

Introduction to Philosophy (Fall 2014)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Philosophic contemplation does not, in its widest survey, divide the universe into two hostile camps—friends and foes, helpful and hostile, good and bad—it views the whole impartially...The impartiality which, in contemplation, is the unalloyed desire for truth, is the very same quality of mind which, in action, is justice, and in emotion is that universal love which can be given to all, and not only to those who are judged useful or admirable. Thus contemplation enlarges not only the objects of our thoughts, but also the objects of our actions and our affections: it makes us citizens of the universe, not only of one walled city at war with all the rest.

—Bertrand Russell

This is a course in philosophy, designed to give you a basic understanding of the sorts of things that contemporary philosophers are thinking about. More importantly, the course should give you some of the tools that you will need in order to think critically, be rational, better argue for what you believe, and investigate basic philosophical questions. The course is divided into three sections:

First Unit: Metaphysics and Epistemology: Epistemology is the study of knowledge, and Metaphysics is the study of what exists, or what the world is like. We'll ask the following sorts of questions: Are we dreaming right now? How would we know if we weren't? What does it mean to "know" something, anyway? Can we trust our senses? What is it that makes us continue to exist over time? Do we have souls? Do we have free will?

Second Unit: God: Here, we will examine some of the reasons for believing that God exists, as well as tackle this difficult issue: If God exists, and God is good, then why is there so much evil in the world?

Third Unit: Ethics: We'll begin this unit by looking at some of the major views about the nature of morality. We will also ask if it is ever appropriate to blame people for their moral misdeeds. From there, we will learn how specific ethical issues are tackled by ethicists. In particular, we will discuss whether it is morally permissible for us to ignore world hunger.

REQUIRED READING:

Most readings come from two books: *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, 6th edition, by Perry, Bratman, and Fischer (labeled as "PDF" in the course schedule below); and *What does it All Mean?* by Thomas Nagel (labeled as "TN" in the course schedule below). Supplementary Pdf files will sometimes be assigned and can be found on the course website (labeled as "Pdf" on the course schedule below).

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (9/1-9/5) Course Intro: The Nature and Value of Philosophy

Mon., 9/1: Labor Day Weekend

Wed., 9/3: Intro to the course/Syllabus/What is Philosophy? What is its value?

Fri., 9/5: Russell, "The Value of Philosophy" (PDF: 18-21)

Week 2 (9/8-9/12) Philosophical Foundations: Logic and Arguments

Mon., 9/8: Arguments

Perry, Bratman, Fischer, "Logical Toolkit" (PDF: first full paragraph of p. 7—14).

Wed., 9/10: Arguments Continued: No new reading

Fri., 9/12: Discussion in small groups

Unit 1 Metaphysics and Epistemology

Week 3 (9/15-19) External World Skepticism

Mon., 9/15: Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy" (PDF: 136-142, Meditations I and II)

Nagel, "How Do We Know Anything?" (IN: 8—18)

Wed., 9/17: Grau, "Bad Dreams, Evil Demons, and the Experience Machine: Philosophy and *The Matrix*" (PBD: 160-164).

Moore, "Proof of an External World" (Pdf)

Fri., 9/19: Discussion in small groups

Week 4 (9/22-9/26) Personal Identity

Mon., 9/22: Discuss Ship of Theseus

Perry, "A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality" (PDF: 312—324, nights 1 and 2)

Wed., 9/24: No New Reading: Perry Continued

Fri., 9/26: Discussion in small groups

Week 5 (9/29-10/3) Personal Identity and the Mind-Body Problem

Mon., 9/29: Parfit, "Personal Identity" (PDF: 343—347, part I)

Wed., 10/1: Nagel, "The Mind-Body Problem" (IN: 27-37)

Fri., 10/3: Discussion in small groups

Week 6 (10/6-10/10) The Mind-Body Problem

Mon., 10/6: Guest Lecture by GA: Armstrong, "The Nature of Mind" (PDF: 257—264)

Churchland, “Eliminative Materialism” (PDF: 277—280)

Wed., 10/8: Guest Lecture by GA: Searle, “Minds, Brains, and Programs” (PDF: 298—300)

Block, “The China Brain” (Pdf)

Fri., 10/10: Discussion in small groups: **First Paper Due**

Week 7 (10/13-10/17) Mental Properties: “Qualia”

Mon., 10/13: Video: Is Your Red the Same as My Red?

Jackson, “What Mary Didn’t Know” (PDF: 281—284)

Nagel, “What is it Like to Be a Bat?” (Pdf)

Wed., 10/15: No New Reading

Fri., 10/17: Review for Midterm

Week 8 (10/20-10/24) Free Will

Mon., 10/22: Holbach, “The Illusion of Free Will” (Pdf)

Wed., 10/24: Frankfurt, “Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility” (PDF: 407—413)

Fri., 10/26: Discussion in small groups

Week 9 (10/27-10/31) The Argument from Design for the Existence of God

Mon., 10/27: **Midterm**

Unit 2: God

Wed., 10/29: Paley, “Natural Teleology” (PDF: 47—51)

Collins, “The Fine-Tuning Design Argument” (Pdf: 1—6, rest optional)

Fri., 10/31: Discussion in small groups

Week 10 (11/3-11/7) The Problem of Evil

Mon., 11/3: Return and go over midterms

Perry, “Dialogue on Good, Evil, and the Existence of God” (PDF: 97—120)

Wed., 11/5: No New Reading

Fri., 11/7: Discussion in small groups

Week 11 (11/10-11/14) Pascal’s Wager and Divine Command Theory

Mon., 11/10: Pascal, “The Wager” (PDF: 52-55)

Wed., 11/12: Plato, “Euthyphro” (PDF)

Nagel, “Right and Wrong” (TN: 59—63, last full paragraph of 63)

Fri., 11/14: Discussion in small groups

Unit 3 Morality

Week 12 (11/17-11/21) Cultural Relativism

Mon., 11/17: Nagel, “Right and Wrong” (TN: 63—75)

Wed., 11/19: Rachels, “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism” (Pdf)

Fri., 11/21: Discussion in small groups

Week 13 (11/24-11/28) Utilitarianism and its Opponents

Mon., 11/24: Mill, “Utilitarianism” (PDF: 460—476)

Wed., 11/26: Grau, “Bad Dreams, Evil Demons, and The Experience Machine (PDF: 164—167)

Carritt, “Criticisms of Utilitarianism” (PDF: 478, parts 3 and 4)

Fri., 11/28: Discussion in small groups

Week 14 (12/1-12/5) The Meaning of Life

Mon., 12/1: Nagel, “The Meaning of Life” (TN: 95)

Nagel, “The Absurd” (PDF: 755—761)

Wed., 12/3: Foster Wallace, “This is Water” (Pdf)

Wolf, “The Meanings of Lives” (PDF: 782—793)

Fri., 12/5: Discussion in small groups

Second Paper Due

Week 15 (12/8-12/12) Practical Ethics and Moral Luck

Mon., 12/8: Nagel, “Moral Luck” (PDF: 440—448).

Wed., 12/10: Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” (PDF: 495—502)

Fri., 12/12: Review for Final Exam