

Philosophy 120.01: Problems in Philosophy Syllabus

PHIL 120, Section 01
Fall 2018
MW 1:00pm – 2:30pm
Psychology 249

Instructor Information

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Wilson 101
Office Hours: MW 4:30pm – 5:30pm, 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: 10%
Reading Quizzes: 15%
Paper 1: 25%
Paper 2: 25%
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, and there will be provided questions to think about, which will be discussed in the next class period. If you do not feel comfortable participating in class discussions, I encourage you to email me with some thoughts about these questions ahead of time so that you may earn full participation points. (You should view participation points as points to be lost, not points to be gained. I start everyone with a full 10% on their participation grade, and if you are not participating adequately, you will lose points. Please note that “adequate participation” includes respecting your peers in the classroom.)

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 a maximum of three true-false or multiple-choice questions about the required reading for that day's class. I will drop your five lowest reading quiz grades. If you miss a reading quiz, 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 4-6 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>

Final Exam

The Final Exam is scheduled for December 19 from 1:00pm to 3:00pm. The exam will consist of 6-8 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 semester. You *will* be able to reference your notes during the final.

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).

August 27: Introduction to the course (no readings due)

August 29: William Paley, “Natural Theology” (*PBF* pp. 47-51); Blaise Pascal, “The Wager” (*PBF* pp. 52-55)

September 3: Labor Day (No class)

September 5: Bertrand Russell, “Why I Am Not a Christian” (*PBF* pp. 56-59)

September 10: Introduction to Knowledge and Reality Section (*PBF* pp. 121-125); Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” (*PBF* pp. 133-135)

September 12: Descartes, Meditations I and II (*PBF* pp. 136-142)
September 17: Descartes, Meditations III and IV (*PBF* pp. 142-151)
September 19: Descartes, Meditations V and VI (*PBF* pp. 151-160); Hume, "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding" Sections II-V (*PBF* pp. 190-205)
September 24: W. C. Salmon, "The Problem of Induction" (*PBF* pp. 216-226)
September 26: W. C. Salmon, "The Problem of Induction" (*PBF* pp. 226-238)
Paper 1 Due by September 28 at 5pm
October 1: Bertrand Russell, "The Argument from Analogy for Other Minds" (*PBF* pp. 247-249)
October 3: Gilbert Ryle, "Descartes's Myth" (*PBF* pp. 250-257)
October 8: Paul Churchland, "Eliminative Materialism" (*PBF* pp. 277-281)
October 10: Frank Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia" (Reading provided on Canvas)
October 15: Fall Break (No class)
October 17: John Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs" (*PBF* pp. 298-311)
October 22: Bernard Williams, "The Self and the Future" (*PBF* pp. 333-343)
October 24: Daniel Dennett, "Where Am I?" (*PBF* pp. 368-376)
October 29: Peter van Inwagen, "The Powers of Rational Beings: Freedom of the Will" (*PBF* pp. 385-396)
October 31: Harry G. Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" (*PBF* pp. 407-413)
Paper 2 Due by November 2 at 5pm
November 5: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (*PBF* pp. 460-476)
November 7: Problems with Utilitarianism (Reading provided on Canvas)
November 12: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (*PBF* pp. 504-520)
November 14: Immanuel Kant again (no new reading)
November 19: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (*PBF* pp. 572-585)
November 21: Thanksgiving Break (No class)
November 26: Robert Nozick, "Justice and Entitlement" (*PBF* pp. 585-593)
November 28: Susan Wolf, "The Meanings of Lives" (*PBF* pp. 782-793)
December 3: Paradoxes of Decision Theory (Reading provided on Canvas)
December 5: Review (Last day of class)
Final Exam: December 19, 1:00pm – 3:00pm