

PHILOS 271: Indigenous Philosophy

Instructor: Eric Wilkinson
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Lectures: 11:30am – 12:45pm, Tuesday & Thursday
Classroom: Curtin Hall 309
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10:00am

Course Description:

The history of North American Indigenous philosophy has only just recently begun to receive the attention it deserves. Contemporary Indigenous philosophers have also drawn on this intellectual heritage to produce compelling new works of philosophy. This introductory course surveys only a fraction of the history of Indigenous philosophy in North America from the 17th century until today. The course is divided into two parts. The first half of the course examines the thought of Indigenous philosophers from the 17th-19th centuries. The arguments of these earlier thinkers broach universal philosophical questions. What is the nature of reality? How should we understand the divine? What is the meaning of liberty or personal virtue? How should a just society be organized? In the second half of the course, we will turn to Indigenous philosophers from the 19th century to the present day. The works of these later thinkers are often focused more precisely on questions of identity, culture, the relationship of Indigenous peoples to settler society, and are engaged with western philosophy. The views of some earlier philosophers in this course have only recently been reconstructed from records and oral traditions, and this will be the first time they are taught in a philosophy classroom.

Assessment & Grading:

<i>Assignment:</i>	<i>Due Date:</i>	<i>Weight:</i>	<i>Description:</i>
Participation	Ongoing	10%	Contributing to in-class discussion groups.
Quizzes	See Schedule	20%	Six short-answer quizzes.
Midterm Exam	March 27 th	20%	An exam of short and long answer questions.
Oral Exam	Sign-Up Sheet	20%	A fifteen-minute philosophical conversation.
Final Exam	TBD	30%	An exam of short and long answer questions.

Communication Policy: Before emailing, please consult the syllabus for an answer to your query. When emailing, use your university email address and allow at least 48 hours to receive a response.

Late Policy & Extensions: The penalty for late assignment submission is five percent (5%) a day. Extensions will be assessed individually and granted mainly for medical reasons or bereavement.

Disability Accommodations: Those who require disability accommodations must register with the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC). ARC will assist students in determining their needs and will help to communicate the accommodations registered students require to the course instructor.

Academic Integrity: The University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee values academic integrity. Thus, students should understand the consequences of cheating, plagiarism, and other academic offences.

Course Schedule

January 21st – May 8th, 2025

Date:	Lecture Topic:	Primary Reading:	Secondary Reading:
January 21 st	Introduction	• Course Syllabus	• No Readings
January 23 rd	Indigenous Philosophy: Past, Present, and Continuity	• “The Euro-American Philosophical Tradition and its Ability to Examine Indigenous Philosophy” (T.L. Hester Jr. & D. McPherson)	• “Some Thoughts on Articulating a Native Philosophy” (Dennis McPherson & J.D. Rabb)
January 28 th	Cosmogony, Creation, and Social Order	• “Menominee Creation Story” (Verna Fowler)	• <i>Tales of the Earth</i> [excerpts] (David Leeming)
January 30 th		• “The Creation of the World” [Potawatomi] (Sam Wapuka) • “The Oneida Creation Story” (Demus Elm & Harvey Antone)	
February 4 th	The Soul, the Mind, and Personhood	• “The Concept of ‘Soul’ in the <i>Jesuit Relations</i> ” (Michael Pomeldi)	• <i>Clothed-in-Fur and Other Tales</i> [excerpts] (T. Overholt & B. Callicott)
February 6 th	Quiz #1		
February 11 th	Peace and Democracy	• <i>Kayanerenkó: Wa – The Great Law of Peace</i> [excerpts] (Kayaneseh Paul Williams)	• <i>Exemplar of Liberty: Native America and the Evolution of Democracy</i> [excerpts] (D. Grinde Jr. & B. Johansen)
February 13 th			
February 18 th	Religion & Law	• <i>New Voyages to North America</i> [excerpts] (Kondiaronk & Lahontan)	• “Are you delusional? Kondiaronk on Christianity” (Barbara A. Mann)
February 20 th			
February 25 th	Personal Virtue & Societal Hierarchy	• <i>New Voyages to North America</i> [excerpts] (Kondiaronk & Lahontan)	• <i>For an Amerindian Autohistory</i> [excerpts] (Georges Sioui)
February 27 th	Quiz #2		
March 4 th	Principles of Diplomacy and Treatymaking	• “Introduction: Hearing the Voices of Native Nations” (Carol Cornelius)	• “The Treaties of 1822, 1824, and 1825” (Carol Cornelius)
March 6 th			
March 11 th	Religious Liberty	• “Defending the Sundance” & “Response to an Offer of Baptism” (payipwat)	• “A Defence of the Ghost Dance Religion” (Masse Hadjo)
March 13 th	Quiz #3		

March 18 th	Spring Recess: No Lectures	• No Readings	• No Readings
March 20 th			
March 25 th	Review Session	• No Readings	• No Readings
March 27 th	Midterm Exam		
April 1 st	Contemporary Metaphysics	• <i>Indian from the Inside</i> , 2 nd Edition [excerpts] (Dennis McPherson & J.D. Rabb)	• <i>The Dance of Person and Place</i> [excerpts] (Thomas Norton-Smith)
April 3 rd			
April 8 th	Epistemology	• “Truth and Native American Epistemology” (Lee Hester & Jim Cheney)	• “What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us” (Brian Burkhart)
April 10 th	Quiz #4		
April 15 th	Philosophy of Religion	• <i>God is Red</i> [excerpts] (Vine Deloria Jr.)	• “Decolonizing the Mind” (Jace Weaver)
April 17 th			
April 22 nd	Identity, Belonging, and Nationhood	• <i>How It Is</i> [excerpts] (V.F. Cordova)	• “The Métis Nation, Epistemic Injustice, and Self-Indigenization” (Kurtis Boyer & Paul Simard Smith)
April 24 th	Quiz #5		
April 29 th	Sovereignty and Philosophy of Law	• “Indigeneity, Self- Determination, and Sovereignty” (Anne Waters)	• <i>Peace, Power, and Righteousness</i> [excerpts] (Taiaiake Alfred)
May 1 st			
May 6 th	Resurgence and Relations with Settler Society	• <i>This Is Not a Peace Pipe</i> [excerpts] (Dale Turner)	• <i>Red Skin, White Masks</i> [excerpts] (Glen Coulthard)
May 8 th	Quiz #6		

Course Readings:

All course readings are available on Canvas from the beginning of the course and consist of either standalone articles or excerpts from books. Each week there is a required reading that must be read before class, and a supplemental reading that offers more information on the week’s subject matter.