

PHIL UN1010 Methods & Problems of Philosophical Thought

Day/Time: MW 11:40am-12:55pm

Location: 702 Hamilton Hall

Teaching Assistants: Robby Finley (jrf2162), Mariana Beatriz Noé (mariana.b.noe)

1. Course Description

We explore perennial philosophical questions, such as:

- What is knowledge?
- What is it to believe something?
- Can we prove that God exists?
- When you know something, do you know that you know it?
- What is imagination?
- What is consciousness?
- Why is it wrong to lie, and is it always wrong to lie?
- What is truth?
- What is involved in asserting something, and are there norms of assertion?
- Is it possible to act against one's better knowledge?
- How should we understand the motivation of actions?
- What is the difference between descriptive and normative claims?
- How should we respond to disagreement about value?
- Does the evolutionary history of our ethical beliefs affect their justification?

We focus on some specific **problems** and study the **methods** philosophers employ, in particular: arguments, thought-experiments, and examples.

Throughout the semester, we

- practice skills related to philosophical inquiry,
- gather tools that are needed for precise philosophical argument and careful examination of philosophical ideas,
- study questions as they are discussed from the perspectives of different subfields in philosophy,
- think about the relationship between philosophy and other fields.

2. Requirements

Reading

Reading assignments are short, but require active reading:

- After every sentence/couple of lines, ask yourself “what does the author say? how would I reformulate this in my own words?”

- For every term that is at all technical, ask yourself how you would explain it to someone who doesn't know the term.
- I'm posting a handout for every class on Courseworks. Every handout ends with a small assignment ("homework"), designed to help you think through the material. My recommendation is that you *always* write up a reply to the homework question, as an exercise and a tool for critical reading.

Written assignments

All papers for the class are replies to the homework questions, posed at the end of the handout.

In total, you are required to submit **seven half page papers and two one page papers, single-spaced**, distributed evenly throughout the semester.

We'll collect written replies every Monday in class. This means that between Wednesday and Monday you'll have two prompts to choose from. In order to accumulate sufficiently many papers, you have to submit one paper per week on average, not counting the week of our midterm and not counting holidays, and allowing for two exceptions. Make yourself a plan: look at your schedule, and make a decision for when you want to take a break. Tell your TA ahead of time—if you don't give us notice, we expect your written work to be handed in.

If you like both prompts in a given week, you can write papers on both prompts. Then you can take the next week off.

Up to the midterm, scheduled for **October 10**, you're required to have submitted **at least three half page papers and one one page paper**.

Exams

Midterm

Final

Grading

- seven half page papers, single-spaced, each 5% (total 35%)
- two one page papers, single-spaced, each 10% (total 20%)
- Midterm, 20%
- Final, 25%

3. Week-by-Week Plan

Week 1: What is Knowledge?

Wednesday

Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” (1963); Jennifer Nagel <<http://www.wi-phi.com/video/analyzing-knowledge-part-1-gettier-problem>>.

Week 2: Knowledge and Belief

Monday

Gettier (1963), continued; Anand Jayprakash Vaidya, “Inclusive Epistemology Part 2” <<http://blog.apaonline.org/2016/06/22/the-inclusion-problem-in-epistemology-the-case-of-the-gettier-cases-2-of-3/>>

Wednesday

Williamson, selections from “Is Knowing a Mental State?” (1995) and “Knowledge First Epistemology” (2011).

Week 3: Second-Order Knowledge and Knowing God

Monday

First Meditation in René Descartes, *Meditations*; selection from Augustine, *On Trinity*; selection from Christoph Kelp and Nikolaj J.L.L. Pedersen, “Second-Order Knowledge,” (2011).

Wednesday

Anselm’s ontological proof for the existence of God (*Proslogion* Chapters II) <<http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/anselm-proslogium.asp>>.

Week 4: Imagination, Knowledge, and Belief

Monday

Anselm, *Proslogion* Chapter IV; René van Woudenberg, “Introduction: Knowledge Through Imagination,” *Metaphilosophy* 37 (2006): 151-161.

Wednesday

Susanna Schellenberg, “Belief and Desire in Imagination and Immersion,” *Journal of Philosophy* (2014): 497-517, with references to Jerry A. Fodor, *The Modularity of Mind*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983.

Week 5: Bats and Zombies

Monday

Thomas Nagel, “What It Is Like To Be A Bat.” *The Philosophical Review* 83 (1974): 435-50.

Wednesday

Selection from David Chalmers (2002); and Chalmers <<http://consc.net/zombies.html>>. Magdalena Balcerak Jackson, “On the Epistemic Value of Imagining, Supposing, and Conceiving,” in A. Kind and P. Kung, *Knowledge Through Imagination*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016;

Week 6: Truth and Truthfulness

Monday

MIDTERM

Wednesday

Sections 1, 2 and 4 in Chapter 3 “The State of Nature: A Rough Guide,” in Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010 <<http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/lib/columbia/reader.action?docID=10400782>>

Week 7: Assertion, Retraction, and Lies

Monday

Sections 1 and 2 in Chapter 4 “Truth, Assertion, and Belief,” Williams 2010.

Wednesday

Selections from Sections 3 and 4, Chapter 4 “Truth, Assertion, and Belief,” in Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*; pp. 489-494 from Timothy Williamson, “Knowing and Asserting,” *The Philosophical Review* 105 (1996): 489-523; pp. 79-86 from John McFarlane, “What Is Assertion?,” in *Assertion*, ed. Jessica Brown and Herman Cappelen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 79-96.

Week 8: What is lying?

Monday

Immanuel Kant, “On a supposed right to lie from philanthropy” (1797); Plato, *Hippias Minor*.

Wednesday

Selections from: Andreas Stokke, “Lying, Deceiving, and Misleading,” *Philosophy Compass* 8/4 (2013): 348–359; and “Lying and Asserting,” *Journal of Philosophy* (2013): 33-60; and “Insincerity,” *Nous* 48:3 (2014): 496–520. Karen Lewis, “Gricean Pragmatics” <<http://www.wi-phi.com/contributor/karen-lewis>>.

Week 9: Weak Will and Akrasia

Monday

Donald Davidson, “How is Weakness of the Will Possible?” (1970). Reprinted in Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 21-42.

Wednesday

Aristotle on Akrasia, *Nicomachean Ethics* VII (selections).

Week 10: Agency

Monday

NO CLASS

Wednesday

Davidson (1970), continued: P1, P2, P3; Harry Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility” (1961), selections; Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention* (1957), §§1-7.

Week 11: Intentions, Reasons, and the Guise of the Bad

Monday

David Velleman, “The Guise of the Good,” *Nous* 26 (1992): 3-26; Joseph Raz, “The Guise of the Good” (2010).

Wednesday

Elizabeth Anscombe (1957), continued: why-questions. Joseph Raz, “The Guise of the Bad,” *Journal of Ethics & Social Philosophy* 10 (2016): 1-14.

Week 12: Normativity

Monday

Selection from David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, Part I, Section I.

Wednesday

Selection from Gilbert Harman, *Change in View: Principles of Reasoning* (MIT 1986).

Week 13: Disagreement

Monday

Al-Ghazali, *The Rescuer From Error*, introductory paragraphs.

Wednesday

Thomas Kelly, “The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement,” *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, edited by John Hawthorne and Tamar Gendler (2005), pp. 167-196.

Week 14: Evolution & Ethics

Monday

Sections 1-6, Sharon Street, “A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value,” *Philosophical Studies* 127 (2006): 109-166.

Wednesday

Selection from Guy Kahene, “Evolutionary Debunking Arguments,” *Nous* 45 (2011): 103-125.

Week 15: Review

Monday

Review for final exam.

4. Readings

All readings will be accessible through Columbia’s Libraries and its institutional subscriptions or through Courseworks.

5. Academic Integrity and Honor Code

Please consult Columbia University’s policies on academic integrity as well as Columbia’s honor code:

<http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicintegrity>

<https://www.college.columbia.edu/ccshonorcode>

These policies explain Columbia University's academic regulations and how you can safeguard the integrity of your original work. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious offenses. Please take the time to familiarize yourself with the details of what constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty. You are expected to confirm to these policies in your academic work. It is important that you understand that academic dishonesty can lead to disciplinary action, including failure in the course and suspension, or even expulsion, from the University.