

Introduction to Philosophy

PHI 101 Fall 2014

MWF 10:00-10:55 AM

Instructor: Mark Bryant Budolfson
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Office Hours: Mondays 2:30-4pm and by appointment
Course Website:

Course Description

This course is an introduction to philosophy with an emphasis on ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, political philosophy, and the philosophy of religion. We will discuss issues like the following: Is it morally wrong to enjoy a luxurious lifestyle while people in third-world countries are suffering and dying? How should governments help the poor, and why? Is it always wrong to kill innocent people? Is torture ever morally defensible? Is there a single true morality? Can the existence of God be proven or disproven? Can belief in God be rational? Are we typically justified in believing the things that we believe? What is it to know something to be true versus merely believing it to be true?

Required Texts

Rene Descartes. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

All other readings can be downloaded from the course website in .pdf format.

Assignments and Evaluation

There will be two major exams, two major written assignments, and a number of small quizzes and other assignments. The major exams are a mid-term and comprehensive final that will account for 20% and 30% of your grade respectively. The major written assignments will each account for 15% of your grade, and the small quizzes and other assignments will account for the remaining 20%. Grades will be curved. Late work will be accepted only under the most compelling circumstances.

The major exams will be completed in-class, and will consist mostly of medium-length written responses. The first major written assignment will be a 3-5 page paper on a narrowly-defined topic, and the second major paper will be an end-of-semester paper with a recommended length of 10-15 pages that is designed to build on your initial paper (if you so choose). Many suggestions will be provided for the second paper, and the expectation is that you will meet with me one-on-one to discuss a serious draft of your final paper several weeks before it is due.

Additional Course Information

Students must abide by all university regulations regarding academic integrity, classroom behavior, etc. A copy of university policy regarding these issues is attached. If you have a disability or other recognized special needs, the instructor is happy to accommodate you—please inform the instructor and the appropriate administrative offices at the beginning of the semester.

Tentative Schedule

Week 1,2,3

Does Morality Derive from Human Rights? What Makes Acts Right or Wrong?

Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”
Don Marquis, “An Argument that Abortion is Wrong”
Peter Singer, “In Place of the Old Ethic”
Thomas Nagel, “War and Massacre”
Robert Nozick, “The Experience Machine”
Judith Jarvis Thomson, “The Trolley Problem”

Quiz

Week 4

Is there a Single True Morality?

Gilbert Harman, “Moral Relativism”
Judith Jarvis Thomson, “Reply to Harman on Moral Relativism”

Draft of First Major Written Assignment Due

Week 5,6

What is it to have a Justified Belief? What is it to Know Something to be True?

Rene Descartes, *Meditation One*
John Pollock, “Skeptical Problems”
First Major Written Assignment Due
G.E. Moore, selection from “Proof of an External World”
Alvin Goldman, “What is Justified Belief?”
Stewart Cohen, selection from “Justification and Truth”
Rene Descartes, *Meditations Five and Six*
John Pollock, “The Gettier Problem”
Catherine Elgin, “The Epistemic Efficacy of Stupidity”

Mid-Term Exam

Week 7,8,9

**Can the Existence of God be Proven or Disproven?
Can Belief in God be Rational?**

Rene Descartes, *Meditations Two through Four*
Handout on the Ontological Argument
Handout on the Cosmological Argument
William Paley, "The Argument from Design"
Elliott Sober, selection from *Philosophy of Biology*
John Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence"
Peter Van Inwagen, "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil"

Quiz

Blaise Pascal, "The Wager"
William Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief"
Peter Van Inwagen, "'It Is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything upon Insufficient Evidence'"
William James, "The Will to Believe"

Quiz

Week 10

Are People Morally Responsible when they Act Wrongly?

Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Free Will, Determinism, Compatibilism"
Dana Nelkin, selection from *Making Sense of Freedom and Responsibility*
Susan Wolf, "The Moral of Moral Luck"

Week 11

Is it Morally Wrong to Live a Luxurious Life while Others Are Suffering and Dying?

Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"
Peter Unger, selection from "Contextual Analysis in Ethics"
David Lewis, "Illusory Innocence?"

Quiz

Week 12

**What is the Best Way to Measure Social Progress?
Should Governments Help the Poor?**

Martha Nussbaum, "The Problem with GDP as a Measure of Social Progress"
Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Politics"

Final Exam and Final Paper Due