

PHIL 100: Problems of Philosophy

Fall 2016

TTH 9:25–10:40 in SEW 560

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Office hours: by appointment

Course Description

This course is an introduction to some central issues in philosophy and to the methods that philosophers use to address those issues. We'll be asking three sorts of questions:

Metaphysical questions: What sorts of things exist, and what is the fundamental nature of those things?

Epistemological questions: What is knowledge? What is required in order to obtain knowledge? What should I believe?

Ethical questions: What is valuable in life? How should I act? How should we organize the political institutions in our society?

Course Objectives

This course will introduce students to the methods and the subject matter of philosophy.

Course Materials

All readings will be made available through Canvas.

Evaluation

Student performance will be evaluated using papers and pop-quizzes:

First Paper	≈ 1100 words	(15% of final grade)
Second Paper	≈ 1500 words	(20% of final grade)
Term Paper	≈ 2200 words	(35% of final grade)
Pop Quizzes	10 quizzes	(3% each = 30% of final grade)

All assignments will be graded on a four-point scale. A+'s will be rare but not impossible.

IMPORTANT In order to pass this course you must receive a D or higher on each of the three papers **AND** you must be present to take at least 6 quizzes (or have a documented excuse for your absence).

Quizzes: The quizzes will be quick and typically pretty easy, provided that you are present in class, have done the reading, and are paying attention to the lecture. They will typically be a surprise, but

I might tell you that one is coming up. I might even tell you what the questions will be. In order to take a quiz and receive any credit for it, you must be present when it is administered (or have a document excuse). No make-up quizzes will be offered unless you have a documented excuse!

Papers: I will provide prompts for each of the papers. If you would prefer to come up with your own prompt then you are welcome to do so, but **YOU MUST CLEAR IT WITH ME FIRST**. I'm not trying to crush your creativity here. It's just that picking a good topic for a paper — not too big, not too small, not involving some confusion — is an art in itself and I'd hate for you to get off on the wrong foot.

All papers must be submitted through Canvas. All papers will be graded blind, meaning that the grader will not know whose paper they are grading. For that reason, **PLEASE DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME OR OTHER IDENTIFIER ON YOUR PAPER**. Why is this important? It helps to avoid implicit bias and ensure fair grading.

Late papers will be docked 1/3 letter grade per day past the due date.

Helpful Resources

Jim Pryor (NYU) has a helpful guide for reading philosophy and another for writing philosophy. They can be found at:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

and

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Tyler Burge (UCLA) offers the following words of wisdom concerning the study of philosophy:

Whatever the reader's background and interests [...] I offer this council, firmly and insistently: patience. Patience is a primary virtue in philosophy. Genuine understanding is a rare and valuable commodity, not to be obtained on the cheap. One cannot reap philosophy's rewards breathlessly, or by looking for the intellectual equivalents of sound bites. Very large claims are at issue here, claims that bear on understanding some of the matters most important to being human. Understanding requires investing time, close reading, and reflection.

Participation

You are encouraged to ask questions and to discuss the readings. The best way to learn philosophy is by doing philosophy, and part of doing philosophy is talking about philosophy. Come to class ready to talk and don't rely on others to carry the weight. Try answers on for size. Very often progress is made by first putting a bad answer on the table and then getting an idea of what is wrong with it and how it could be improved upon. Offering a "bad" answer doesn't make you bad at philosophy or mean you are being dumb or dense. Some of the most important works in philosophy were merely conversation

starters, and some of the best and smartest philosophers have offered really “bad” answers to certain questions.

Here are some examples of fantastic questions that I’ve been asked:

“I don’t understand what you just said. Would you please explain it again?”

“You just claimed that X, but I don’t see why I should believe X. What can you say to convince me?”

“You just drew conclusion Y from premise X, but I don’t see how X supports Y. What can you say to convince me?”

“I’ve lost the forest for the trees. Can you zoom out and tell me how this small point that we’ve been discussing fits in to the larger issues?”

And here is a list of every stupid question I’ve ever been asked:

[blank — there are no stupid questions]

Attendance Policy

Your regular attendance is expected. This expectation is reflected in your grace through the quizzes: skip a class in which we have a quiz and you’ll receive a 0 on that quiz (odds are about 1 in 3 that there will be a quiz in any given class meeting — feeling lucky?).

Rice Honor Code

Rice takes its honor code very seriously. All work completed in this course is subject to the Rice Honor Code pledge, which reads:

On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unauthorized aid on this assignment.

So what’s authorized?

Citation Cite anything you’d like, but be sure to cite any sources that you’ve consulted; plagiarism is a heinous crime and will not be tolerated.

Extent of collaboration I encourage you to discuss relevant materials with anyone you’d like, and in particular I’d encourage you to discuss them with myself and with your colleagues in the course. I encourage you to solicit feedback on your written work and on your presentations from anyone you’d like. Philosophy is a collaborative enterprise, and it’s really fun to talk about. But write your own essays and be sure to document any ideas that appear in your written work that aren’t yours (i.e. cite appropriately). Collaboration on quizzes is prohibited. Placing quizzes in a test bank for future students to consult (or anything of that sort) is prohibited.

Multiple submission The resubmission any of your own work by that has been used in identical or similar form in fulfillment of any academic requirement at this or another institution is prohibited.

Notes Sharing class notes with other students in the class is generous, and I encourage it.

Sources All types of sources are permitted in your research. Cite appropriately.

If you're unclear about any of this, please talk to me about it.

Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. Instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Honor Council, and maximum penalties will be sought. For information regarding what constitutes plagiarism, see: honor.rice.edu or talk to me.

Students with Disabilities

1. Any student with a documented disability seeking academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain as confidential as possible. Students with disabilities will need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.
2. Any student with a disability requiring accommodations in this course is encouraged to contact me after class or during office hours. Additionally, students will also need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.
3. If you have a documented disability that will impact your work in this class, please contact me to discuss your needs. Additionally, you will need to register with the Disability Support Services Office in the Allen Center.
4. Just as university policy requires me to accommodate all documented disabilities, it prohibits me from accommodating any undocumented disabilities. It also prohibits me from retroactively imposing accommodations. For example, if your disability is first documented halfway through the semester I will not be able to make grade changes or other accommodations for any work completed earlier in the semester. To avoid these issues please be sure to document your disability with Disability Support Services as early as possible.

Syllabus Subject to Change!

This syllabus is subject to change. Reasonable notice will be given. Any changes will be announced in class and/ or posted to Canvas.

Phones and The Laptops

You are welcome to use your laptop, tablet or phone to take notes or to consult the day's readings. If you must do other things with your devices — text, email, check Facebook — then please sit in back so that you don't distract the more serious students. If your device usage is disruptive then you will be asked to put that device away or to leave.

Course Schedule:

The following schedule will be revised as we go along. Any changes will be announced in class and/or via Canvas. Please complete the readings for the date listed.

Week 1: Introduction

8/23 Introduction. What is philosophy and why is it worth studying?

- No reading

8/25 Arguments: believing for reasons; organizing those reasons into arguments; induction vs deduction; soundness and validity; common fallacies

- No reading

Metaphysics

Week 2: Is there a God?

8/30 Medieval arguments for God's existence

- Aquinas: 'The Five Ways' (focus on the *Second* Way)
- Clarke: 'The Cosmological Argument'
- Anselm: 'Proslogion' sections 2, 3, 4, 15, and the reply from Guanilo

9/1 A scientific argument for God's existence

- Paley: 'Natural Theology' p. 9-14, 21-24 (stop at "I. In order to exclude...")

Week 3: Is there a god?

9/6 A pragmatic argument for God's existence (Pascal's Wager)

- Pascal: 'Pensees' (selection)
- Hacking: 'The Great Decision'

9/8 An argument that evil and God can't both exist, so God doesn't

- Mackie: 'Evil and Omnipotence'
- optional: Swinburn: 'Why God Allows Evil'

Week 4: Free Will

9/13 Introduction: the problem of free will

- Kane Ch. 1 sections 4-6

9/15 Compatibilism

- Kane Ch. 2

Week 5: Free Will (cont'd)

9/20 Incompatibilism

- Kane Ch. 3

9/22 Libertarianism

- Kane Ch.4

Epistemology

Week 6: Free Will, Analysis of Knowledge

9/27 Free will and moral responsibility

- Kane Ch. 8
- Frankfurt: 'Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility'

9/29 Analysis of Knowledge

- Plato: 'Theaetetus' (selection)
- Chisholm: *Perceiving* (selection)
- Gettier: 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?'

First Paper due by 11:59PM on 10/2

Week 7: Cartesian Skepticism

10/4 External World Skepticism: Three Arguments for Skepticism

- Descartes: Meditation 1, 2
- Ungraded homework assignment: go watch 'The Matrix', but don't bother trying to take Keanu Reeves seriously as an actor. How does the Matrix scenario relate to Descartes's evil deceiver scenario?

(10/6) External World Skepticism: First Steps; the Cogito

- Descartes: Meditation 2, 3

Week 8: Cartesian Skepticism

10/11 Fall Break - no class

10/13 External World Skepticism: Clear and Distinct Ideas, Existence of God

- Descartes: Meditation 3, 4

Week 9: External World Skepticism

10/18 External World Skepticism: Wrapping things up

- Descartes: Meditation 6

10/20 Hume's Skeptical argument

- Hume: 'Enquiry II, III, IV'

Week 10: Skepticism about induction

10/25 Hume's Skeptical solution ('solution'?)

- Hume: 'Enquiry IV, V'

10/27 Hume on Testimony and Miracles

- Hume: 'Enquiry X'

Week 11: Skepticism about miracles, minds playing tricks

11/1 Minds Playing Tricks: illusion and implicit bias

- Saul: 'Skepticism and Implicit Bias'

11/3 Swing day – we'll probably be behind by this point, so I'll leave some time to catch up

Second Paper due by 11:59PM on 11/6

Week 12: Origins; Subjectivism and Relativism

11/8 Where does morality come from?

- Plato: 'Euthyphro' (selection)

11/10 No really - where does morality come from?

- TBD

Ethics

Week 13: Ethical Theories 1

11/15 Subjectivism and Relativism

- Rachels: 'Subjectivism in Ethics' (selection)
- Rachels: 'The Challenge of Cultural Relativism' (selection)

11/17 Deontology

- Rachels: 'Are There Absolute Moral Rules?'

Week 14: Ethical Theories 2

11/22 Utilitarianism

- Mill: 'Utilitarianism' (selection)

11/24 Thanksgiving break - no class

Week 15: Obligations and prohibitions

11/29 The Scope of Moral Obligation

- Singer: 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality'

12/1 Trolley Problems

- Thomson: 'The Trolley Problem'

Term Paper Due by 11:59PM on December 11