

PHIL : 020: Introduction to Philosophy

Summer, 2015

MWTR, 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm in ICC 219A

Instructor: Benjamin Elzinga

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Office Hours:

By Appointment.

Course Description:

This course will introduce students to some central issues in philosophy, central figures in the history of philosophy, and techniques of philosophical argument through a consideration of the question of what it is to be a person. More specifically, we will focus on questions surrounding three distinct, but related aspects of personhood. First, we will address classic problems in the philosophy of mind: what it is to have a mind and what the is relationship between mind and body? For that we turn to foundational texts from Rene Descartes and Alan Turing as well as more contemporary works from Daniel Dennett and Victoria McGeer. Next, we turn to the problems of free will. Does free will exist? What is the relationship between freedom, determinism, and responsibility? To address such questions, we will focus on the "value problem" for free will as explored by contemporary philosophers such as Robert Kane and P.F. Strawson as well as classic works by Fredrick Nietzsche. Lastly, we will explore issues in epistemology or the study of knowledge. Beginning with Plato's Meno, we will ask: what is knowledge and how is it acquired in a responsible manner? We will then continue to address these and related questions by exploring contemporary works by Robert Brandom and John Haugeland.

Course Goals:

- 1) Students will gain knowledge and appreciation of some of the deep problems in the history of philosophy and will also have an opportunity to grapple with more contemporary issues.
- 2) Students will develop a set of analytic tools that will help them to find answers to hard theoretical questions, whether philosophical questions or questions that arise in their broader engagement with the world.

Required Texts:

- 1) On Genealogy of Morals etc (Trade Ed) Edition: N/A

Author: Nietzsche

ISBN: 9780679724629

Copyright Year: 1967

Publisher: Penguin Random House, Inc

- 2) Five Dialogues Edition: 2nd

Author: Plato

ISBN: 9780872206335

Copyright Year: 2002

Publisher: Hackett Publishing Company, Incorporated

- 3) All other required materials for the course will consist of philosophical articles or brief excerpts from larger philosophical works distributed via Blackboard.

Course Requirements:

Your course grade will be based on four short papers (4 pages max, times new roman, 12 point font, double spaced) and participation including weekly reflection assignments:

- 1) Four Short Papers (first three worth 20%, final worth 25% of total grade)

In these papers, your task will be to do some philosophy yourself. For example, the paper may have three parts:

a) explaining an argument that is developed by one (or more) of the philosophers whose work we have examined; b) offering a plausible objection to this argument; and c) explaining how the philosopher in question would respond to your argument.

2) Participation (15% of total grade)

The material that we are going to cover in this class is difficult and likely to be unfamiliar. Thus, careful attention to each text will be expected and required. There will always be some opportunity for you to ask pressing and important questions, bring up something you find confusing, raise an objection against something we've read, etc.

Your participation grade will be determined by your active, participation in class. Receiving full credit will require zero unexcused absences and a consistent effort to genuinely engage with the material and with your classmates each time we meet.

Your participation grade will also be determined in part by weekly reflection assignments.

Late Work and Extensions:

Late papers will automatically be penalized 1/3 of a grade (A- to a B+, B+ to a B, etc) for each day that they are late. Extensions may be possible if requested before the due date.

Grading:

These are the general criteria I use for assigning specific grades on written work. What matters most is not the content of your ideas, but the expression of them.

A: original ideas very clearly expressed and organized; full grasp of the material and its implications; especially insightful reflection on the relevant texts

B: reasonably original ideas clearly expressed and organized; good grasp of the material and its implications; good reflection on the relevant texts

C: adequate expression and organization of ideas; adequate grasp of the material and its implications; adequate reflection on texts

D: inadequate expression and organization of ideas; inadequate grasp of the material and its implications; inadequate reflection on texts

F: mostly for serious sins of omission, like turning in only part of an assignment

Academic Integrity

This course will be conducted under the strictest standards of academic integrity. Plagiarism or other forms of dishonesty are contradictory to the goals of this class and hence, will not be tolerated. Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be referred to the Honor Council for investigation, and I reserve the right to fail a student for the entire course in the case of demonstrated violation. Please see *The Undergraduate Bulletin* or, for more information, visit the university's Honor System website at <http://www.georgetown.edu/honor>. The website has useful guidelines about what constitutes plagiarism and how to cite properly.

**Course Schedule:
(subject to revision)**

Unit 1: Philosophy Of Mind

Week 1:

M, July 6: Introduction

T, July 7: Rene Descartes, Selections from *Meditations*; Gilbert Ryle, "Descartes' Myth".

W, July 8: Gilbert Ryle, "Knowing How and Knowing That".

R, July 9: Alan Turing "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" (Required); Rene Descartes, "Letter to Cavendish (Optional).

Week 2:

M, July 13: Paul Churchland, "Functionalism".

T, July 14: Daniel Dennett, "True Believers".

W, July 15: Victoria McGreer, "The Regulative Dimension of Folk-Psychology".

Unit 2: Free Will

R, July 16: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy*: Preface and First Treatise.

Week 3:

M, July 20: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy*: "Second Treatise".

T, July 21: Robert Kane, "Introduction to Free Will" (Required); John O'Leary-Hawthorne and Philip Pettit, "Strategies for Free Will Compatibilists" (Optional).

W, July 22: P.F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment".

Paper #1 Due at 11:59pm on Wednesday

R, July 23: Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"; Excerpts from B.F. Skinner's *Walden Two*.

Week 4:

M, July 27: Susan Wolf, "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility" (Required); Philip Pettit and Michael Smith, "Freedom in Belief and Desire" (Optional).

Unit 3: Epistemology

T, July 28: Plato, *Meno*.

W, July 29: Plato, *Meno*.

R, July 30: Gilbert Ryle, "Teaching and Training"; Jeremy Wanderer, "Parrots".

Week 5

S, August 1: Paper #2 due at 11:59pm

M, August 3: John Haugeland, "Authentic Intentionality".

T, August 4: Selections from Linda Zagzebski, *On Epistemology*.

W, August 5: Miranda Fricker, "Epistemic Injustice and a Role for Virtue in the Politics of Knowing".

R, August 6: Helen Longino, "Can There be a Feminist Science?"

S, August 8 Paper Due at 11:59pm

Final Paper Due August 12 at 11:59pm