PHIL 35: Philosophy of the Americas

Summer Session II 2025
Mondays and Wednesdays 11:00 – 1:50PM
Hybrid (In class, with a remote option)
RWAC 0472

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Overview

Welcome to PHIL 35! This class is an invitation to think with the Americas, to see how its ideas have been shaped by its history, its peoples, and its hopes, and to take part in the philosophical work that continues to grow out of them. We will step into a conversation that begins in the philosophies of Indigenous nations, is reshaped by the upheavals of colonization and revolution, and carries forward into the struggles and hopes of the present. Along the way we will see how thinkers across this hemisphere have wrestled with what freedom really means, how to weave communities out of difference, and who gets counted as part of "the people." More than a survey, this course asks what it means to do philosophy from this side of the world and invites you to join in that ongoing project of imagining and creating more just and inclusive futures.

At the center of the course are two guiding questions: How do we create a more perfect union? And what happens when we take seriously the philosophical traditions born in the Americas? These questions frame our movement across centuries and across the hemisphere, as we read and discuss works that invite us into an ongoing conversation about how ideas of freedom, democracy, and belonging take shape and continue to evolve. In joining that conversation, you will practice philosophy as something alive: a way of thinking together about the kind of world we want to inhabit and the futures we want to build.

No prior background in philosophy or history is required. If you come curious, do the readings, and join the conversation, you will leave with a broader understanding of how philosophy has been used in the Americas to imagine and work toward more just and inclusive societies.

This course also satisfies DEI credit and may occasionally include short video materials posted in advance on Canvas.

Hybrid class details

This is a hybrid class, that is, it meets in person with an online option. Regular attendance at meetings (whether online or not) is ordinarily expected as there are assignments during the class meetings that are graded, and there is a participation component in your grade. Any slides used in synchronous meetings will be posted after the meeting, in part because the course will rely significantly on open-ended, sometimes Socratic pedagogy

Course Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Recognize and describe key philosophical ideas and debates that have shaped the Americas
2. Navigate challenging discussions on important contemporary topics
3. Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of philosophical arguments
4. Produce original philosophical argumentation and analysis
5. Read and synthesize challenging philosophical texts

Course Material and Tools

Course Readings

There are no required textbooks for the course; all the readings will be made available electronically as pdfs through Canvas / Google drive folder; for titles see the reading schedule below.

Technology Requirements:

Remote Option: If you are participating in the remote option, you will need a reliable internet connection to access class meetings and course materials. Please plan to join from a quiet space when possible and dedicate uninterrupted time for class meetings so that you can focus and participate fully.

In Person: Laptops, tablets, and other note-taking technology are welcome in class for course-related purposes, but please use them in ways that minimize distractions for yourself and others.

Note: The use of ChatGPT or other large language models (LLMs) is prohibited in this course unless you clearly cite the tool and explain how it was used in your assignment. These technologies are discouraged except for very minor tweaks to improve readability. Overreliance on or misuse of such tools is considered academic misconduct and may be treated as an academic integrity violation.

Classroom Etiquette / Participation Expectations

This course works best as a shared conversation. Come ready to listen closely, respond thoughtfully, and engage with ideas and with one another in good faith. Respect for different perspectives is essential, especially when we disagree.

Participation in this class is less about how much you talk and more about how you show up: being attentive, prepared, and willing to work through complex ideas together. Whether you are speaking, asking questions, or listening, your focus helps make the classroom a space where everyone can think deeply.

Course Readings

There are no required textbooks for the course; all the readings will be made available electronically as pdfs through Canvas / Google drive folder; for titles see the reading schedule below.

Evaluation

Assignments	Points	Weight

Attendance/Participation	10	10%
Short In-Class Writing Assignments	20 (4pt x 5)	20%
Discussion Board	20 (4pt x 5)	20%
Argument Mapping	10	10%
Philosophical Fieldwork	40	40%
Total	**100**	**100%**

Grading Scale
A = 90-100% B = 80-89% C = 70-79% D = 60-69% F = 59%-below

Attendance/Participation (10% (5% x 2))

Because this class is hybrid, showing up and being part of the conversation really matters. Ten percent of your grade comes from attendance and participation. Simply being present, whether in person or online (with your camera on unless we have talked about an exception), will earn you half of these points. The other half comes from taking part in the life of the class: joining group discussions, asking questions during lecture, or coming to office hours. You do not need to be outgoing to do well here, but you do need to be willing to join in and help make this a space where we are all thinking together. Everyone gets one no questions asked absence. After that, unexcused absences will start to bring your attendance grade down. Come to class ready to talk about the week's readings, listen to others, and help make our class an open and thoughtful place to learn.

In-class writing assignments (20% (4% x 5))
These will be short in-class writing exercises typically asking you to reflect on some aspect of the reading or some issues addressed in the reading. They are graded on a plus (100), check (85), minus (60), or zero (0) scale, in light of demonstrating your facility with the text and evidence of some critical engagement, imagination, or reflectiveness about the reading.

Weekly Online Discussion Posts (20% (4% x 5))

By **Tuesday at midnight each week**, you will submit a post to your group's discussion board on Canvas (groups are divided by last name). Each post should include:

1. A quotation (one or two sentences) from that week's readings that you found interesting, puzzling, or provocative.
2. A short response (at least 100 words) sharing your thoughts about the passage. This is your chance to explain why you chose it, what you think it means, and any connections or disagreements you see.
3. A question for the group inspired by the passage. Your question should aim to open up discussion rather than have a single right answer.

Extra Credit Opportunity (2.5% (.5% x 5))

In addition to your required weekly post, you may earn up to 0.5% extra credit each week (maximum 2.5% overall) by writing an additional thoughtful reply to a classmate's post. These replies should do more than agree or disagree; they should engage with your classmate's ideas in a way that deepens the discussion (for example, by asking a question, drawing a connection, or offering a new perspective). Extra credit points earned this way will be added to your final grade at the end of the term and cannot raise your final grade above 100

Argument Mapping (10%)

This assignment is designed to prepare you for the final Philosophical Fieldwork project by practicing how to explain ideas clearly and invite dialogue. You will complete an **argument mapping assignment** midway through the course (08/18). An argument map is a one-page visual representation of an argument. It shows:

- The **main conclusion or claim** of a text or class discussion,
- The **reasons and evidence** that support that claim, and
- **Possible objections or counterpoints**.

Detailed guidelines (including options for audio/video formats, how to submit, and evaluation criteria) will be posted later in the quarter

NOTE: Onliners:

- If you are primarily attending via Zoom, you will also do a 10-min check in with the TA where you will explain why you chose your topic and walk through your reasoning.

This assignment will give you early experience in the core skills you will need for the final project: identifying a central philosophical idea, breaking it down into its supporting reasons, considering possible objections, and communicating that structure clearly to someone else. By practicing these skills now, you will be better prepared to explain and discuss a concept during your final philosophical fieldwork project.

Philosophical Fieldwork (40%):

For the final project, you will carry out a piece of "philosophical fieldwork." Your task is to take some of the key ideas from this class and explain them to someone outside of it (ex: a parent, sibling, niece or nephew, partner, friend, or another willing listener).

You will record your conversation (audio or video) and submit it by **Friday, September 5, 2025 11:00AM**, and you will also meet with me or the TA for a short 10-minute reflection on the experience **Friday September 5, 2025 during the scheduled final exam time.**

Your project should:

1. Choose a focused question or theme from the class.
2. Explain two or three of the main ideas or arguments connected to that theme in clear language for someone who has not read the texts.
3. Engage your dialogue partner by inviting at least two genuine questions from them and responding in your own words.

The goal is to demonstrate that you understand the concepts deeply enough to explain them, to listen and respond thoughtfully to questions, and to reflect on what happens when philosophical ideas are taken outside the classroom. The best projects will show close engagement with the readings and themes (*freedom, belonging, identity, sovereignty, democracy, multiculturalism*) as well as clarity and creativity.

Detailed guidelines (including options for audio/video formats, how to submit, and evaluation criteria) will be posted later in the quarter.

Notes About Requirements

A. No extensions will be granted for any assignment or exam, except in cases of genuine emergency (e.g., earthquake, flood, fire, death in the family, illness certified by a doctor).

B. The UCSD Policy on Integrity of Scholarship must be observed in this course. This includes observance of the following six principles:

As a student,

1. I will not receive or provide unauthorized assistance in examinations.
2. I will not use unauthorized materials during an examination.
3. I will not use materials from sources without proper quotation, acknowledgement or citations.
4. I will not alter examinations, essays, or other assignments for regrading.
5. I will not fabricate data or references.
6. I will not use false excuses to obtain extensions of time for examinations or writing assignments.

C. Maintaining academic integrity: Though students are strongly encouraged to discuss the assignments with one another, each student must submit answers to the assignments independently of one another, written in her or his own words.

D. Any student caught cheating or plagiarizing (i) will be reported to the Academic Integrity Office, (ii) will receive a failing grade on the assignment at issue, and (iii) will be in jeopardy of failing the entire course, depending on the nature of the breach of academic integrity.

E. If any accommodations are needed due to a disability or for religious reasons, please notify me at the end of the first class period or as soon as possible. Students requesting accommodations for the course due to a disability must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) which is located in University Center 202 behind Center Hall. Students are required to present their AFA letters to Faculty (please make arrangements to contact me privately) and also to the OSD Liaison in the Philosophy Department in advance so that accommodations may be arranged.

Overall Community and Engagement Expectations

What you can do to support your success in the course:	What I will do to support your success in the course:
Read the syllabus and stay current with course information	Be prepared and bring my enthusiasm for teaching to each session.
Keep up with readings.	Respond to emails within one working day, and provide timely feedback on assignments / submissions.
Contribute to the learning environment with fairness, cooperation, and professionalism.	Establish a learning environment with fairness, cooperation, and professionalism, and will take action if these principles are violated.
Treat your classmates and myself honestly and ethically.	Treat you honestly and ethically, and will address any concerns you might have.

Commit to excel with integrity[1]. Have the courage to act in ways that are honest, fair, responsible, respectful & trustworthy.	Uphold integrity standards and create an atmosphere that fosters active learning, creativity, critical thinking, and honest collaboration.
Manage your time, so you can stay on track with the course and complete tasks on time.	Only assign work that is vital to the course, and will work to meet the standard credit hour allotment for the course.
Communicate with me if you determine that a deadline cannot be met due to extenuating circumstances.	Consider requests for adjustments and will make reasonable exceptions available to all students when approved.

1. Please read UC San Diego's Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and take the integrity pledge!

Inclusion Statement

I believe very strongly that the classroom is a place to expand our knowledge and experiences safely, while being respected and valued. I support the values of UC San Diego to "create a diverse, equitable, and inclusive campus in which students, faculty, and staff can thrive". I strive to uphold the values articulated by the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: "We believe that true excellence is achieved through productive relationships among people of diverse perspectives. When the collective talents of our students, faculty, and staff at UC San Diego are united in an environment that is open and inclusive, creativity and innovation prospers." I hope you will join me in creating a class that upholds these values to further enhance our learning as a community. For more information, please visit: http://diversity.ucsd.edu

Resources for Support and Learning

There are a variety of resources available to students at UC San Diego, which are designed to address needs and enhance the student experience.

Learning and Academic Support	
Ask a Librarian: Library Support *Chat or make an appointment with a librarian to focus on your research needs*	**Writing Hub Services in the Teaching + Learning Commons** *One-on-one online writing tutoring and workshops on key writing topics*
Course Reserves, Connecting from Off-Campus and Research Support *Find supplemental course materials*	**Supplemental Instruction** *Peer-assisted study sessions through the Academic Achievement Hub to improve success in historically challenging courses*
First Gen Student Success Coaching Program *Peer mentor program that provides students with information, resources, and support in meeting their goals*	**Tutoring – Content** *Drop-in and online tutoring through the Academic Achievement Hub*

Office of Academic Support & Instructional Services (OASIS) *Intellectual and personal development support*	**Tutoring – Learning Strategies** *Address learning challenges with a metacognitive approach*
Support for Well-being and Inclusion	
Basic Needs at UCSD ***Any student who has difficulty accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live is encouraged to contact:*** **foodpantry@.ucsd.edu | basicneeds@ucsd.edu | (858) 246-2632** **Counseling and Psychological Services** *Confidential counseling and consultations for psychiatric service and mental health programming* Triton Concern Line ***Report students of concern:* (858) 246-1111** Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD)** ***Supports students with disabilities and accessibility across campus***	**Community and Resource Centers** **Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion** *As part of the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion the campus community centers provide programs and resources for students and contribute toward the evolution of a socially just campus* (858).822-.3542 | diversity@ucsd.edu **Get Involved** *Student organizations, clubs, service opportunities, and many other ways to connect with others on campus* **Undocumented Student Services** ***Programs and services are designed to help students overcome obstacles that arise from their immigration status and support them through personal and academic excellence***

Campus Policies

- UC San Diego Principles of Community
- UC San Diego Policy on Integrity of Scholarship
- Religious Accommodation
- Nondiscrimination and Harassment
- UC San Diego Student Conduct Code

Lecture and Reading Schedule

Subject to change: all texts will be available on Canvas; texts are to be read prior to the course meeting on the date listed

Note: At first glance the reading schedule may look extensive, but much of what we will be reading are **primary texts**. These are usually shorter in length but denser in content, and they often do not look like the kinds of philosophy you may have encountered before. Because of this, the weekly page count is relatively low. Students are encouraged to read everything at least twice (for example, a quick read before class to get a sense of the text, followed by a slower, more careful read after class) in order to deepen understanding

Week 1	**American Indigenous Philosophies**
Monday 08/04	**Introduction/Syllabus Review** "Windows on Native American Philosophy" *How It Is,* V.F. Cordova **Discussion Board Week 1 Due Tuesday 08/05**
Wednesday 08/06	Selections from the *Popul Vuh* [Mayan]; Selections from David Cusick's, *Ancient History of the Six Nations* [Iroquois]
Week 2	**Freedom and Liberty**
Monday 08/11	"Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms" Thomas Jefferson (1775) "The Angostura Address" Simon Bolivar (1817) "Discourse on the Independence of the Mexican Empire" Jose Luis Mora (1821) **Discussion Board Week 2 Due Tuesday 08/12**
Wednesday 08/13	"Letter to the General Assembly" Biassou, Jean-Francois and Touissant L'Ouverture (1792) "The Nature of Slavery', 'The Inhumanity of Slavery' (1850); "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?' (1852) from *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Frederick Douglass
Week 3	**The Struggle for Democratic Belonging**
Monday 08/18	"The Degradation of Disenfranchisement" Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1901) "Women's Presence in Politics"; "Why Women do Not Engage in Politics" Ofelia Uribe de Acosta, *Una Voz Insurgente* (1953) **Argument Mapping Due 08/18 During Class Period** **Discussion Board Week 3 Due Tuesday 08/19**

Wednesday 08/20	"Justifying Uncivil Disobedience" Ten-Herng Lai (2019) "Showdown for Non-Violence: The Theory and Practice of Nonviolent Politics" Karuna Mantena (2018) Video: Malcolm X - *We're non-violent with people who are non-violent with us* Video: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr: *Nonviolence is the Most Powerful Weapon*
Week 4	**The Search for Identity**
Monday 08/25	"My Race" Jose Marti "Mestizaje, Métissage, and Mixedblood: Tracing Some Political Terms of Racial and Cultural Mixture Across the Americas" Andrea J. Pitts "La Conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness" Gloria Anzaldua **Discussion Board Week 4 Due Tuesday 08/26**
Wednesday 08/27	"Americanization and the American Dream" and "Chinese Identity and the American Dream", *The Challenge of the American Dream,* Francis Hsu, (1971) "The Discovery of What It Means to be An American", James Baldwin
Week 5	**Multiculturalism, Sovereignty, Immigration**
Monday 09/01	**Labor Day Holiday, No Lecture** **Discussion Board Week 5 Due Tuesday 09/02**
Wednesday 09/04	"Cesar Chavez and the Pluralist Foundations of US American Democracy" Jose Antonio Orozco (2016) "Socially, Not Legally, Undocumented" Amy Reed-Sandoval (2020) *Recommended but not required:* Anzaldúa, G (1992- 2001) New Mestiza Nation
Friday 09/05	**Philosophical Fieldwork due at 11:00AM** **10 Minute Meetings with TA 11:30AM-2:29PM**