

Philosophy 120.01: Problems in Philosophy Syllabus

PHIL 120, Section 01
Spring 2019
T/Th 11:30am – 1:00pm
McDonnell 362

Instructor Information

Chris Dorst
cjdorst@wustl.edu
Office: Wilson 101
Office Hours: M/W 1:00pm - 2:00pm, or by appointment

Course Description

This course is a general introduction to philosophical questions, methods, discussion, reading, and writing. It presumes no background in philosophy. We will be surveying various philosophical topics in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of science. Some examples of questions we will be addressing are: What evidence is there for or against the existence of God? Is the mind distinct from the brain? Do we have free will (and if not, what are the consequences for ethics)? What distribution of social goods is demanded by justice? How can we be sure that there is an external world? Throughout the course, there will be a heavy emphasis on learning to discuss and write about philosophical issues, so class discussion will be an important component.

Honor Code

In this class, the Honor Code is taken very seriously, and all infractions will be reported. You may discuss paper topics with each other—in fact this is encouraged—but all of your submitted work must be entirely your own.

Course Text

The textbook for this course is *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings, 6th Edition*, by John Perry, Michael Bratman, and John Martin Fischer. This book is available from the bookstore and on Amazon. The majority of our readings will come from this book.

Course Requirements

Participation: 5%
Reading Quizzes: 15%
Paper 1: 15%
Paper 2: 20%
Midterm Exam: 20%
Final Exam: 25%

Participation

Respectful participation is expected of everyone. It can take a variety of forms: contributing to class discussions, coming to office hours, emailing me with questions, etc. Each class has assigned readings, which will require critical engagement and reflection. You should come to class prepared to discuss these readings and demonstrate that you have thought critically about them beforehand.

Reading Quizzes

To prepare for our discussions, we need to study the readings carefully. Try to outline what the author's main claim is, what her principal reasons for that claim are, what alternative position(s) she considers, and the reason(s) why she does not adopt those alternatives. To reward you for doing this work, there will be daily quizzes during the course of the semester. Each quiz will contain two or three true-false or multiple-choice questions about the required reading for that day's class. I will drop your three lowest reading quiz grades. If you miss a reading quiz for any reason, you will not be able to retake it.

Papers

You will write two papers for this course. For each paper, you will be given the choice of several prompts, of which you must choose one and write a 3-4 page paper in response. The prompts will concern topics we have read about and discussed in class. The papers give you the opportunity to illustrate your understanding of the material, as well as to develop your own views. (For a basic overview of how to write a philosophy paper, the following website is worth exploring: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>.) Late papers will be deducted 1/3 of a letter grade (i.e. a +/- increment) for each day past the due date.

Midterm Exam

The midterm exam is scheduled for March 5. The midterm will take place in class, and will consist of around five essay questions. You will have to choose a subset of them to answer with a short essay. The questions will concern the readings and topics we have discussed over the first half of the semester.

Final Exam

The Final Exam is scheduled for May 6 from 1:00pm to 3:00pm. The exam will be similar in format to the midterm: it will consist of around five questions, and you will have to choose a subset of them to answer with a short essay. The questions will concern the readings and topics we have discussed over the course of the entire semester.

Course Schedule

The following is a tentative schedule for the course. Any changes to the schedule will be announced in class and over email. The items listed next to a given date are to be read before class on that date. Note: "PBF" stands for "Perry, Bratman, and Fischer," i.e. the course text (see above).

January 15: Introduction to the course (no readings due)

January 17: William Paley, "Natural Theology" (*PBF* pp. 47-51); Blaise Pascal, "The Wager" (*PBF* pp. 52-55)

January 22: Bertrand Russell, "Why I Am Not a Christian" (*PBF* pp. 56-59)

January 24: Introduction to Knowledge and Reality Section (*PBF* pp. 121-125); Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" (*PBF* pp. 133-135)

January 29: Descartes, Meditations I and II (*PBF* pp. 136-142)

January 31: Descartes, Meditations III and IV (*PBF* pp. 142-151)

February 5: Descartes, Meditations V and VI (*PBF* pp. 151-160); Hume, "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding" Sections II-V (*PBF* pp. 190-205)

February 7: W. C. Salmon, "The Problem of Induction" (*PBF* pp. 216-226)

Paper 1 Due by February 8 at 5pm (Submit on Canvas)

February 12: W. C. Salmon, "The Problem of Induction" (*PBF* pp. 226-238)

February 14: Bertrand Russell, "The Argument from Analogy for Other Minds" (*PBF* pp. 247-249)

February 19: Gilbert Ryle, "Descartes's Myth" (*PBF* pp. 250-257)

February 21: Paul Churchland, "Eliminative Materialism" (*PBF* pp. 277-281)

February 26: Frank Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia" (Reading provided on Canvas)

February 28: John Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs" (*PBF* pp. 298-311)

March 5: Midterm Exam (in class)

March 7: Bernard Williams, "The Self and the Future" (*PBF* pp. 333-343)

March 19: Daniel Dennett, "Where Am I?" (*PBF* pp. 368-376)

March 21: Peter van Inwagen, "The Powers of Rational Beings: Freedom of the Will" (*PBF* pp. 385-396)

March 26: Harry G. Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" (*PBF* pp. 407-413)

March 28: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (*PBF* pp. 460-476)

April 2: Problems with Utilitarianism (Reading provided on Canvas)

April 4: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (*PBF* pp. 504-520)

Paper 2 Due by April 5 at 5pm (Submit on Canvas)

April 9: Immanuel Kant again (no new reading)

April 11: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (*PBF* pp. 572-585)

April 16: Robert Nozick, "Justice and Entitlement" (*PBF* pp. 585-593)

April 18: Susan Wolf, "The Meanings of Lives" (*PBF* pp. 782-793)

April 23: Paradoxes of Decision Theory (Reading provided on Canvas)

April 25: Review (**Last day of class**)

Final Exam: May 6, 1:00pm - 3:00pm