

Reading and Composition Through Philosophy

Instructor

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Course Description

What are the principles that should govern our assessment of actions as morally right or wrong? Can we ever have knowledge about the world around us on the basis of perception, or about the future on the basis of our past experiences? What is a person, and what is involved in a person's continuing to exist through time? Such questions have long exercised philosophers, and will be among the topics that we will investigate in this course. We will begin by looking at some classic questions in the field of ethics. Since many people, after thinking about these issues, come to wonder whether we can really know things about what's right and wrong, we will next turn to the theory of knowledge, focusing on skepticism and the problem of induction. From there we will transition into metaphysics, specifically the topic of personal identity, which will then take us back to a question in applied ethics, namely, the permissibility of abortion.

This course is designed to teach students how to read and understand dense philosophical texts, how to critically evaluate philosophical arguments, and how to articulate that understanding lucidly in written form. The class will feature historical texts in philosophy (by e.g. Plato, Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Bentham) as well as work by contemporary philosophers, and students will produce two substantial philosophy papers. This course fulfills the university's second-semester reading and composition (R&C) requirement.

Requirements and Grading

- First Paper (2 pages): 6%
- Second Paper (6 pages; 2 drafts): 35%
- Third Paper (10 pages; 2 drafts): 45%
- Participation, review questions, and peer reviews: 14%

These are *requirements*, and must be fulfilled to pass the course. All the readings are collected in a course reader, available from Copy Central at 2576 Bancroft.

Tentative Schedule

Note: the dates for the readings are *subject to change*, and will depend on how quickly we move along. I will announce each week's readings the week before. Due dates for papers (including drafts, outlines, and peer reviews) will not change.

Part I Ethics

Week 1 1.20, 1.22	Introduction. What is philosophy? What is an argument? The <i>Euthyphro</i> Dilemma and Divine Command. Reading: Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> ; Antony, 'Good Minus God'
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Week 2 1.27, 1.29	Bentham's Utilitarianism. Reading: Bentham, <i>Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> (Ch. 1–4) <i>First paper due 1.29</i>
Week 3 2.3, 2.5	Hedonism and the experience machine. How to write a philosophy paper. Reading: Nozick, <i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i> (excerpt) <i>Review questions due 2.5</i>
Week 4 2.10, 2.12	Singer on charity and duty. A classic problem: trolleys. Reading: Singer, 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality'; Thomson, 'The Trolley Problem' <i>Review questions due 2.12</i>
Week 5 2.17, 2.19	Continuing on Trolleys. Thompson on abortion. Reading: Thomson, 'In Defense of Abortion' <i>Outline of second paper due 2.17</i>
Part II	Epistemology <hr/>
Week 6 2.24, 2.26	Descartes' meditations. Reading: Thomson, 'The Trolley Problem'; Descartes, 'Meditation One' <i>First draft of second paper due 2.26</i>
Week 7 3.3, 3.5	Moore's hands. Peer Review Session. Reading: Moore, 'Proof of an External World', Moore, 'Certainty' <i>Peer review for second paper due 3.5</i>
Week 8 3.10, 3.12	Dretske's response to skepticism. Reading: Dretske, 'The Pragmatic Dimension of Knowledge' <i>Review questions due 3.12</i>
Week 9 3.17, 3.19	Hume on Induction. Reading: Hume, <i>Enquiry</i> (excerpt) <i>Final draft of second paper due 3.19</i>
Week 10 3.24, 3.26	Spring Break
Week 11 3.31, 4.2	Goodman's new riddle of induction. Quine on natural kinds. Reading: Goodman, 'The New Riddle of Induction' ; Quine, 'Natural Kinds' <i>Outline of third paper due 4.2</i>
Part III	Metaphysics <hr/>
Week 12 4.7, 4.9	Locke on identity and persistence. Reading: Locke, <i>Of Identity and Diversity</i> <i>Review questions due 4.9</i>

Week 13 4.14, 4.16	Problem cases for Locke. McMahan's embodied mind account. Reading: Parfit, 'Personal Identity'; McMahan, <i>The Ethics of Killing</i> (excerpt)	<i>First draft of third paper due 4.16</i>
Week 14 4.21, 4.23	McMahan on personal identity and abortion. Peer Review Session. Reading: McMahan, <i>The Ethics of Killing</i> (excerpt)	<i>Peer review for third paper due 4.23</i>
Week 15 4.28, 4.30	Individual meetings on third paper.	<i>Final draft of third paper due May 7</i>

Course Policies

Participation

In addition to learning how to write philosophy papers, one of our aims in this class is to discuss philosophy together as a group. Some of the issues we will discuss may be emotionally charged, so remember to be respectful in your engagement with other students in the class.

Participation is taken into account in determining your course grade. I expect everyone to come to class having done the readings and to be ready to discuss them with the rest of us. Merely being physically present in class does not count as participation — if you are here, I expect you to be attentive, engaged, and respectful. Persistent tardiness, texting, sleeping etc. *will* negatively impact your grade.

Electronic Devices

Please do not use laptops, tablets, smartphones etc. in this class. If you need to use an electronic device in class, come talk to me about it during office hours.

Extensions and Late Work

To request an extension on an assignment you need to contact me *at least three days* before the due date. After that, extensions will be granted only in case of medical or family emergencies. Assignments submitted late will be penalized by one grade-step (e.g. B to B-) *immediately* and by an *additional* grade-step every 24 hours thereafter.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you require special accommodations due to a disability, please get in touch with me as soon as possible so that I can do whatever I can to help you in the course. To receive special accommodations, you will have to get a Letter of Accommodation from the [Disabled Students Program](#).

Academic Integrity

The following statement is from the [UC Berkeley Center for Teaching and Learning](#):

You are a member of an academic community at one of the world's leading research universities. Universities like Berkeley create knowledge that has a lasting impact in the world of ideas and on the lives of others; such knowledge can come from an undergraduate paper as well as the lab of an internationally known professor. One of the most important values of an academic community is the balance between the free flow of ideas and the respect for the intellectual property of others. Researchers don't use one another's research without permission; schol-

ars and students always use proper citations in papers; professors may not circulate or publish student papers without the writer's permission; and students may not circulate or post materials (handouts, exams, syllabi — any class materials) from their classes without the written permission of the instructor.

Any test, paper or report submitted by you and that bears your name is presumed to be your own original work that has not previously been submitted for credit in another course unless you obtain prior written approval to do so from your instructor. In all of your assignments, including your homework or drafts of papers, you may use words or ideas written by other individuals in publications, web sites, or other sources, but only with proper attribution. If you are not clear about the expectations for completing an assignment or taking a test or examination, be sure to seek clarification from your instructor or GSI beforehand. Finally, you should keep in mind that as a member of the campus community, you are expected to demonstrate integrity in all of your academic endeavors and will be evaluated on your own merits. The consequences of cheating and academic dishonesty — including a formal discipline file, possible loss of future internship, scholarship, or employment opportunities, and denial of admission to graduate school — are simply not worth it.

Any plagiarism or cheating will be penalized with a failing grade on the relevant paper or assignment at a minimum, and may result in a failing grade in the course and referral to the Center for Student Conduct.

Resources

Philosophical writing is in some ways quite different from the kind of writing you have most likely been asked to do in other classes in the past, so we will spend a fair bit of time talking about how to write a good philosophy paper in this class. I also encourage you to look at the following writing-related resources:

- [Berkeley Student Learning Center](#) (peer tutoring)
- Jim Pryor, [Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper](#)
- Harvard College Writing Center, [A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper](#)
- Angela Mendelovici, [A Sample Philosophy Paper](#)