

Per-Erik Milam

Main
C.V.
Research
Current
Course
Teaching
Other
Contact

Philosophy 1: Introduction to Philosophy

This course is an introduction to some of the central problems of philosophy, as well as to the methods used to investigate them. We will be considering four problems that have vexed philosophers since the discipline first arose over 2500 years ago and one question that, despite its importance, has only begun to receive widespread attention in the last century.

Skepticism. In this unit, we ask whether any of our commonsense beliefs about the world are justified. Does the paper (or screen) on which you are reading this sentence exist? Does the hand that holds it exist? Does the brain that controls that hand exist? Do you exist as anything more than an incorporeal mind? Skepticism suggests that the intuitive answer to these questions—"Yes!"—is mistaken and that all such commonsense beliefs are false.

God. In this unit, we ask whether God exists and, if so, what He is like. Is God the only thing that can explain why our universe exists? Does the complexity of our universe demonstrate the existence of an omniscient and omnipotent creator? Is the existence of God, as we traditionally understand Him, challenged by the existence of evil in the world? And, finally, is God's omniscience and omnipotence incompatible with human free will?

Free Will. In this unit, we continue our discussion of free will outside the religious context. We ask whether human beings have free will and whether they are ever responsible for their actions. We will consider different challenges to free will and responsibility—e.g., determinism, luck, manipulation, environment, and upbringing—as well as competing solutions to these challenges.

Identity & Death. In this unit, we ask what it is that explains a person's identity. What makes her the same person today as she was yesterday or a month ago? We also ask whether a person can continue to exist after the death of her body or her mind. Finally, we ask what, if anything, makes death bad for the person who dies. After all, how can something be bad for a person if she's dead?

Feminism. In this final unit, we consider the case for feminism. We first examine the evidence for the existence of sexism, patriarchy, and gender privilege. We then ask what feminism is and why it is relevant to philosophy. In doing so, we examine the various conceptions of feminism defended by and imposed upon feminists at different times. We conclude by reflecting on the moral and political implications of accepting feminism. What does being a feminist require of one as a citizen and as a person?

The aim of this course is to provide the philosophical skills and knowledge necessary to think critically about philosophical problems, whether abstract or concrete. My hope is that students will leave this course with the ability and curiosity to examine the philosophical problems we have covered and any others that they might encounter, whether in another philosophy class, in another discipline, or in their daily lives.

INSTRUCTOR

Instructor: Per-Erik Milam
Email: pmilam@ucsd.edu
Office: HSS 7093
Lecture: HSS 1128A
Office Hours: Wed. 6-8pm at Muir Woods Coffee Shop (next to Roots and under Summit)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Classroom Conduct: Everyone is expected to be respectful of one another in the classroom. Basic respect entails, among other things, being on time, not leaving early, not disrupting or interrupting class, not using cell phones, not talking when others are speaking, and demonstrating respect for others' viewpoints during

discussion.

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory and requires attending every class from beginning to end. (Students with athletic, religious, or critical personal obligations should inform me as far in advance as possible of missing class so that necessary arrangements can be made.) The final exam will cover material both from lecture and readings. Lectures will often introduce material not in the readings. Students are expected to come to class with an adequate understanding of the arguments made in the readings. Students should also be prepared to discuss and assess the assigned readings and are encouraged to present arguments of their own. *Learning philosophy is inseparable from doing philosophy.* This means that in order to understand philosophical theories, including your own, you must ask questions about them, raise objections to them, and revise and refine them in response to problems.

Grades: Final grades will be calculated from participation, four short papers, one longer paper, and a final exam. The short papers will be 600 words and will be due throughout the quarter. The longer paper will be 1200 words and will be due in the middle of the quarter.

1. Participation	10%	0-3 points
2. Short Papers	30% (10% each)	0-9 points (0-3 points each)
3. Longer Paper	30%	0-9 points
4. Final Exam	30%	0-9 points

Translating total points into final letter grades

A+	30 or at my discretion	B	21-22	C-	13-14	F	0-6
A	27-29	B-	19-20	D+	11-12		
A-	25-26	C+	17-18	D	9-10		
B+	23-24	C	15-16	D-	7-8		

Participation: Participation can be gained in three ways. First, you can get full participation credit by visiting my office hours once and talking about philosophy for half an hour. You should come with a question about a philosophical topic; you should have a tentative answer to it; and your question and answer should demonstrate that you have thought carefully about the topic. Second, you can get full participation credit by submitting a question about the reading once every week (10 weeks, 10 questions). Your question should demonstrate that you've thought carefully about the topic. (You must submit your question to me by email the night before class by 8pm.) Finally, you can get participation credit by asking questions and participating in discussion during lecture and sections. You can also lose participation credit by missing class, being late, or leaving early.

Computer Policy: Use of computers and other electronic devices is *not allowed* in class, except with written permission from, for example, the Office for Students with Disabilities.

SYLLABUS

Required Texts:

- John Perry - *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*
- Internet sources, linked or available as a PDF on the course website

Paper Prompts

- Short Paper 1
- Short Paper 2
- Short Paper 3
- Long Paper

Handouts

- Week 1: Logic
- Week 2: Skepticism
- Week 3: God
- Week 4: God (continued)
- Week 5: Free Will
- Week 6: Free Will (continued)
- Week 7: Personal Identity
- Week 8: Immortality

- Week 9: Feminism
- Week 10: Feminism (continued)
- Final Exam: Study Guide
- Phil 13: Sample Final Exam (our final will have a similar structure)

COURSE INTRODUCTION

Monday 1/6

- Course introduction

Wednesday 1/8

- Plato – *The Apology*

Friday 1/10

- Louis P. Pojman – “Excursus: A Little Bit of Logic” (2014)
- (**optional reading**) James Rachels – “How to Evaluate Arguments” (2011)

UNIT 1: SKEPTICISM

Monday 1/13

- Michael Huemer – “The Lure of Radical Skepticism” (2001)

Wednesday 1/15

- Michael Huemer – “Easy Answers to Skepticism” (2001)

Friday 1/17

- Discussion

Monday 1/20

- **Martin Luther King Jr. Day (no class)**

UNIT 2: GOD

Wednesday 1/22

- William Rowe – “The Cosmological Argument” (2006)

Friday 1/24

- William Paley – *Natural Theology* (1801)
- David Hume – *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779)

Monday 1/27

- Eleonore Stump - Knowledge Freedom and the Problem of Evil (1983)

Wednesday 1/29

- Linda Zagzebski – “Recent Work on Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will” (2002)

Friday 1/31

- Discussion
- (**YouTube**) "The Best of All Possible World's" from Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*

UNIT 3: FREE WILL

Monday 2/3

- Galen Strawson – “Impossibility of Moral Responsibility” (1994)

Wednesday 2/5

- Robert Kane – “Some Neglected Pathways in the Free Will Labyrinth” (2002) only sections 1-8

Friday 2/7

- Harry Frankfurt – “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility” (1969)
- (**extra video**) Harry Frankfurt on the Daily Show (2005)

Monday 2/10

- Susan Wolf – “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility” (1989)

Wednesday 2/12

- J.J.C. Smart - "Free Will, Praise, and Blame" (1961)

Friday 2/14

- Discussion
- (**optional reading**) Kerri Smith - "Neuroscience vs. Philosophy: Taking Aim at Free Will" (2011)
- (**YouTube**) Rush - "Freewill" (lyrics are here)
- (**optional reading**) Fyodor Dostoevsky – *Notes from Underground* (1864) only part 1

Monday 2/17

- **Presidents' Day (no class)**

UNIT 4: IDENTITY & DEATH

Wednesday 2/19

- John Perry – *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality* (1st night) (1978)

Friday 2/21

- John Perry – *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality* (2nd night) (1978)

Monday 2/24

- John Perry – *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality* (3rd night) (1978)

Wednesday 2/26

- Thomas Nagel – “Death” (1971)

Friday 2/28

- Frances Kamm – “Why Is Death Bad and Worse than Pre-natal Non-existence?” (1988)

Monday 3/3

- Shelly Kagan – “Immortality” (2012)

Wednesday 3/5

- Discussion

- **(optional reading)** Philip Larkin – “Aubade” (1977)

UNIT 5:

Friday 3/7

- Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn - "Rule by Rape" (2009)

- The World (PRI) - Gender Violence in Cambodia (2013)

Monday 3/10

- Estelle Freedman - "The Historical Case for Feminism" (2002)

- Eileen Pollack - "Why Are There Still So Few Women in Science?" (3 October 2013)

- Emily Graslie - "Where My Ladies At?" *The Brain Scoop* (YouTube)

Wednesday 3/12

- Allan G. Johnson - "Where Are We?" from *The Gender Knot* (2005)

Friday 3/14

- Discussion

- **(optional reading)** Rebecca Solnit - "Men Who Explain Things" (13 April 2008)

- **(optional reading)** Carol Ann Duffy - "Mrs. Aesop" and "Mrs. Sisyphus" *The World's Wife*

FINAL – Wednesday, March 19th, 11:30AM-2:30PM

Last updated: 18 September, 2013