

PHL* K101 (formerly PHL K111)
INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

3 Credit Hours

Prerequisite: Placement test score indicating ENG K101 or successful completion of ENG* K100 with a "C" grade or better.*

Spring 2011

Instructor: David Capps

Email: david.capps@uconn.edu

Office hrs: TBA



Immanuel Kant

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to some traditional problems of philosophy. Using logic and argumentation, we will investigate the following questions: Does God exist? Do human beings have free will if determinism about the physical world is true? Can we have knowledge of the external world? What is it for an action to be morally right?

Course Outcomes

Upon successful completion of Introduction to Philosophy students should be able to:

Logically evaluate deductive, inductive, and abductive forms of argument.

Demonstrate understanding on some foundational issue(s) in metaphysics (e.g., the existence of God, personal identity, time and space, etc.).

Demonstrate understanding on some foundational issue(s) in philosophy of mind and language (e.g., mind-body problem, free-will, psychological egoism, etc.).

Demonstrate understanding on some foundational issue(s) in epistemology (e.g., skepticism, Descartes' Foundationalism, the justified-true-belief theory, the problem of induction, etc.).

Recognize how philosophical investigation applies to real-world and personal circumstances.

Collaborate with others on presenting philosophical problems in a rational and logical manner.

Use various critical thinking strategies to analyze and synthesize information from a variety of sources (i.e. primary texts, secondary texts, multi-media presentations, experiential learning, etc...).

Course Requirements

Questions: 15%
Participation: 15%
Midterm Exam: 30%
Final Exam: 40%

Questions

Each week a set of questions over the readings will be due. These should run approx. 1 page, typed, with appropriate margins, and address the following:

1. State the author's main point. What, specifically, is the author trying to accomplish in the passage?
2. Ask a difficult question about the text, that is, one that does not have a simple answer, that you are genuinely puzzled about, and not explicitly addressed by the author. Make sure you ask your question in the form of a question.
3. Explain briefly why your question is a good or difficult one, e.g. you might consider it in relation to other aspects of the author's views, or larger questions. Make sure in offering your explanation of why your question is difficult or interesting, that you do not attempt to answer your question. (If your question is indeed a good one, space probably will not permit an answer).

Each set of questions will be worth 10 points, with 12 points possible for exposition and/or questions of exceptional quality.

Questions serve as a springboard for discussion, so they should be polished and you should be prepared to read them before the class.

Participation

Pedagogical research shows that class participation enhances academic performance. But it requires more than merely showing up. Raising questions, if only by way of clarification, objections, and engaging the material with the rest of the class will greatly enhance your understanding. If you are confused about something in the reading, you are probably not the only one. I would encourage

you to debate with me and your peers, while making sure to approach issues objectively and tolerantly. I also encourage you to email me or visit my office hrs with any relevant issues that we do not manage to address in class.

Here let me emphasize also something that will be helpful to us both. You may feel that I occasionally move too quickly and/or too abstractly through the material. Sometimes that will be my fault—I am very familiar with the material. Sometimes it may be the fault of the particular philosopher we're engaging. And sometimes it may be your fault (e.g. if you have only read the material once). I urge you to use this as an opportunity to ask questions. Even if you don't know what in particular you're confused about, or have the sense that everything is confusing, calling that very fact to my attention will let me know that I should slow down or provide further clarification. And it counts towards your participation.

Exams

The midterm and final will be blue-book style exams, each comprised of 3 essay questions. The final will be non-cumulative. One week before each exam I will provide you with a list of possible exam questions that you can use to help prepare. Exams will be assessed on the basis of clarity, incisiveness, and thoroughness of exposition, with a special emphasis on your ability to entertain objections to your arguments.

Texts

Required texts for this class include:

Reason and Responsibility (14th edition) eds. Feinberg and Shafer-Landau

Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals by Immanuel Kant

Meditations by René Descartes

Other required readings will be posted online.

General Notes

- You'll find that philosophical writing can be very dense, so read the assigned material more than once, and don't try to read more quickly than 10 pages/hr. This will help prepare you for writing assignments, sharpen your discussion skills, and in some cases you may not understand the material the first time around.

- Proofread your work before submitting it. Use proper punctuation, grammar, etc.
- Make-up policy: I am the sole determiner of what counts as a good excuse for making up missed work.
- Academic misconduct is a serious offense. If you are caught plagiarizing or cheating you will receive an “F” for the course along with further disciplinary action.
- Please see me within the first week of classes if you need to make special test-taking or note-taking accommodations.
- Email is the best way to contact me, and feel free to do so.
- The conditions of the exam(s) are non-negotiable.
- Texting in class is not permitted.
- It may be beneficial for you to get the contact info. of another fellow student, so that you can obtain missed lecture notes in the event of an absence.

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction

1/20: Philosophy, Logic and Argumentation. Readings: (Sober, online)

Weeks 2-4: The Existence of God

1/25: Cosmological Arguments. “The Five Ways” from *Summa Theologica* (Aquinas); “The Cosmological Argument” (Rowe)

1/27: Argument from Design. Selection from *Natural Theology* (Paley)

2/1: The Problem of Evil. Selection from *The Brothers Karamazov* (Dostoyevsky); “Why God allows Evil” (Swinburne)

2/3: Faith and Reason. “The Ethics of Belief” (Clifford), “The Will to Believe” (James)

2/8: College Professional Day (No Class)

2/10: Faith and Reason. “Without Evidence or Argument” (Kelly James Clark)

Weeks 5-7: Free Will and Determinism

2/15: Setting up the problem. “The Illusion of Free Will” (Holbach)

2/17: Libertarianism. “Human Freedom and the Self” (Chisholm)

2/22: Compatibilism. “The Problem of Free Will” (Stace, online); “Freedom and Necessity” (Ayer)

2/24: Hard Incompatibilism. “Why We Have No Free Will and Can Live Without It” (Pereboom)

3/1: Freedom and Responsibility. “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility” (Frankfurt); “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility” (Wolf)

3/3: Wrapping up and Midterm Review

3/8: *Midterm*

Weeks 8-10: Knowledge and Skepticism

3/10: Knowledge of the External World. Meditations 1 and 2 (Descartes)

3/13-3/19: Spring Break (No Class)

3/22: Meditation 3

3/24: Meditations 4 and 5

3/29: Meditation 6; “Proof of an External World” (Moore)

3/31: Selection from *The Theaetetus* (Plato); “Is Knowledge Justified True Belief?” (Gettier)

4/5: “What is Justified Belief?” (Goldman, online)

Weeks 11-13: Theories of Morality

4/7: Ethical Egoism. “Ethical Egoism” (Rachels, online); “Psychological Egoism” (Feinberg)

4/12: Moral Relativism. “Relativism in Ethics” (Shaw, online). Selection from *Republic* (Plato)

4/14: Selection from *Utilitarianism* (Mill). “The Principle of Utility” (Bentham, online)

4/19: Applications of Utilitarianism. “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” (Singer)

4/21: Assessing Utilitarianism. “The Experience Machine” (Nozick, online). “The Real and Alleged Problems of Utilitarianism” (Brandt, online)

4/26: Overview of Kantian Ethics. Preface, and Sections 1 and 2 of *The Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Kant)

4/28: Assessing Kantian Ethics. “An Examination of Kantian Ethics” (Feldman, online); “Kant and Utilitarianism Contrasted” (O’Neill, online)

Week 14: The Meaning of Life

5/3: “My Confession” (Tolstoy); “The Meaning of Life” (Taylor)

5/5: “The Absurd” (Thomas Nagel)

Week 15: Wrapping up

5/10 “The Value of Philosophy” (Russell); Final Review

5/12 Final Exam

