

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

PHIL X1001.001

Fall 2011

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 11-12:15

Barnard Hall 302

PROFESSOR

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TEACHING ASSISTANT

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The aim of this course is two-fold:

- to familiarize you with some of the central issues in Western philosophy, with some of the positions philosophers have taken on these issues, and with some of the arguments that have been offered for and against these positions.
- to equip you with critical reasoning skills that will enable you to assess the strengths and weaknesses of a given argument and to reason through an issue to decide on your own point of view. These are skills that you can apply well beyond philosophy to any issue that calls for rational assessment.

The course is divided into four units. Drawing on both classical and contemporary sources we will address questions such as these:

- I. GOD: Does God exist? If God does exist, how are we to understand the presence of evil and suffering in the world?
- II. EPISTEMOLOGY: What is knowledge? In light of skeptical challenges, how much do we really know?
- III. FREE WILL: Do we have free will? Does moral responsibility depend on free will?
- IV. MORALITY: What determines whether an action is morally right or wrong? To what extent are we morally obligated to help the poor? Are there any moral norms that are objective and universal or are they all relative to the judgments of individuals or societies?

TEXTBOOK

The Elements of Philosophy, eds. Tamar Szabó Gendler, Susanna Siegel and Steven M. Cahn, Oxford 2008.

This book can be purchased at the Columbia Bookstore. Additional readings will be available on Courseworks [C].

REQUIREMENTS & EVALUATION

- (1) *1st Paper: 20%*
3 pages (900 words) due Oct. 11 at 11:00 a.m.
 - (2) *Midterm Exam 20%*
In class Oct. 25
 - (3) *2nd Paper: 30%*
4-5 pages (1200-1500 words) due Nov. 2 at 11:00 a.m.
 - (4) *Final Exam: 30%*
Tuesday Dec. 20, 9-12 a.m. (The exam cannot be taken at any other time. Please plan accordingly.)
- Regular attendance is required; unexcused absences may lower your grade. Participation in lecture is highly encouraged and may improve your grade.
 - All papers are to be typed, double-spaced, and submitted in hard (paper) copy. Please do not try to submit your papers by email. I strongly encourage you to read “Guidelines for Writing a Philosophy Paper” before you begin your first paper: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>
 - All requirements are to be fulfilled in accordance with the Barnard Honor Code (see <http://barnard.edu/dos/honor-code>).

PROVISIONAL SCHEDULE

This schedule is subject to change according to the rate at which we are progressing from week to week. Any changes will be announced both in lecture and on Courseworks.

Introduction

Week 1, Sept. 6, 8: Introduction

- Simon Blackburn, *What Is Philosophy?*
- Simon Blackburn, *The Elements of Logic*
- Jim Pryor, *Guidelines on Reading Philosophy*

Unit I: Traditional Arguments For and Against the Existence of God

Week 2, Sept. 13, 15: The Ontological Argument—and Replies

- Saint Anselm, *The Ontological Argument*
- Gaunilo, *On Behalf of the Fool*
- G. E. Moore, *Is Existence a Predicate?*
- William L. Rowe, *Why the Ontological Argument Fails*

Week 3, Sept. 20, 22: The Cosmological Argument, the Argument from Design—and Replies

- Richard Taylor, *The Cosmological Argument*
- William Paley, *The Argument from Design*
- Ernest Nagel, *Does God Exist?*

Week 4, Sept. 27, 29: The Problem of Evil—and Replies

- John Hick, *The Problem of Evil*
- Steven M. Cahn, *The Problem of Goodness*

Unit II: Epistemology

Week 5, Oct. 4, 6: Skepticism

- Descartes, *Meditations 1 and 2*
- John Pollock, *A Brain in a Vat [C]*

***** Oct. 11 – 1st Paper due at the beginning of class (11am) *****

Weeks 6-7, Oct. 11, 13, 17, 20: Responses to the Skeptical Challenge

- G. E. Moore, *Proof of an External World*
- G. E. Moore, *Certainty*
- Robert Nozick, *Skepticism*
- Jonathan Vogel, *Cartesian Skepticism and Inference to the Best Explanation*

***** Oct. 25 – Midterm in class *****

Unit III: Free Will

Week 8, Oct. 27, Nov. 1: Free Will I

- A. J. Ayer, *Freedom and Necessity*
- Roderick M. Chisholm, *Human Freedom and the Self*

Week 9, Nov. 3, 10: Free Will II

- Harry Frankfurt, *Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person*
- Peter Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment*

Unit IV: Morality

Week 10, Nov. 15, 17: Utilitarianism vs. Deontology

- John Stuart Mill, Selections from *Utilitarianism*
- J. J. C. Smart, *Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism*
- Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism, Integrity and Responsibility*
- Onora O'Neill, *A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics*

***** Nov. 22 – 2nd Paper due at the beginning of class (11am) *****

Week 11, Nov. 22, 27: Puzzling Cases

- Judith Jarvis Thomson, *The Trolley Problem*
- Thomas Nagel, *Moral Luck*

Week 12, Nov. 29, Dec. 1: Moral Duties to the Poor

- Peter Singer, *Rich and Poor*
- Garrett Hardin, *Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor*
- Thomas W. Pogge, "Aiding" the Global Poor

Week 13, Dec. 6, 8: The Universality of Morality

- James Rachels, *Egoism and Moral Scepticism*
- James Rachels, *The Challenge of Cultural Relativism*

***** Dec 20 – Final Exam, 9-12 a.m. *****