, you are welcome to source your books wherever you choose. Please be sure to get these specific editions in hard copies (unless you need an e-text to accommodate a disability):

- Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method and Meditations*, trans. Donald A. Cress. Hackett.
- Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Eric Steinberg. Hackett.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, trans. James W. Ellington. Hackett.
- Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Michael Inwood. Oxford University Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Michael Scarpitti. Penguin.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism is a Humanism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Student Handbook

Refer to: [Student Handbook](#)

Academic Misconduct Policy & Procedures

Students are expected to uphold the standards of “Academic Integrity” set forth by the [MSU Student Honor Creed](#). The instructor will notify the appropriate authority of any infringement of academic honesty.

“Cheating” includes the unauthorized use of certain information, materials, or devices in exams, papers, or assignments. “Plagiarism” includes but is not limited to using the published or unpublished works of another person without recognition. This includes attempts to portray AI-generated material as evidence of a student’s personal knowledge of course content and/or academic skill. A student who makes use of plagiarized material, or anyone that profits from (or abets) cheating, will be dismissed from the course and referred to the Dean of Students.

Academic Dishonesty: Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism (the act of using source material of other persons, either published or unpublished, without following the accepted techniques of crediting, or the submission for credit of work, not the individual to whom credit is given). Additional guidelines on procedures in these matters may be found in the [Office of Student Conduct](#).

Course Policy on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Students are strictly prohibited from using any and all forms of AI in their submitted work for this course, unless explicitly stated otherwise in an assignment description. Violations of this policy will be treated in accordance with the Academic Misconduct Policy & Procedures outlined above. This course requires that students demonstrate in writing their comprehension of philosophical ideas. Because philosophical concepts are shaped in and by language, any use of AI that generates language content for the user or edits/clarifies the user’s own language will be treated in this class as a form of cheating. Questions about this policy should be directed to the instructor at the start of the course.

Grading

Table 1: Value of each assignment to overall course grade

Assignments	Percent value	Point value
(1) Writing Assignment 1-3	25%	175
(2) Writing Assignment 1-3	25%	175
(3) Writing Assignment 4 (for 4513: Final Research Essay)	30%	210
Engagement 1: in-class engagement	10%	70
Engagement 2: Engagement Prompts	10%	70
Total	100%	700

Table 2: Value of final letter grades

Letter grade	Percentage range
A	90-100%
B	80-89%
C	70-79%
D	60-69%
F	0-59%

Homework

Homework assignments comprise daily reading assignments, which should be completed by the time class session starts. Class activities will be based on the readings and will work under the assumption

that students have come to class with the reading prepared. Students are encouraged to meet with the professor for help on reading strategies or on the reading's content. All other homework assignments are listed below.

Writing Assignments

Students will choose two papers from Writing Assignments 1-3 to write. All PHIL-2513 students are required to write Writing Assignment 4, which is due during the finals week of the semester. Students registered for PHIL-4513 will replace "Writing Assignment 4" with their "Final Research Essay" project. Therefore, in total, each student will write three essays this term. Each paper should be roughly 5-7 double spaced pages. These papers will be analytical in nature, pertaining to the primary texts read for that section of the course, and will not use secondary sources. Writing Assignments 1-3 are "exegetical," meaning they will require students to explain in detail a specific philosophical argument through an in depth analysis of a primary source. Each writing assignment will include a detailed assignment prompt two weeks prior to the due date. Students will be graded on the clarity of the argument presented, fidelity to the text (detail, quotation, citation), thoroughness of analysis, and demonstrated grasp of the nuances and applicability of the philosophy in question.

Engagement Prompts

To facilitate engagement, students will write short responses to "Engagement Prompts" and submit to the D2L dropbox. 11 Engagement Prompts are listed on the course schedule; students will be required to complete 7 throughout the semester. To encourage creativity and open-mindedness, these responses are not taken for individual grades (0 points for not completing; 5 points for inadequately completing; 10 points for completing). Engagement prompts serve to spark in-class discussion and, for that reason, the prompts will ask students to connect the philosophical material to broader issues of social responsibility. Prompts will be provided by Week 2.

Final Research Essay (PHIL-4513 only)

Students registered for this course at the upper level are required to submit a final research project. Development of the final project works in stages. Students will consult with the instructor to brainstorm ideas. Once a topic idea is approved, students will outline the project and, if needed, make appointments with the instructor to discuss their outline as it develops. To ensure that revision plays a forefront of this project, all PHIL-4513 projects must incorporate the earlier essay assignment (and the revisions mentioned in the grading comments) in a substantial way. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that students recognize the development and continuity of ideas across the philosophical tradition, as well as to see their own philosophical work as developmental and ongoing.

Extra Credit

There are no extra credit assignments in this course. Students are encouraged to meet with the professor to strategize study skills and to clarify course content before the need for extra credit would arise.

Late Work

Late submissions of written work must be arranged ahead of time with the instructor and include reasonable justification. Instances that warrant such rescheduling include documented illness,

medical emergency, or official university activity. Otherwise, late submissions will be penalized one-third of a letter grade per day late. Missed quizzes will not be re-administered unless due to absences caused by official university activity.

Important Dates

Last day for term schedule changes: August 27, 2026

Last Day to drop with a grade of "W:" November 23, 2026

Refer to: [Drops, Withdrawals & Void](#)

Desire-to-Learn (D2L)

Extensive use of the MSU D2L program is a part of this course. Each student is expected to be familiar with this program as it provides a primary source of communication regarding assignments, examination materials, and general course information. You can log into [D2L](#) through the MSU Homepage. If you experience difficulties, please contact the technicians listed for the program or contact your instructor.

Attendance

Students are expected to attend all meetings of the classes in which they are enrolled. However, students in this course are graded on "Engagement," which includes but is not limited to attendance. You must be in attendance to be engaged, but attendance alone does not constitute engagement. "Engagement" describes the *minimum* expectations for good standing in this course: participating in class discussion, active listening, bringing the text with you to class, having done the assigned reading before coming to class, refraining from disruptive and/or disrespectful behavior, etc.

If you come to class, plan to stay for the entire session. Early departures are disruptive and, therefore, will be recorded as an absence. Of course, if you know ahead of time that you will need to leave a class session early, please let the professor know at the start of class (or via email beforehand) and try your best to sit near the exit on that day.

Students do not get a formal attendance grade in this course, but a significant number of absences can affect a student's overall grade. Here is how this course treats absences:

- There is no distinction in this course between "excused" and "unexcused" absences (except for absences for official university business, like athletics). Any student can miss class for any reason without penalty to their grade; they do not need to give an "excuse" for their absence.
- Quizzes and other deadlines missed because of an absence will not be rescheduled. (This policy does not apply to absences caused by official university business, which will be brought to the professor's attention ahead of time.)
- Any student who misses 6 or more class sessions (i.e. three weeks of a Tues/Thurs schedule) will receive a zero for their overall Engagement grade.
- The professor will reach out via email to students who have accumulated a "dangerous" number of absences. Those students will be required to make an appointment with the professor during office hours to collaborate on an action plan to get back on track.
- Any student who misses 8 or more class sessions (i.e. four weeks of a Tues/Thurs schedule) will be dropped from the course.
- The professor will give the student a verbal and/or written warning before being dropped from the class.

- Instructor's records will stand as evidence of absences.

Online Computer Requirements

Portions of this course make use of online materials. It is your responsibility to have (or have access to) a working computer in this class. ****Assignments and tests are due by the due date, and personal computer technical difficulties will not be considered a reason for the instructor to allow students extra time to submit assignments, tests, or discussion postings.*** Computers are available on campus in various areas of the buildings as well as the Academic Success Center. ****Your computer being down is not an excuse for missing a deadline!!*** There are many places to access your class! Our online classes can be accessed from any computer in the world that is connected to the internet. Contact your instructor immediately upon having computer trouble. If you have technical difficulties in the course, there is also a student helpdesk available to you. The college cannot work directly on student computers due to both liability and resource limitations; however, they are able to help you get connected to our online services. For help, log into [D2L](#).

Instructor Class Policies

Help

Students should discuss any concerns with the instructor as soon as possible. Office hours are available throughout the week and appointments can also be made on a case-by-case basis.

Recordings

Lectures, lecture notes, assignments, etc. remain the intellectual property of the instructor. Students are not permitted to record class or disseminate the content of our class without the prior permission of the instructor. This policy does not apply to a student's own hand-written notes.

Conduct

Actions that diminish the quality of other students' learning will not be tolerated. Insults, slurs, or attacks of any kind will be grounds for permanent removal from the course. Every student is expected to engage with the course material in a responsible and respectful manner. This course requires discussion of a diverse array of philosophical ideas. Students are likely to find some ideas popular and others unpopular. That's normal. Neither the course nor the instructor will defend any one philosophical viewpoint except insofar as it advances the teaching outcomes of the course. Therefore, disagreement is normal in classes of this nature; disagreement is conducive to positive learning outcomes, regardless of whether this disagreement happens between texts themselves, between texts and readers, or between students. Disagreement that turns negative, derogatory, hostile, or otherwise demeaning *in any way* will not be tolerated in class.

Course Texts

Please bring readings to class on the day due, and please bring the hard copy (no e-text, unless it is needed to accommodate a disability registered with the Office of Disability Support Services).

Personal Technology

All personal electronic devices must remain stowed for the duration of the class session. Unless permitted to accommodate a disability officially recognized by and registered with the Office of

Disability Support Services, all notes must be taken by pen/pencil on paper rather than a laptop. This policy exists to enhance engagement by mitigating distraction.

Email

Check your MSU Texas email inboxes regularly. This is the only way students will be informed about class cancellations or any changes to the course. All email related to this course must take place between official MSU Texas email addresses. Please allow 24 hours for a reply to all emails.

Change of Schedule

A student dropping a course (but not withdrawing from the University) within the first 12 class days of a regular semester or the first four class days of a summer semester is eligible for a 100% refund of applicable tuition and fees. Dates are published in the Schedule of Classes each semester.

Refund and Repayment Policy

A student who withdraws or is administratively withdrawn from Midwestern State University (MSU) may be eligible to receive a refund for all or a portion of the tuition, fees, and room/board charges that were paid to MSU for the semester. However, if the student received financial aid (federal/state/institutional grants, loans, and/or scholarships), all or a portion of the refund may be returned to the financial aid programs. As described below, two formulas (federal and state) exist in determining the amount of the refund. (Examples of each refund calculation will be made available upon request).

Moffett Library

Moffett Library provides resources and services to support student's studies and assignments, including books, peer-reviewed journals, databases, and multimedia materials accessible both on campus and remotely. The library offers media equipment checkout, reservable study rooms, and research assistance from librarians to help students effectively find, evaluate, and use information. Get started on this [Moffett Library webpage](#) to explore these resources and learn how to best utilize the library.

Services for Students with Disabilities

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Midwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make an application for such assistance through Disability Support Services, located in the Clark Student Center, Room 168, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to [Disability Support Services](#).

College Policies

Campus Carry Rules/Policies

Refer to: [Campus Carry Rules and Policies](#)

Smoking/Tobacco Policy

College policy strictly prohibits the use of tobacco products in any building owned or operated by WATC. Adult students may smoke only in the outside designated smoking areas at each location.

Alcohol and Drug Policy

To comply with the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989 and subsequent amendments, students and employees of Midwestern State are informed that strictly enforced policies are in place which prohibit the unlawful possession, use, or distribution of any illicit drugs, including alcohol, on university property or as part of any university-sponsored activity. Students and employees are also subject to all applicable legal sanctions under local, state, and federal law for any offenses involving illicit drugs on University property or at University-sponsored activities.

Campus Carry

Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes as prohibited. The new Constitutional Carry law does not change this process. Concealed carry still requires a License-to-carry permit, and openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit [Campus Carry](#).

Active Shooter

The safety and security of our campus is the responsibility of everyone in our community. Each of us has an obligation to be prepared to appropriately respond to threats to our campus, such as an active aggressor. Please review the information provided by the MSU Police Department regarding the options and strategies we can all use to stay safe during difficult situations. For more information, visit [MSUReady – Active Shooter](#). Students are encouraged to watch the video entitled “Run. Hide. Fight.” which may be electronically accessed via the University police department’s webpage: [“Run. Hide. Fight.”](#)

Mandatory Reporting

Under Title IX, all MSU faculty are “mandatory reporters” of any disclosure from a student of sexual assault, abuse, harassment, dating violence, stalking, or other forms of sexual misconduct. It is the legal responsibility of a “mandatory reporter” to notify the Title IX coordinator if a student reports being the victim of any of the aforementioned abuses. For more information, please visit the [Sexual Misconduct Resource](#).

Grade Appeal Process

Update as needed. Students who wish to appeal a grade should consult the Midwestern State University [MSU Catalog](#)

***Notice:** Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor.

Course Schedule

Readings are listed according to their due date. Unless indicated otherwise, all readings come from the required course textbook. Texts marked “(PDF)” can be for free on our D2L course page.

Week 1

- Tuesday 8/25: Course introduction; overview of key concepts in the history of modern philosophy
- Thursday 8/27: René Descartes *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 1

Week 2

- Tuesday 9/1: René Descartes *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 2
- Thursday 9/3: René Descartes *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 2 continued
- Engagement Report #1 due in D2L dropbox no later than 11:59 p.m. this Sunday

Week 3

- Tuesday 9/8: David Hume *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section 2
- Thursday 9/10: David Hume *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section 4
- Engagement Report #2 due in D2L dropbox no later than 11:59 p.m. this Sunday

Week 4

- Tuesday 9/15: David Hume *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section 5
- Thursday 9/17: David Hume *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section 7
- Engagement Report #3 due in D2L dropbox no later than 11:59 p.m. this Sunday

Week 5

- Tuesday 9/22: Immanuel Kant *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Preface (pp. 1-8)
- Thursday 9/24: Immanuel Kant *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Preamble (pp. 9-22)
- Engagement Report #4 due in D2L dropbox no later than 11:59 p.m. this Sunday
- Writing Assignment #1 due no later than 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, 9/27 in D2L dropbox

Week 6

- Tuesday 9/29: Immanuel Kant *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Part 1 (pp. 23-34)
- Thursday 10/1: Immanuel Kant *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Part 2 (pp. 35-42)
- Engagement Report #5 due in D2L dropbox no later than 11:59 p.m. this Sunday

Week 7

- Tuesday 10/6: Flex session to wrap up Kant and introduce Hegel
- Thursday 10/8: G. W. F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit*, paragraphs 73-89, 90-95

Week 8

- Tuesday 10/13: G. W. F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit*, paragraphs 111-117, 120-131, 132-165 (optional)

- Thursday 10/15: G. W. F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit*, paragraphs 166-177, 178-196

Week 9

- Tuesday 10/20: G. W. F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit*, paragraphs 197-230 (optional)
- Thursday 10/22: G.W. F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit*, paragraphs 462-476 (required) and 582-595 (optional)
- Writing Assignment #2 due no later than 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, 10/25 in D2L dropbox
- Engagement Report #6 due in D2L dropbox no later than 11:59 p.m. this Sunday

Week 10

- Tuesday 10/27: G. W. F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit*, paragraphs 788-789, 792-795
- Thursday 10/29: Flex session to wrap up Hegel and introduce Nietzsche
- Engagement Report #7 due in D2L dropbox no later than 11:59 p.m. this Sunday

Week 11

- Tuesday 11/3: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, First Essay sections 1-11
- Thursday 11/5: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, First Essay continued sections 12-17
- Engagement Report #8 due in D2L dropbox no later than 11:59 p.m. this Sunday

Week 12

- Tuesday 11/10: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Second Essay sections 1-14
- Thursday 11/12: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Second Essay sections 16-25
- Engagement Report #9 due in D2L dropbox no later than 11:59 p.m. this Sunday
- Writing Assignment #3 due no later than 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, 11/15 in D2L dropbox

Week 13

- Tuesday 11/17: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, pp. 17-39
- Thursday 11/19: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, pp. 39-54
- Engagement Report #10 due in D2L dropbox no later than 11:59 p.m. this Sunday

Week 14

- Tuesday 11/24: Flex session to wrap up Nietzsche/Sartre and introduce Arendt
- Thursday 11/26: No class. Thanksgiving.

Week 15

- Tuesday 12/1: Hannah Arendt, "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility" (PDF)
- Thursday 12/3: Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations" (PDF)
- Engagement Report #11 due in D2L dropbox no later than 11:59 p.m. this Sunday

Exam Week

- Writing Assignment #4 (for PHIL-2513)
- Final Research Essay (for PHIL-4513)
- Due: no later than Thursday, 12/10 by 11:59 p.m.
- Location: D2L assignments folder, submitted as either MS Word or PDF file.