

MAJOR ISSUES IN PHILOSOPHY (PHI1500) 8/30/2011

Baruch College, Fall 2011

Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30am-10:45am

Instructor: Henry Shevlin (hfshevlin@gmail.com)

Course Description:

Philosophy is the study of fundamental questions. Who are we? What is the meaning of life? Is there absolute right and wrong? Is there such a thing as a human soul? More than this, however, it is also a way of approaching problems using logical analysis and rigorous thought. This course is designed to give a basic grasp of the philosophical methodology and to consider a range of applications of this methodology. Over the semester, we will consider questions such as: does God exist? Do we have free will? Is morality just a matter of the greatest good for the greatest number? What is the relationship between the mind, brain, and soul?

Required Text:

Problems from Philosophy (3rd Edition) by James Rachels and Stuart Rachels; ISBN-10: 0073535893. This is available from the Baruch Bookstore. Readings additional to this textbook will be posted on Blackboard.

Requirements:

- (1)** All students must submit two short papers (word limit 700 words). I will assign a choice of questions for each paper. You will be given your first paper on October 6th and it is due on October 20th. You will be given your second paper on November 22nd and it is due on December 8th. **Each paper is 20% of your final grade (40% total).**
- (2)** There will be a two hour written exam with multiple choice questions in class on October 11th. **This exam is 20% of your final grade.**
- (3)** There will be a second two hour written exam with multiple choice questions in class on December 13th. **This exam is 30% of your final grade.**
- (4)** Your final grade will reflect a good attendance record, participation in class discussion, and short reading quizzes. **This will constitute the remaining 10% of your grade.**

Policies:

- (1) All students should do the required reading for each class and bring their copy of the reading along to class. Certain readings will be marked as optional. Reading these is not required, but showing knowledge of these texts in papers and in discussion will positively impact your grade.
- (2) Punctuality is important. Students who are consistently late will be refused entry to the class and will fail the course.
- (3) Philosophy is a subject that requires concentration and participation in discussion. For this reason, *students may not use electronic devices in class. If you use a laptop or a mobile phone in class, you will first be asked to turn it off, and then to leave the classroom.* If you wish to make notes, use a pen and paper. Additionally, summary notes will be provided each week.
- (4) All class materials, including readings, assignments, and admin (including this document) will be available on Blackboard.
- (5) All students are permitted up to three discretionary absences. I will expect students to catch up on reading for classes they miss. I must be informed *well in advance* of any additional absences. Failure to do so may result in failing the course.
- (6) Late assignments will be accepted. However, grade penalties will be imposed for every day that a paper is late.
- (7) I will only grade your papers once. This means I will not grade rewrites. Additionally, I will not examine draft material.
- (8) **PLAGIARISM.** I take academic honesty very seriously. I will randomly google sentences from all submitted work. If I find that a student has directly plagiarised another piece of work, or has made very extensive use of a source without citing it, he or she will fail the assignment. A subsequent offence will result in my contacting the school administration. See Baruch's plagiarism policy online: http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/academic/academic_honesty.html.

Questions/Problems

I am happy to help any students who have questions or problems. The best way to contact me is via email. Note that I will get to your questions as soon as I can, but I cannot guarantee an immediate reply. Note that reading and writing philosophy papers is unlike reading and writing papers in any other subject, so that you will be required to develop new skills. Jim Pryor has some excellent guidelines on how to read and write philosophy papers. See <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/index.html>. We will also discuss these issues in class. Additionally, for assistance with citation formats, see the Newman Library's online guide: http://newman.baruch.cuny.edu/help/tutorial/Specific_Topics/cit_guides.htm.

SCHEDULE

Please note this schedule is subject to change; additional readings will be mentioned in class and posted on Blackboard.

Topic 0: Introduction (8/30)

No readings.

Topic 1: What is Philosophy? (9/1)

- Simon Blackburn, Introduction to *Think*

Topic 2: Logic (9/6)

- Rachels, Appendix, How to Evaluate Arguments

Topic 3: Philosophy of Religion (9/8, 9/13, 9/15)

- Rachels, Chapter 2, God and the Origin of the Universe
- *Daniel Dennett: Darwin's Dangerous Idea (extract)
- *Ricky Gervais: *Why I'm an atheist*

Class 4: Free Will (9/20, 9/22, 9/27)

- Rachels, Chapter 8, The Case Against Free Will
- Rachels, Chapter 9, The Debate over Free Will

Topic 5: Personal Identity (9/29, 10/4, 10/6)

- Rachels, Chapter 5, The Problem of Personal Identity
- *Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (extract)

PAPERS ASSIGNED 10/6, DUE 10/20

MIDTERM EXAM: 10/11

Topic 6: Epistemology (10/13, 10/18)

- René Descartes, *Meditations* I-II

- *Rachels, Chapter 10, Our Knowledge of the World Around Us

Topic 7: Philosophy of Mind (10/20, 10/25, 10/27)

- Rachels, Chapter 6, Body and Mind
- Rachels, Chapter 7, Could a Machine Think?

Topic 8: Ethics I - Why be moral? (11/1, 11/3)

- Rachels, Chapter 11, Ethics and Objectivity

Topic 9: Ethics II – Varieties of Moral Theory (11/8, 11/10)

- Rachels, Chapter 12, Why Should We Be Moral?

Topic 10: Ethics III - Applied Ethics (11/15, 11/17, 11/22, 11/29)

- Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defence of Abortion”
- Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”
- Peter Singer, extract from *Animal Liberation*
- Philippa Foot, extract from *The Problem of Abortion and The Doctrine of Double Effect*

NB: No class on 11/24 – have a good Thanksgiving.

FINAL PAPER ASSIGNED 11/22, DUE 12/8

Topic 11: Life and Death (12/1, 12/6, 12/8)

- Thomas Nagel, “Death”
- Rachels, Chapter 4, Do We Survive Death?
- Rachels, Chapter 13, The Meaning of Life

FINAL EXAM: 12/13