

PHL 301: Introduction to Philosophy
Fall 2013, 9:30am - 10:45am, Tuesdays and Thursdays

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Course Information:

We'll survey a number of classic philosophical problems. In some form or other, these problems have gripped humans for millennia, but we will usually engage with modern formulations of them.

We'll ask:

- How could free will be possible if the laws of physics fully govern the behavior of the atoms we're composed of?
- What is the nature of time and space? How come space travel seems so much easier than time travel? Is time travel logically impossible?
- Are there objective moral facts? What explains our moral judgements and moral behavior?
- How can you know God exists? How does modern science, not only evolutionary biology, but cosmology too, bear on the issue?
- How can you know you're not in the Matrix?
- When, if ever, is it morally permissible to let another innocent human die?
- Is it morally permissible to eat meat?
- Is abortion morally permissible?

We'll read about, talk about, and write about these issues.

The main goal of the course is not only to expose you to some of the subject matter of philosophy, but also to introduce you to the method of philosophical investigation, namely **making and evaluating arguments**.

Readings:

All readings will be made available as PDFs.

Assignments and Grading:

Students will submit three pieces of writing for grading.

The first assignment will not be a conventional paper; it will be an argument analysis and commentary. (I'll explain this more when we get to it.)

- Argument analysis: distributed in class Sept 19th.
 - **Due Oct 1st.**

The second and third assignments will be conventional papers, 6 - 8 double-spaced pages each. Before submitting the two papers for grading, we will hold a class meeting dedicated to reading first drafts of each others' papers. These first drafts will not be officially graded; they are only meant to help you prepare your final drafts. However, attendance at both these peer review sessions is absolutely mandatory for all students.

- Essay 1: distributed in class Oct 17th.
 - Bring two hard copies of draft to the **peer review session on Oct 29th.**
 - **Final draft due Nov 5th.**
- Essay 2: distributed in class Nov 19th.
 - Bring two hard copies of draft to the **peer review session on Nov 26th.**
 - **Final draft due Dec 5th.**

These three items will be the only graded material for this class (but not the only factor affecting your final grade; read on). Pluses and minuses will be used.

Your work will be graded *blindly*. In other words, you will not write your name anywhere on your work, you'll only write an identification number, and our grader will read and grade it without knowing who wrote it.

IF YOU MISS A PEER REVIEW SESSION WITHOUT AN EXTREMELY GOOD EXCUSE, YOUR COURSE GRADE WILL BE REDUCED A THIRD OF A LETTER.

Class Participation:

Class participation is *extremely welcome*. **Ask questions.** Never worry that your question sounds dumb, because (a) it won't affect your grade, and more importantly (b) it's almost certainly not a dumb question.

If your final grade from the papers is near a borderline, then it can be adjusted up or down. Multiple unexcused absences from lecture will put it below the borderline. A dramatically upward progress of grades on the three papers can put it above the borderline.

Late Work:

Any work handed in after the start of the class when it is due will be docked one-third of a letter grade. An additional one-third of a letter will be docked every 24 hours after that. Medical excuses for late work require written notice from your doctor to avoid docking.

Plagiarism:

Don't plagiarize! This course will have a zero tolerance policy for plagiarism.

Plagiarism happens whenever your work includes *words* or *ideas* that come from someone else, and you do not *explicitly* say what is coming from someone else (e.g. like I do with my footnote to the heading above). **Students are caught plagiarizing all the time.** If you plagiarize in this course, it will be caught, you will automatically fail the course, and you will be reported to the dean.

Disabilities:

“Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259.” (quoted from a memo from Vice Provost Ritter.)

Laptops, Tablets, and Phones:

Barring a documented disabilities need, students may **not** use laptops, tablets or phones during lecture. The disadvantages outweigh the advantages of being able to use these during class.

Schedule

Aug. 29 (Thursday)

- No required reading. Optional: Robert Heinlen, “By His Bootstraps”

Fate and Freedom 1

Sept 3, 5

- Ted Sider, “Free Will and Determinism”
- Ted Sider, “Time”
 - (Jim Pryor, “How to Read a Philosophy paper”)

Fate and Freedom 2

Sept 10, 12

- David Lewis, “The Paradoxes of Time Travel”
- Ned Markosian, “How Fast Does Time Pass?”

Star Trek Transporters and Personal Identity

Sept 17, 19

- Bernard Williams, “The Self and the Future”
- Derek Parfit, “Personal Identity” (Guest lecturer today! Steven James)
 - (*1st Assignment---argument analysis---distributed Sept 19th, due in 2ish weeks, on **Oct 1st.***)

Observations and Explanations of Morality

Sept 24, 26

- Gilbert Harman, “Ethics and Observation”
- Nicholas Sturgeon, “Moral Explanations”

Divine Design? 1

Oct 1, 3

- William Paley, David Hume parts 1, 2, and 3
 - (*1st Assignment due this Tuesday, Oct 1st*)

Divine Design? 2

Oct 8, 10

- Hume, parts 4 and 5

Divine Design? 3

Oct 15, 17

- Robin Collins, “God, Design, and Fine-Tuning”
- Richard Dawkins, chapter 4 of *The God Delusion* (Guest lecturer today! Kimberly Dill)
 - (*2nd Assignment---essay on design arguments---distributed this week. Draft for peer review due **in class on Oct 29th.***)

Dreams, Demons, and Doubts 1

Oct 22, 24

- Rene Descartes, First Meditation
- Peter Klein, “Academic Skepticism” #3

Dreams, Demons, and Doubts 2

Oct 29, 31

- *Peer Review Session on design paper---final draft due next week.*
 - *If you don't bring two hard copies of your paper to the start of this session, your course grade goes down a third of a letter.*
- G. E. Moore, “Proof of an External World” (excerpt); Jim Pryor, “There Is Immediate Justification”

Dreams, Demons, and Doubts 3

Nov 5, 7

- Jonathan Vogel, “Cartesian Skepticism and Inference to the Best Explanation”
 - *1st essay, final draft due today*
- David Chalmers, “The Matrix as Metaphysics”

Charity and Moral Duties

Nov 12, 14

- Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”
- Susan Wolf, “Moral Saints”

The Ethical Treatment of Animals

Nov 19, 21

- Peter Singer, “Equality for Animals”
 - *(2nd essay distributed today---**final draft due** on last day of class, **Dec 5th**, but **peer review draft due the coming Tuesday, Nov 26th.**)*
- R. M. Hare, “Why I Am Only a Demi-Vegetarian”

Nov 26 (Tuesday, then Thanksgiving)

- *Tuesday: Peer review session on skepticism/moral obligation essays. If you don't bring two hard copies of your paper to the start of this session, your course grade goes down a third of a letter.*

The Ethics of Abortion

Dec 3, 5

- Don Marquis, “Why Abortion is Immoral”
- Judith Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”
 - *2nd essay, final draft due today.*