Philosophy deals with four areas of enquiry: (1) Ethics: What does it mean to live a good life? What is an ideally just society? How can we distinguish between right and wrong? Are values individual, social, or universal? (2) Metaphysics: What does it mean to be? How can we distinguish between reality and mere appearance? Is there an absolute, eternal, universal, ideal level of reality? (3) Epistemology: What does it mean to know? How can we distinguish between knowledge and mere opinion? Can the human mind, or human experience, grasp a universal truth? (4) Logic: What is reason? How can we distinguish between valid and invalid arguments, strong and weak evidence?

In this course, we will study some of the great philosophers, past and present. A careful reading of great texts like this allow us to conduct our own analyses and speculations about the philosophical concepts that lie at the foundation of human existence. We begin, as most introductory courses do, with Plato’s theory of ideal truths in *The Apology of Socrates*, and *The Republic*. Next, we focus on Descartes’ *Meditations*, to examine the roots of modern rationalism and the concept of the conscious self. As part of this study, we compare Descartes’ argument for the existent of God with the arguments of Thomas Aquinas. Then we move to John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*, a founder of the modern concept of freedom. After that, we study Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, the existentialist philosophers of the 20th Century who develop the concepts of anxiety and choice. De Beauvoir is also a founder of modern feminist philosophy. Then we read the African-American philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah on the possibility of cosmopolitanism in today’s global societies.

Part of the goal of this course is for students to synthesize the history of ideas that moves from the pursuit of eternal truths towards the modern theory of subjectivity, and then towards the postmodern theory that there is no unity to truth and no centre to the subject. No one period of the history of thought—neither the old nor the new—is guaranteed to be correct, but it is important to know how ideas have reacted upon one another if one is to understand the concepts at stake in our own time of history. The other goal of this course is for students to develop the analytical, critical, and speculative skills to philosophize on their own, to make use of the resources in the history of philosophy in order to create their own concepts.