

PHILOSOPHY 232: PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY

CONTACT INFO

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DESCRIPTION

Do we have free will? Does God exist? What is the correct moral code? Are the answers to any of those questions necessarily related? Fifty years from now, when you have very different beliefs and desires, what is going to make you the same person that you are now? How can you know that the external world exists? Even if it didn't exist, why should you care?

The main goal of this course is that you deeply engage with these questions and thereby come to love the practice of doing philosophy. In particular, you will learn how to do philosophy well—how to read and write and talk and reason with an incisive and yet open mind—and you will enjoy engaging with these questions not just because they are themselves rich and intriguing, but because you appreciate your own developing skill in thinking about them.

Another goal of this course is that you become familiar with a variety of central subfields of philosophy: ethics, philosophy of religion, philosophy of action, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, and epistemology. As a result, this course will give you a sense what you might expect if you continue to study philosophy in more focused higher-level courses.

PREREQUISITES

No previous work in philosophy is required or assumed.

GRADING

Section participation: 15%
First paper: 25%
Second paper: 25%
Final exam: 25%
Five surprise exams in lecture: 10%

The surprise exams given in lecture may contain questions about the material assigned for the week of the exam and/or topics covered in lecture in the week preceding the exam. There are no chances to make up the exam if you miss lecture. But in recognition of the fact that you may have to miss lecture for some good reason at some point during the semester, you may drop your lowest exam grade.

MATERIALS All readings and assignments will be posted on our course webpage at <http://canvas.umich.edu>.

DISABILITY Students requesting academic accommodations for a disability are required to register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities. If you need accommodation, please contact both me and your graduate student instructor with an official request as early as possible.

READINGS Please read each paper both before and after the corresponding lecture.

Ethics: The Trolley Problem

- 9/8 Shaw 2005: "The Consequentialist Perspective"
- 9/13 Thomson 1985: "The Trolley Problem"
- 9/15 Singer 1972: "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"
- 9/20 Harris 1975: "The Survival Lottery"
- 9/22 Thomson 1971: "A Defense of Abortion"

Philosophy of Religion: The Problem of Evil

- 9/27 Mackie 1955: "Evil and Omnipotence"
- 9/29 Plantinga 1965: "The Free Will Defense"
- 10/4 Pryor 2006: "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper"
- 10/6 McCord-Adams 1993: "The Problem of Hell"
- 10/11 Nozick 1983: "Philosophy and the Meaning of Life"

Philosophy of Action: Free Will

- 10/13 Sider 2005: "Free Will and Determinism"
- 10/20 Pereboom 2006: "Why We Have No Free Will and Can Live Without It"
first paper due in lecture on October 20
- 10/25 Nagel 1979: "Moral Luck"
- 10/27 Wolf 1987: "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility"

Metaphysics: Material Constitution

- 11/1 Sider 2005: "Constitution"
optional reading: Gibbard 1975: "Contingent Identity," §1
- 11/3 Merricks 2001: *Objects and Persons*, chapter 2

- 11/8 Sider 2001: *Four-Dimensionalism*, §5.1–2
11/10 Lewis 1976: "Survival and Identity"

Philosophy of Mind: Special Access

- 11/15 Gertler 2011: "Introduction: Philosophical Issues about Self-Knowledge"
11/17 Gendler 2008: "Alief and Belief"
11/22 Washington and Kelly 2016: "Who's Responsible for This?"
11/24 *University of Michigan Thanksgiving Recess*
11/29 Zheng 2014: "Attributivity, Accountability, and Implicit Bias"

Epistemology: Skepticism

- 12/1 Williams 2001: *Problems of Knowledge*, chapter 17
second paper due in lecture on December 1
12/6 Wachowski 1999: *The Matrix*
12/8 Nozick 1974: "The Experience Machine"
12/13 Pryor 2005: "What's So Bad About Living in the Matrix?"

The final exam for this class is scheduled for Thursday, December 22 at 10:30am.