Learning philosophy can be achieved through a study of the history of philosophy or by doing philosophy. The emphasis of the Diploma Programme philosophy course is on doing philosophy within an international context.

The aim is to encourage students to develop the ability to reason and argue and to take a personal and independent position on philosophical issues. Below is a suggested approach that will enable students to study themes or texts in a consistent way. When formulating philosophical arguments students should:

- identify the problem(s)/issue(s) and possible assumptions present in the activity
- ask themselves what they think about these problem(s)/issue(s)—taking into account their own and other perspectives—and presenting reasons that support their position
- put forward possible objections or counter-arguments that could be levelled against their position
- suggest strategies for overcoming these objections or counter-arguments
- illustrate their position and counter-positions with supporting examples
- offer possible and consistent resolutions to the problem(s)/issue(s) present in the activity, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the positions they encounter.

Students should adopt the same approach when they examine a classic philosophical issue or use a philosophical argument presented in a text. They should always be careful not to refer to the text or the author as an authority. In addition, students are expected to:

- identify the philosophical problem(s)/issue(s) raised by the text
- identify the author’s standpoint in the text
- state what they think about the author’s standpoint
- develop and explore their own position on the author’s standpoint by:
  - acknowledging alternative approaches to the text
  - considering how different approaches to the text might enable them to extend their own thinking about the problem(s)/issue(s) posed.

This approach goes beyond the mere presentation of arguments and counter-arguments from philosophers' texts, and insists on students developing their own line of reasoning. Students must always demonstrate how their own personal reasoning underpins their argument.
“The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.” F. Scott Fitzgerald

The IB Philosophy SL syllabus consists of three compulsory parts.

Part 1: Themes

Core theme: What is a human being?
- What, if any, are the relationships between mind and body?
- Self-consciousness, language, agency, dreams, spirituality, imagination, intuition, passion, reason and emotion, aggression, moral values, empathy, creativity
- Could animals or machines be persons?
- Human nature: individuality, universality, diversity
- The question of self: Is it possible to know oneself? To know others? Solipsism and intersubjectivity
- Freedom and determinism
- Our existence in time and place; biological and social necessities; gender and social conditioning
- Existential anxiety; meaning and meaninglessness; responsibility and authenticity

Secondary theme: Philosophy of Religion

Philosophy of religion examines the nature of religion, explores rational arguments for and against various religious views, analyses the nature of religious language and explores the variety of human religious experience. This theme allows students to explore philosophically such questions as:
- Can we prove the existence of a higher being through reasoning or experience?
- Can morality be based on religious experience?
- What is the nature and scope of religious language?
- Can religion give meaning to life?
- Is spirituality possible without religion or belief in a higher being?
- Could religion be seen as only a social phenomenon?
- Concepts of a higher being
  - nihilism, theism, atheism, agnosticism
  - arguments for and against the existence of God
  - problems of evil and suffering
- Religious experience and behavior
  - the nature and value of religious experiences: from social conformity to personal commitment
  - the naturalistic view of faith: indoctrination, illusion, projection
  - faith, reason and motivation for belief
  - the human experience of evil: moral evil, natural evil
  - sin, alienation and salvation
- Religion around the world
  - Religion and politics
  - Religious pluralism—roads to the same mountaintop?

In-class texts:

For the core theme:
*Who Are We? Theories of Human Nature* by Louis Pojman

For the optional theme:
*Letters to a Doubting Thomas: A Case for the Existence of God* by C. Stephen Layman

Part 2: Prescribed philosophical text

The purpose of studying a prescribed text is to allow students to achieve an in-depth knowledge and understanding of a challenging work, and to extend their overall comprehension of philosophy. The detailed study of a philosophical text can be seen as another way in which students learn to do philosophy by entering into dialogue with another philosopher. The text studied has been chosen from the twelve works on the “180 list of prescribed philosophical texts”. Students are required to study one text for this component of the program (on which the paper 2 assessment is based), and that will be the ancient Hindu text *The Bhagavad Gita*. In studying the prescribed text, students should develop their ability to present a philosophical argument by testing their own position against the standpoint of the author, and using the author’s ideas to expand their own thinking on the issue(s) under discussion. Students are expected to develop the skills required to undertake a critical analysis of the text. The study of a prescribed text should be from the text itself and not from a commentary on it.
Part 3: Internal assessment

Students are required to produce a philosophical analysis of non-philosophical material, to demonstrate their philosophical skills. The internal assessment exercise takes the form of a philosophical analysis of non-philosophical material, which allows students to do philosophy under ordinary conditions, without the time constraints associated with written examinations. The purpose of the internal assessment is to allow students to develop their philosophical skills by applying understanding of philosophical ideas and concepts through the analysis of non-philosophical material. In doing this students will be able to:

- choose appropriate stimulus material for analysis
- demonstrate how non-philosophical material can challenge their philosophical reflection and be treated in a philosophical way
- apply the skills of philosophical analysis to material of a non-philosophical nature
- apply their philosophical knowledge and understanding to concrete examples or situations.

“Look beneath the surface; let not the several qualities of a thing nor its worth escape thee.” Marcus Aurelius

Coursework

Students will complete the following tasks each week:
- reading of assigned passages (approximately 30-50 pages per week) from text and/or course reader
- online journal: reflective response to assigned reading
- online discussion: contribution to weekly blog discussion threads
- one-page notes for audio lecture/podcast
- [bonus]: one-page notes for Philosophy Talk podcast of choice

Students will complete the following tasks each month:
- in-class writing assessment
- oral sharing of non-philosophical material (film clip, comic, fiction passage, song, magazine article, etc.)
- [bonus]: attendance of a philosophical Movie Afternoon and subsequent online discussion
Required texts (you will need to purchase these):

- The Bhagavad Gita
- Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl*
- Civilization and Its Discontents by Sigmund Freud
- The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics by C.S. Lewis*
- Life of Pi by Yann Martel
- Thus Spoke Zarathustra by Friedrich Nietzsche

“A good reader is active in his efforts to understand. Any book is a problem, a puzzle. The reader's attitude is that of a detective looking for clues to its basic ideas and alert for anything that will make them clearer.” Mortimer Adler, How to Read a Book

Reading for philosophy classes generally makes up in density for what it lacks in length. That means that an adequate job of reading the assignments will perhaps require a slower, more thoughtful and questioning pace. Books marked with an (*) asterisk need to be purchased for first semester.

Please indicate that you have read and understand the above course requirements by printing and signing your name. Please indicate parental and student email addresses, a phone number and a time when it is best to contact you should the occasion arise. If you have any questions, please contact me.

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