

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

SEMESTER

SECTION

Days, Time, Room

INSTRUCTOR

Jonathan Spelman

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to some of the central questions in philosophy and identifies some potential answers to them. For example, we consider epistemological questions such as whether we can trust our senses and, more generally, whether we can know anything. We consider metaphysical questions such as whether God exists and whether we could survive the death of our bodies. Finally, we consider normative questions such as whether we have a moral obligation to donate money to famine relief and whether it is morally wrong to buy and eat factory-farmed meat, pollute the environment, and/or play violent video games. Along the way, this course helps students develop the philosophical skills they need to answer these questions. In particular, it helps students to construct and evaluate arguments, devise thought experiments and counterexamples, and develop intellectual courage, empathy, and humility.

OFFICE HOURS

I will hold office hours on Mondays from 11:00a-12:45p and Wednesdays from 2:00p-3:45p in Hellems 15. I am also available by appointment.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Course Pack
- John Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*. Hackett, 1978.
- René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditation on First Philosophy*, translated by Donald A. Cress, 4th ed., Hackett, 1999.

TECHNOLOGY POLICY

Studies show that students who write their notes retain more information than those who type their notes (see, for example, <http://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away>). In light of that, I ask that you not use your laptops during class. Of course, if you have a compelling reason for using your laptop during class, please let me know. I am willing to make exceptions to this rule in certain cases.

GRADES

Grades will be assigned in accordance with the university's uniform grading policy. "A" grades are exceptional and are reserved for those students who demonstrate both a comprehensive understanding of the material and competence with all the philosophical skills we work on over the course of the semester. "B-/C+" grades are average.

GRADED ELEMENTS

CLASS PREPARATION AND ATTENDANCE

You are expected to prepare for each class period by reading and flagging the assigned text and reflecting on its content. You are also expected to attend class regularly. You may miss up to five classes without penalty, but after your fifth absence, each additional absence will result in a 2.5% reduction in your final grade.

PARTICIPATION

You are expected to be an informed, active participant in all small group activities (e.g., homework and peer review activities), small group discussions, and large group discussions. This is good for you, your classmates, and me. We will all benefit from your input. You are also expected to complete a number of miscellaneous assignments over the course of the semester. If you are unsatisfied with your grade on any one of them, you may redo it (shortly thereafter) to improve your grade. You may, at some point, be asked to prepare some material for presentation at a future time, in which case you are expected to do that. Finally, you are expected to prepare for and participate in three debates. Your class participation grade will account for 20% of your final grade.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

You will have approximately six homework assignments over the course of the semester. Although you should complete each homework assignment on your own, before class, you will be able to rework a number of them (but not all of them) in class with a small groups of your peers. Those you are able to rework will account for (approximately) 2.5% of your grade. Those you are *not* able to rework will account for (approximately) 5% of your grade. Combined, your homework assignments will account for 20% of your final grade.

JOURNAL ENTRIES

Most weeks, you will be expected to either compose a journal entry on that week's prompt or participate in an online discussion of that prompt. If you choose to compose a journal entry on the prompt, it should be at least 150 words and should be posted online. In it, you should provide your position on the questions at issue, an argument for your position, an objection to your argument, and a response to that objection. If you choose to participate in an online discussion of the prompt, you are expected to post an original insight that advances the relevant debate. Your post need not be particularly long. In fact, I would prefer multiple short posts to a single, long post. Your journal assignments will typically be due on Fridays. Your journal grade will account for 20% of your final grade.

PAPERS

During the semester, you will write two 3-4 page (900-1200 word) papers. We will talk more about the paper requirements on Friday of Week 8. A hard copy of your first paper will be due in class on Friday of Week 10. An electronic copy of your second paper will be due by 11:59 pm on the day of your final exam. Each paper will account for 20% of your final grade.

<u>GRADED ELEMENT</u>	<u>%</u>
Participation	20
Homework Assignments	20
Journal Entries	20
<u>Papers</u>	<u>40</u>
Total	100

ASSIGNED READINGS

Week 1 – Introduction to Philosophy

- Wed [Sean Blanda, “The Other Side Is Not Dumb”](#)
- Fri *CP*: How to Read Philosophy, pp. 19-26
- Redo summary of excerpt from Mill’s *On Liberty***

Week 2 – Evaluating and (Re)Constructing Arguments

- Mon *CP*: Lewis Vaughn and Louis Pojman, “Excursus: A Little Bit of Logic,” pp. 47-51
- [Wireless Philosophy, What Makes an Argument Valid?](#)
- [Wireless Philosophy, What Makes an Argument Sound?](#)
- CP*: Evaluating Arguments, pp. 1-5
- Wed **Homework #1**
- Fri *CP*: (Re)Constructing Arguments, pp. 7-9
- [Wireless Philosophy, What Is an Implicit Premise?](#)

Week 3 – Thought Experiments, Counterexamples, and Famine Relief

- Mon **Homework #2**
- Wed *CP*: Thought Experiments, pp. 11-12
- CP*: Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality,” pp. 53-57
- Fri *CP*: Counterexamples, pp. 13-14
- CP*: Travis Timmerman, “A Reply to Singer,” pp. 59-60

Week 4 – Discourse on Method

- Mon **Précis and Debate**: Are we morally obligated to relieve famine?
- Wed René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Part I
- Fri René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Part II

Week 5 – The Meditations

- Mon René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 1st Meditation
- Homework #3**
- Wed René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 2nd Meditation
- Fri René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 3rd Meditation

Week 6 – The Cosmological Argument for God’s Existence

- Mon *CP*: St. Thomas Aquinas, “The Five Ways,” pp. 164-166
- Homework #4**
- Wed *CP*: William Rowe, “An Examination of the Cosmological Argument,” pp. 167-176
- Fri **Précis and Debate**: Does the cosmological argument prove God’s existence?

Week 7 – The Problem of Evil

- Mon René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 4th Meditation
- Wed *CP*: Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, “Some Reasons to Believe that There Is No God,” pp. 75-84
- Fri *CP*: John Hick, “There Is a Reason Why God Allows Evil,” pp. 85-90
- In-Class Group Activity**

Week 8 – The Meditations

- Mon **Précis and Debate**: Does the existence of evil disprove God’s existence?
- Wed René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 6th Meditation
- Fri *CP*: Evaluated Elements, Rubric, and Example, pp. 31-39

Week 9 – Writing Workshop

Mon **Paper #1 Intro Paragraph**

Wed

Fri René Descartes and Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, “Letters,” pp. 91-95

Paper #1 Intro Paragraph Approval

Week 10 – Writing Workshop

Mon **Paper #1 Draft Due**

Wed **Peer Review Feedback Due**

Fri **Paper #1 Due**

Week 11 – Spring Break

Mon

Wed

Fri



Week 12 – Personal Identity

Mon CP: John Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*, “First Night”

Wed CP: John Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*, “Second Night”

Fri CP: John Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*, “Third Night”

Week 13 – Personal Identity

Mon **Homework #5**

Wed *Who is Julia?* or *Being John Malkovich*

Fri *Who is Julia?* or *Being John Malkovich*

Week 14 – Animal Ethics

Mon **Précis and Debate:** What makes you *you*? Could you survive the death of your body?

Wed CP: Alastair Norcross, “Puppies, Pigs, and People,” pp. 97-100

Fri **Homework #6**

Week 15 – Video Games

Mon **Précis and Debate:** Is it wrong to buy and eat factory-farmed meat?

Wed CP: Marcus Schulzke, “Defending the Morality of Violent Video Games,” pp. 101-106

Fri CP: Morgan Luck, “The Gamer’s Dilemma,” pp. 107-112

Week 16 – Environmental Ethics

Mon **Précis and Debate:** Is it wrong to murder someone in a video game?

Wed CP: Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, “It’s Not *My* Fault,” pp. 113-118

Fri CP: Marion Hourdequin, “Climate, Collective Action, and Individual Ethical Obligations,” pp. 119-124

Final Exam

Date Time **Précis and Debate:** Is it wrong to joyride?

11:59p **Paper #2 Due**