

Introduction to Philosophy

Instructor: Liz Jackson

Course Description:

Philosophy is the systematic study of fundamental phenomena, such as the nature of the world, the grounds of human knowledge, and the evaluation of human conduct. This class will cover four major parts of philosophy. Here are some examples of the questions we will cover in each part.

- 1) **Philosophy of Religion:** Does God exist? What are the best reasons to think God exists, and the best reasons to think there is no God?
- 2) **Metaphysics:** Do we have free will? Do we have souls? What enables us to survive over time?
- 3) **Epistemology:** Can we know anything at all? What should we believe?
- 4) **Ethics:** Is morality relative? Is morality more about following rules or maximizing good consequences? Do we have an obligation to give to charity? Is having a disability a bad thing?

Learning Goals:

At the end of the course, students should be able to...

- 1) Clearly state an argument in premise-conclusion form.
- 2) Properly object to an argument in premise-conclusion form.
- 3) Comprehend and analyze arguments for and against the existence of God.
- 4) Comprehend and analyze the main views on free will and arguments for and against each view.
- 5) Comprehend and analyze the main views on personal identity and arguments for and against each view.
- 6) Comprehend and analyze the main views on what we should believe and arguments for and against each view.
- 7) Comprehend and analyze the main views on the nature/content of moral truths and arguments for and against each view.

Policies:

Technology policy: No screens during class, including phones, laptops, tablets, etc. The reason for this policy is that there is quite a bit of research on this topic, and almost all findings support the idea that screens in class inhibit, rather than enhance, student learning. Further, the main purpose of this class is to *discuss* the philosophical issues at hand. I do not, primarily, want students to memorize facts, but for them to think, converse, and form opinions about the various topics. If you need to use a device during class to aid your learning, feel free to come talk to me.

Late work: Late work will be deducted one-third letter grade for each day late (A to A-, etc.).

Texts: There is no textbook for this class. We will instead be working from a variety of material, including professional philosophy articles, opinion pieces, podcasts, and video. Each topic will have required material. Most topics will have further material that students are encouraged to consume.

Grading scale: I will use the following grading scale.

A	94+	B+	87-89	B-	80-82	C	73-76	D	60-69
A-	90-93	B	83-86	C+	77-79	C-	70-72	F	59-

Honor Code: Students are responsible for compliance with the University's honor code at all times. I take academic integrity very seriously. Cheating of any kind will be reported, will result in a failing grade on the assignment, and might lead to even stronger penalties. Any particular questions about the honor code should be directed to me.

Accessibility: I am committed to making this course accessible to all students. Students who have (or think they may have) a disability, or who have questions about disability, are invited to talk to me.

Assignments:

Attendance:

It is impossible for a student to participate if he or she does not attend class. It is also difficult to learn the material without attending and participating. *Students who have more than two unexcused absences will have points deducted from their overall grade.*

Participation: 20%

This class is discussion-based, so participation from the students is especially important. I know not everyone loves talking in front of the class, so participation grades will also include reading responses. For each reading response, students should submit a question about the assigned material the Google Doc 24 hours before the class meeting. The question should demonstrate that you read (or watched/consumed/etc.) the material (partially because I am doing these instead of pop quizzes).

Paper 1, Precis: 15% (~1-2 pages)

In this paper, students defend an argument presented by an academic article we read in class. Students can pick which argument they would like to defend. An argument related to course material that we did not discuss is also fine, but students must get it pre-approved. No rough draft required.

Paper 2, Objection and Response Paper: 25% (~3-4 pages)

In this paper, students present an argument (a different argument than Paper 1), offer an original objection to the argument, and then an original response to the objection. A rough draft is required (and graded as pass/fail).

Paper 3, Paper & Creative Project: 40% (~6 pages)

Part 1- Paper (20%): In this paper, students take their own view on an issue we discuss. They should offer an argument for their view, then give two objections to their argument, then respond to each objection. A rough draft is required (and graded as pass/fail). I will give ideas for paper topics, but students can write on any topic that is related to course material.

Part 2- Presentation (20%): Students are required to do a creative project that explains or illustrates their argument from paper 3. During the final weeks of the semester, students will present their projects to the class.

Do not include your first or last name on your papers. Instead, merely include your student ID number.

Note on paper length: While I have provided a suggested length for each paper, there are no minimum word requirements. Quality is much more important than quantity for the papers; I strongly prefer a short, tightly-argued paper to a long, rambling paper without much substance. (Part of the reason we do rough drafts is to teach students how to produce quality philosophical writing). Closer to the due dates, I will provide more detailed instructions for each paper.

Schedule:

Week 1:

- Intro/Syllabus
- What is philosophy?

I. PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Week 2:

- Cosmological Argument (Aquinas, the Second Way)
- Design Argument (Paley, *Natural Theology* [excerpts]; Rees, Just six numbers)

Week 3:

- Divine Hiddenness (Schellenberg, Divine Hiddenness Justifies Atheism)
- The Problem of Evil (Mackie, Evil and Omnipotence)

Week 4:

- The Problem of Evil, cont.
- The Free will defense (Van Inwagen, the Problem of Evil)

II. METAPHYSICS

Week 5:

- Free will: libertarianism (Van Inwagen, The Powers of Rational Beings)
- Free will: compatibilism (Frankfurt, Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility)

Week 6:

- Free will: hard determinism (Pereboom, ch. 5 of *Living without Free Will* [excerpts])
- Personal identity: the soul view (Descartes, *Meditations*; Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth and Descartes)

Week 7:

- Personal identity: the physical view (Van Inwagen, Dualism and Personality Identity)
- Personal identity: the psychological view (Locke, Of Identity and Diversity)

III. EPISTEMOLOGY

Week 8:

- Can we know anything at all? (Descartes, Meditation 1; Moore, Proof of an External World)
- Evidentialism and Proper Basicity (Plantinga, Is Belief in God Properly Basic?)

Week 9:

- Disagreement (Tom Kelly, The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement [excerpts])
- Pascal's Wager (Pascal, The Wager)

IV. ETHICS

Week 10:

- Metaethics: Relativism vs. Realism (Pojman ch. 2-3 in *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong*)
- Normative ethics: Consequentialism (Mill, Utilitarianism II [excerpts]; Nozick, The Experience Machine)

Week 11:

- Normative ethics: Deontology (Thomson, Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem; Kant, Groundwork [excerpts])
- Normative ethics: Virtue Ethics (Driver, Virtue Theory [in *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory*])

Week 12:

- Charitable giving (Singer, *The Life You Can Save* [ch. 1-2])
- Disability (Barnes, Valuing Disability, Causing Disability)

Week 13: Thanksgiving Break

Week 14: Student Presentations

Week 15: Student Presentations