

# Phil 120: Problems in Philosophy

Spring 2012  
Tuesday 6:30-9:00  
Wilson 104

Instructor: Tyler Paytas  
E-mail: tylerpaytas@wustl.edu  
Office: Wilson 116  
Office Hours: Tuesday 3:00-4:00, Thursday 2:30-3:30, and by appointment

## Course Description

Is there a real world, or is everything a figment of my imagination? Do we have free will, or do our brains simply respond mechanically to stimuli? What, if anything, distinguishes right from wrong? Philosophers relentlessly pursue the fundamental questions of life, and their techniques apply to problems in any discipline or endeavor. They establish standards of evidence, provide rational methods of resolving conflicts, and create techniques for evaluating ideas and arguments.

This course is a survey of several major areas of Western philosophy: logic, epistemology, ethics, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of religion. Students explore such concepts as the nature of the world and how we have access to knowledge of the world; moral behavior and the nature of good and evil; the relationship between minds and bodies; the relationship between our thoughts and the external world; arguments for and against the existence of God; and how we should employ logical analysis and empirical observation to evaluate arguments.

For each topic, students consider positions of historical thinkers such as Plato, Descartes, and Hume, as well as those of contemporary philosophers such as Derek Parfit and John Heil. Students reflect upon philosophical issues through reading assignments, lectures, class discussions, and formal critical essays in order to develop the analytical skills necessary for effectively evaluating arguments, thinking carefully, and communicating with clarity.

## Learning Objectives

Logic and Reasoning: Understand the fundamentals of argument construction and evaluation. Be able to recognize logical fallacies.

Philosophy of Religion: Understand and explain clearly the theistic conception of God; explain the different arguments for the existence of God; explain the problem of evil for theistic belief; and understand the complexity of evaluating justified religious belief.

Epistemology: Learn how to evaluate the commonsense idea that we often have knowledge and that we are often rationally justified in the beliefs we have. Understand the prominent theories of knowledge including their strengths and weaknesses.

Philosophy of Mind: Understand the significance of the mind/body problem and the problem of free will, and gain knowledge of the most important proposed solutions to these problems.

Ethics: Learn different principles and theories which attempt to explain what makes an action right or wrong, or what makes a character trait good or bad. Investigate the deeper meaning of moral concepts such as 'right', 'wrong', 'duty', 'justice', and 'obligation'. Understand what is at issue in the debate between moral realists and moral anti-realists.

## Expectations

This course has no prerequisites. Students are expected to attend all lectures, read the required texts, and do the best work they can on all assignments. Students are also expected to take an active role in their learning by raising questions in class and participating in discussion. The instructor will attempt to provide interesting and informative material for students to read, give helpful lectures, provide assignments and activities that challenge and stimulate interest, be available to answer any questions, and provide fair and timely evaluations of student achievement.

## Required Texts

- *Core Questions in Philosophy: A Text with Readings* 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Elliot Sober. Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009
- *Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. John Heil. Routledge, 2009
- Additional readings will be distributed in class.

## Evaluation

10%	Participation	
30%	Midterm Exam	(10/23)
30%	Term Paper	(12/1)
30%	Final Exam	(12/18)

*Participation* – Much class time will be spent discussing the assigned readings. For that reason, it is essential that each student come to class prepared with questions, comments, or objections. To ensure that this is the case, each student will submit a one page (typed, double spaced) summary of the assigned readings at the beginning of each class period. Participation grades will be determined by the quality of the weekly summaries, the quality and frequency of contributions to class discussion, and regularity of attendance. Students can also participate by attending office hours. Please do not be afraid to share your thoughts with the class—undeveloped ideas often lead to fruitful discussions.

*Term Paper* – Students are expected to write one paper with a length of 1,200 – 1,500 words. Students can either choose a topic suggested by the instructor, or come up with their own paper idea. Anyone who wants to do the latter must have the paper proposal approved by the instructor. I will provide further details about the paper assignment and expectations later in the semester. Some class time will be devoted to discussion of strategies for writing papers.

*Late Papers* – Papers are due at the beginning of class on the assigned date. Papers not received then will be penalized 5% off their base grade immediately, and another 5% for every 24 hour period thereafter until they are received.

*Academic Integrity* – All students are expected to adhere to high standards of academic integrity. In this class especially, that means that all work presented as original must, in fact, be original, and the ideas and contributions of others must always be appropriately acknowledged. Quotations must, of course, be acknowledged, but so must summaries, paraphrases, and the ideas of others. *Course Listings* and *Bearings*, and the [University Policies website \(www.wustl.edu/policies/undergraduate-academic-integrity.html\)](http://www.wustl.edu/policies/undergraduate-academic-integrity.html) all contain full statements of the University's policy on academic integrity. The policy is summarized at [www.ja.wustl.edu/academicintegrity/resources-policysummary.php](http://www.ja.wustl.edu/academicintegrity/resources-policysummary.php). If you have any doubts or questions about documentation requirements, please ask me. Don't guess.

*Electronic Devices* – Cell phones, music players, and computers may not be used during class. Ringers should be turned off before entering, and texting is prohibited.

**Course Schedule** (Subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class and via e-mail.)

**PART I: Logic and Reasoning**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading Due</u>
8/28	Introduction to Philosophy	None
9/4	Arguments and Reasoning	Sober chs 1-3

**PART II: Philosophy of Religion**

9/11	The Cosmological and Ontological Arguments	Sober chs 4 & 8
9/18	Design vs. Evolution	Sober chs 5-7
9/25	Pascal's Wager and the Problem of Evil	Sober chs 10-11

**PART III: Epistemology**

10/2	Defining Knowledge	Sober ch 12; Zagzebski
10/9	Foundationalism and Reliabilism	Sober chs 13-14
10/16	Problem of Induction	Sober chs 15-16
10/23	Midterm	None

**PART IV: Philosophy of Mind**

10/30	Dualism and the Mind/Body Problem	Heil chs 1, 3-4
11/6	Identity Theory	Heil ch 6
11/13	Functionalism and Qualia	Sober ch 23; Heil ch. 9
11/20	Free Will	Sober chs 24-26; Ekstrom

**PART V: Ethics**

11/27	Utilitarianism	Sober ch 32; excerpts from Sidgwick
12/4	Kant	Sober ch 33
12/11	Virtue Ethics	Sober ch 34; Hursthouse
12/18	Final Exam	None