

METHODS AND PROBLEMS

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Time and Place:

MW 1:10pm-2:25pm
517 Hamilton Hall

Summary:

This course provides a whirlwind tour of some “big questions” of philosophy. We will engage with modern, often contemporary, authors on such perennial issues as the nature of consciousness, personal identity, time, generality, possibility and necessity, mathematics, logic, and existence. We will critically evaluate our common-sense claims to freedom, responsibility, and knowledge. And we will shine the light back on ourselves and ask what we philosophers can hope to achieve.

Requirements:

Participation (20% of your grade):

You must complete all of the required reading (marked with an “R”) prior to class.

You must post a question or comment about the reading on the Discussion Board by the midnight prior. You are encouraged to engage in focused back-and-forth there.

Exams (40% of your grade):

You must complete take-home midterm and final exams. The exams include short essay questions. The questions test your understanding and critical engagement with the material. While you may talk with classmates about them, you must complete the exam yourself.

Papers (40% of your grade):

You must complete three 1-page papers by the end of the year (20% of your grade), two of which must be handed in before Spring Break. I will pose one or more questions in connection with each required reading in class. You must respond to three such questions in concise, 1-page, double-spaced, essays in order to complete this assignment successfully.

You must submit one 3-page paper (20% of your grade) between Spring Break and the last day of class. In order to complete this assignment, you must respond to one of the questions posed in a sustained way. Your response will be graded primarily on grounds of clarity.

Resources:

All of the required readings will be available in pdf form on Courseworks.

In addition, there are a number of free online philosophy resources. These include:

- [The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) (the optional readings marked with a * come from this)
- [The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)
- [PhilPapers.org](#) is a comprehensive index of philosophy works, maintained by philosophers.
- Jim Pryor's Guide to [Writing](#) and [Reading](#) Philosophy, and his Guide to [Philosophical Terms and Methods](#). (We strongly encourage you to consult these in connection with your writing assignments.)
- James Lenman's [How to Write a Crap Philosophy Paper](#)
- [Greg Restall's Lectures on Symbolic Logic](#) (including elementary, mathematical, and non-classical). This is *not* a course in symbolic logic, and I do not assume that you have had such a course. I will explain any logical concepts that I expect you to know as they come up. But those wishing to pursue the topics further may enjoy Restall's videos. (See also <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/logic-classical/>)

Schedule:

R = Required / O = Optional

You must read all works marked with an "R" prior to class. But we do not expect you to read the works marked with an "O". These are merely mentioned in case you wish to investigate the issue further. Feel free to ask us for suggested selections from the historical works in particular.

<i>Week</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>
1 – Introduction		(1/18) Overview
2 – Consciousness	(1/23) R: Nagel, “What is it Like to be a Bat?” O: Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> ; Balog, “Conceivability, Possibility, and the Mind-Body Problem”	(1/25) R: Dennett, “Quining Qualia”
3 – Free Will & Responsibility	(1/30) R: Van Inwagen, “The Consequence Argument” O: Spinoza, <i>Ethics</i> ; Harman, “Does Moral Ignorance Exculpate?”	(2/1) R: Rosen, “Skepticism about Moral Responsibility”
4 – Personal Identity	(2/6) R: Parfit, “Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons” O: Locke, <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> ; Rovane, “Branching Self-Consciousness”	(2/8) R: Swinburne, “Personal Identity: The Dualist Theory”
5 – Time	(2/13) R: McTaggart, “The Unreality of Time” O: Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> ; Haslanger, “Persistence, Change, and Explanation”	(2/15) R: Williams, “The Myth of Time’s Passage”

6 – Universals	(2/20) R: Price, “Universals and Resemblance” O: Plato, <i>Parmenides</i> ; Aristotle, <i>Categories</i> ; Swoyer, “Properties”*	(2/22) R: Quine, “On What There Is”
7 – Modality	(2/27) R: Kripke, Selections from <i>Naming and Necessity</i> O: Spinoza, <i>Ethics</i> ; Leech, “Logic and the Laws of Thought”	(3/1) R: Mortensen, “Anything is Possible”
8 – Logic	(3/6) R: Frege, “Logic” O: Steinberger, “The Normative Status of Logic”*, Russell, “Logical Pluralism”*	(3/8) R: Carnap, “Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology” [Two of three 1-page papers due]
9 – Spring Break	(3/13) No Class	(3/15) No Class
10 – Mathematics	(3/20) R: Godel, “What is Cantor’s Continuum Problem?” O: Field, <i>Science without Numbers</i> , Hamkins, “The Set-Theoretic Multiverse”	(3/22) R: Benacerraf, “Mathematical Truth”
11 – Existence	(3/27) R: Meinong, “The Theory of Objects”	(3/29) R: Russell, “On Denoting”

	<p>O: Hume, <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i>; Kant, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>; Parsons, <i>Nonexistent Objects</i>; Zalta, <i>Abstract Objects: An Introduction to Axiomatic Metaphysics</i></p>	
12 – Realism	<p>(4/3) R: Davidson, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme”</p> <p>O: Bilgrami, “Realism and Relativism”, Kuhn, <i>The Structure of Scientific Revolutions</i>; Appiah, <i>Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race</i>; de Beauvoir, <i>The Second Sex</i></p>	(4/5) R: Baghramian, “Why Conceptual Schemes?”
13 – Skepticism	<p>(4/10) R: Stroud, “The Problem of the External World”</p> <p>O: Descartes, <i>Meditations</i>, Vogt, “Ancient Skepticism”*; Goodman, “The New Riddle of Induction”; Lewis, “Natural Kinds”</p>	(4/12) R: Moore, “Proof of the External World”
14 – Justification	(4/17) R: Field, “Recent Debates about the A Priori”	(4/19) R: Bealer, “A Priori Knowledge and the Scope of Philosophy”

	O: Plato, <i>Meno</i> , Bonjour, <i>In Defense of Pure Reason</i>	
15 – Defeat	(4/24) R: Street, “A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value” O: Lasonen-Aarnio, “Higher-Order Evidence and the Limits of Defeat”, Clarke-Doane “Morality and Mathematics: The Evolutionary Challenge”	(4/26) R: McGrath, “Moral Knowledge and Moral Expertise”
16 - Metaphilosophy	(5/1) R: Sellars, “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man”; Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” (selections), Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> (selections) O: Kitcher, “Philosophy Inside Out”; Unger, <i>Empty Ideas: A Critique of Analytic Philosophy</i> [3-page paper due]	

Academic Integrity:

Please familiarize yourself with Columbia University’s policies on academic integrity at:
<http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicintegrity>

Please also familiarize yourself with Columbia University's honor code at:
<https://www.college.columbia.edu/ccshonorcode>

Failure to comply with Columbia's policies can result in serious disciplinary action.