Welcome to Philosophy 110, Introduction to Philosophy. My name is Daniel Kaufman and I am a professor in the Philosophy Department at Missouri State University.

The course is designed to acquaint students with the basic subjects and some of the more important historical figures in the history of philosophy. This is not a complete or comprehensive course in the sense that we will not learn about every subject that philosophers have addressed nor will we have a chance to read every philosopher that’s important. However, we will cover some of the essentials. As a primer — as a preparatory course, I think you’ll find it interesting and useful for further study.

Let me just say a couple of things about some of the skills that we need to develop in order to do philosophy well and in order for you to succeed in this course. For one thing, in philosophy we have to read carefully. It’s usually not enough to just read something once and it’s usually not enough simply to skim. We need to read closely and we need to read it at least twice in order to really get what’s going on.

You also need to be able to sit uninterruptedly and listen to the lecture. The format here is good in this regard because there’ll be no interruptions from questions from the classroom or asides that a professor might ordinarily make in a classroom, talking to a live audience. But one of the things you really need to be able to do is sit and listen uninterrupted to the lecture. The reason is that philosophy is conducted through argumentation and oftentimes a point that a philosopher will make will take an extended line of argument in order to establish. And so you need to be able to follow a sustained line of argument often over the course of a substantial amount of time and through several permutations of complexity. So you don’t want to be listening to this or watching this while you’re doing something else. This is gonna require your complete and total attention.

The first thing I want to do is I want to talk a little bit about what philosophy is —
which, as you'll see in a moment, is not such a simple thing to explain — and then to introduce you to our first subject. So let me talk a little bit about what philosophy is. There have been a number of attempts over time to define philosophy. Such definitions are rarely neutral. They usually reflect the interests that the philosophers in question bring to the study of philosophy and these are interests that are shaped in part by their time and by their place. So I'm just going to give you a couple of examples — a few examples of the sorts of definitions of philosophy that have been offered.

A very ancient and influential notion of philosophy is that it is the quest for wisdom. Indeed, the word philosophy comes from the Greek *philosophia* which means *love of wisdom*. Some have believed that what philosophy is ultimately is the search for knowledge, for the foundations of all human understanding. And more recently people have defined philosophy as linguistic and conceptual analysis. That is, of attempting to understand what we mean by the words that we use and what the basic logic is of our discourse.

Now, I think that all of these certainly describe philosophy in its many aspects, but I don’t think that any of these suffices as a definition of philosophy. In other words, philosophy is all of these things and more. And what I’ve found useful — rather than trying to capture the essence of philosophy in a single definition — and, after all, philosophy is a subject that goes back to at least 500 B.C. if not further, and so it would be odd if it was a concise, short definition that would capture the essence of a subject that is so ancient and so large in its scope.

What I’d like to do, rather than try to define philosophy, is to give a list of distinctive philosophical questions — that is, the kinds of questions that philosophers have asked over the millennium — and thus help you to get some sense of what philosophy is about more by a kind of acquaintance than by a formal definition. So what I’m gonna do now is I’m going to give a list of typical philosophical questions and
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Hopefully in hearing these you’ll get a sense of what the subject is about.

So one question that philosophers have asked since antiquity has been what is a
good or fulfilling human life? Another question that they’ve asked is what is the
meaning of justice? Can the existence of God be proven or is it solely a matter of
faith? What is a person? What determines an individual’s identity? What does it
mean to know something as opposed to merely believing it? Do moral judgments
admit of proof or are they purely subjective? Is there a standard of taste? What
makes something a work of art? What gives marks on a page or sounds linguistic
meaning? What does it mean to say that a sentence is true or false?

So I hope you see that philosophy covers a broad gamut of subjects, and so you
couldn’t define philosophy in terms of a specific subject matter. Philosophy covers
everything from ethics to politics, to linguistics, to science, to religion. You might be
able to define philosophy as a certain kind of way of asking questions and I think that
that might get us closer to the truth. But, in fact, philosophy does not admit of a simple
definition. All that one can say about it really, if you want to give a concise formula, is
that philosophy involves the investigation of humanity’s most fundamental questions at
their most abstract level.

Now, in this course we’re gonna address three broad subjects. That is, we’re
gonna address three fundamental subjects that have arisen in the history of philosophy
and that continue to be discussed today. Each of these subjects breaks down into
many smaller subject areas. And so I’ve chosen these subjects with the idea being
that keep the class simple, keep it into three digestible parts, but let the parts be broad
enough that we can really get a sense of the broad play of a philosophical investigation
over the millennia.

And the subjects are personhood and identity — that’s the first; knowledge —
that’s the second; and ethics and politics which is the third. And, as I’m sure you can
tell simply by the headings, these are vast subjects which will admit of a lot of
interesting discussion within their respective rubrics.

What I’d like to do now is I’d like to introduce our first subject and I will do this
throughout the course. As we begin a new subject, I will give an overview of the
subject, talk about what some of the distinctive questions are, and give a little
biographical information about the philosophers that we’ll be talking about in the course
of the subject. Our first subject is personhood and identity, and so I’m going to spend
the rest of this first lecture giving a general overview of the subject and talking about
some of the distinctive questions that arise within its context.

There are two general issues with respect to personhood and identity which are
reflected in the title. The first is, well, what is a person? Put in a way philosophers
would put it, what is personhood? The second question concerns the criteria for
personal identity. What does it mean to say that someone has remained the same
person over time and what does it mean to say that someone is no longer the same
person that one was before? These are, of course, ordinary ways of speaking. And I
should say that philosophy, while its methods may often seem technical because it’s
essentially an analytical way of looking at questions, philosophy always begins from
common usage, ordinary speech, common sense and common ways of thinking. That
is, it’s the full play of human life and thought and activity that constitutes philosophy’s
subject matter. And so here when I’m talking about what the subject of personal identity
is all about, we cannot avoid but talk about our common notions and our common
conceptions because these provide data on which the philosopher is going to operate.

So the subject breaks down into two more basic subjects which concern the
nature of persons, what is a person, and criteria for personal identity. What makes
someone the same person, what makes someone a different person? And, of course,
these reflect ways of speaking. We refer to ourselves as persons and we talk about
how we are the same person that we’ve always been, or we are a different person than we used to be. A lot of times people will undergo sort of life-changing events or life-changing frames of mind which will lead them to say, “I’m no longer the same person that I was.” Philosophy tries to make sense of what we mean when we talk this way. So let’s address these two sub subjects, if we can call them that, in a little more detail.

The first thing I want to talk about is whether there’s any purpose served in distinguishing persons from human beings. Obviously, human being is a word that we use and has a certain connotation and person is a word that we use and has a certain connotation. The question is, are these simply synonyms for one another? Are they different ways of describing the same thing? Or do they refer to literally different entities? And there have been philosophers who’ve taken positions all across the questions I’ve just asked. There’s some who’ve said, “Well, look. There’s no difference between a human being and a person. These are just synonyms for the same thing.” There are others who’ve said, “Well, they may be referring to the same thing but they are very different ways of describing that thing.” And then there have been philosophers further still who’ve said, “No, no. Person and human being refer to entirely different entities.”

Let’s talk about a few of the traditional reasons for making this distinction between human beings and persons, or some sort of distinction like that. The probably most common reasons for making some sort of a distinction between person and human being or between soul and body or between mind and body are religious. Traditionally, many of the religions that come out of the Mediterranean base — and which, of course, is our — which is where most of our civilization comes from — have believed in some sort of immortality or afterlife. There’s clearly a problem to understanding how immortality or an afterlife is possible given that the human body
perishes, ceases to exist. And so oftentimes, traditionally speaking, people will make distinctions between human beings on the one hand and persons on the other, or between the body and the soul, in order to allow for there to be something that remains after death. Now, in this case we would be talking about a literal distinction. That is, that the word person or soul, or what have you, and the word human being and body literally refer to different things, one of which perishes, the other of which survives.

Another reason for making this distinction or a distinction like this, also traditional, is a longstanding belief in human distinctiveness with respect to the rest of the animal kingdom. No matter which of the ancient religions you look at, whether it’s Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, whichever of the ancient philosophical traditions you look at, there has always been a sense in which human beings are distinct from and superior to the rest of the animal world. And one of the ways of explaining that difference is by saying that human beings have an additional element beyond the physical body, that human beings have a soul, that human beings have a rational mind or some other distinguishing non-physical characteristic.

A third reason — traditional reason for making a distinction like this has to do with freedom of the will and the possibility of morality. The physical body, of course, is bound by physical laws. You cannot flap your arms and fly. If you jump off a bridge you will fall. In short, the physical body is limited by the laws of nature and its movements and behaviors are governed by the laws of nature. But this provides a bit of a problem because we generally believe that in order to be able to make a moral assessment of someone’s behavior, that behavior must be voluntarily or freely chosen. That is, free will would seem to be a prerequisite for morality.

And so many philosophers have believed that, well, if morality is possible, then there must be some part of a human being that is not — whose behavior is not determined by the laws of nature, whose behavior is in a sense entirely a matter of its
own volition. A very convenient way of explaining this is to say that, well, human behavior ultimately stems from a non-physical source, namely from the human mind or from the human soul, if you will. That is, a lot of philosophers have tried to say that there’s an aspect of human nature, this non-physical, non-corporeal soul or mind, which is free from the laws of nature and thus free to make autonomous decisions for which they can then be held accountable. This, of course, is the essence of moral judgment.

There are also a number of more what I’ll call modern reasons — and by modern I mean after the scientific revolution of the 17th century — there are more modern reasons for making the distinction between human beings and persons, and we are going to explore two of these in this course.

Now, given some substantial notion of person — so let’s say assuming that there is some use to distinguishing persons from human beings, our second question arises. And that second question is what are the criteria for identity of persons? That is, given two individuals, X and Y, at two different times, T1 and T2, under what conditions would we say they are the same person and under what conditions would we say they are different persons, different people? This is a question that reflects a more general interest in identity conditions, the conditions under which things either remain the same or change, that is of ancient interest.

The ancient Greeks were particularly fascinated with questions of identity and change — or, as Aristotle put it, of questions in a generation and corruption, how things come to be and how things go out of existence. The Greeks recognize a general puzzle that arises with respect to the question of identity and that is, on the one hand, if you say that something has changed, you are saying that it no longer is what it was. But, on the other hand, since you are still talking about it, it somehow has remained the same despite the fact that it has changed. The Greeks who loved puzzles like this found this utterly mystifying, how change was possible, how identity through change
was possible, and spilled an awful lot of ink, or whatever it was they wrote with, trying to understand it.

Now, most agree that a strict or mathematical notion of identity is not suitable to most things, and let’s try to explain this. Identity is a notion that comes from mathematics, $X = Y$. And in its strictest form, the rules for identity say something like this: $X$ is identical to $Y$ if and only if for any property $P$, if $X$ is $P$ then $Y$ is $P$, and vice versa. Put into English, for any two things they’re identical just in case they have all the same properties. If they have any properties not in common they are not identical.

Now, I hope you’ll realize that this cannot possibly be the notion of identity, the notion of sameness that we use most of the time when we’re engaged in ordinary discourse. When I come home from recording this session and I park my car in the driveway, and it rains overnight and I go back to my car the next morning, of course if you asked me I would say it’s the same car. But notice the car the next morning does not have all the same properties as the car the day before. After all, it rained overnight and all the dirt and grime that was on my car the day before is now washed off. So at least with respect to its dirt or lack thereof, the car at $T_1$ has a different property from the car at $T_2$. And on the strict mathematical notion of identity, you’d have to say it’s not the same car. But, of course, this is not what anyone means when they say, “Well, that’s the same car.” And notice, if you came the next morning and took my car and I had you arrested for theft, you couldn’t say, “Oh, no, no, no. That’s not his car. That’s a different car from the car that was parked there yesterday.” The judge would laugh at you if he was humorously inclined and would tell you that you didn’t know the meaning of the word same and the meaning of the word different.

And so we clearly cannot employ the mathematical notion of identity with respect to persons or with respect to any other ordinary notion as we employ the word. When we use the words like same, different, identical, non-identical in ordinary speech,
whatever it is we mean, it’s not the mathematical notion of identity. The question is what notion is it? Specifically, what notion of identity are we working with when we talk about persons? When I say, as people do, that I’m not the same person that I was when I was six years old, what notion of same am I working with?

So that’s the second subject that we’re gonna address under this general rubric of personhood identity. The first is going to be what is a person? Why would we want to make a distinction between a person, say, and a human being? And the second is, given some substantial notion of personhood, what are the relative identity conditions? Under what conditions are two people the same and under what conditions are they different?

We’re going to examine the views of two important philosophers on these subjects concerning personhood and personal identity. The first will be Rene Descartes, a French philosopher, and the second will be John Locke, an English philosopher. Next time we will begin our discussion of Descartes. We will have a total of two discussions on Descartes and his theory of personhood.

And I want to leave you with a few things to think about while you’re doing the reading, and I’ll be doing this at the end of every lecture. At the end of every lecture, I will leave you off with what we are going to be doing next time and I will give you some things to think about while you’re reading. The reason for doing this is because of the kind of understanding that I want you to come away with from this course and I distinguish two different types of understanding. The first is a passive sort of understanding in which you literally understand in the sense that we’re speaking the same language. This is understanding in the sense that you understand what I’m saying but you wouldn’t if, let’s say, I was speaking some foreign language that you didn’t know. But there’s also an active sense of understanding which means not only that you understood in the first sense but that you’re able to make use of what you’ve
learned. You’re able to perform with the information that you’ve acquired.

And, of course, it’s the second sort of understanding that we’re after. Because after all, to perform successfully in a course requires not just that you’ve listened and understood in the first sense, but that you’re able to perform with the knowledge that you’ve acquired, that you’re able to perform on tests. In general, we want our understanding to be active and not merely passive because much of the value of the knowledge we acquire is its use.

And so part of the way that I think that active understanding is engendered is by not merely reading but by writing. And so if you want to think about these things to think about while you read that I’m going to be giving you at the end of every lecture, think about them as a kind of study question. But I suggest that you not merely contemplate them but actually try to answer them with pen and paper. There’s something about the act of writing that imprints understanding in your mind in a way that simple reading does not. I tell people sometimes that I can no longer read a book without writing in it and that’s why I buy all my books. I don’t take out books from libraries because if you write in the library’s books they get angry. I find that if I’m writing while I’m reading, more of what I’ve read is being retained and is available to me in a way that it would not be if I’ve merely read it.

So here’s my suggestions. I suggest a) that you read everything twice. You read it once before you listen to the lecture and you read it once after you’ve listened to the lecture. Secondly, that you have pen and paper while you read and that you take notes and write while you read, and a great way to start that is to try and answer these questions that I’m posing in my things to think about.

So things to think about while you’re reading Descartes or preliminary things to think about while you’re reading Descartes. First, in Descartes’ view, what is a person? Now, don’t expect that he’s simply going to tell you. He’s not going to say, “A person is
X.” Remember, Descartes didn’t write his books for this class. Indeed, Descartes, I don’t believe, used the word person at all or if he uses it he doesn’t ever define it. Descartes’ primary focus is on the distinction between mind and body. What you’re going to need to do is you’re going to need to, in a sense, deduce from the things he says about mind and body what he thinks a person is. So that’s the first thing to think about when you’re reading. In Descartes’ view, what is a person?

Secondly, how does Descartes’ view of the nature of matter, the nature of physical substance, affect his views on the nature of the mind and on the nature of persons? That is, how does Descartes’ physics affect his views on personhood. Those are the two things I’d like you to think about while you read. As I said, next time we will begin our discussion of Descartes’ views on personhood and identity in earnest. Thank you.