

PHILOSOPHY 2050
PHILOSOPHY: THE BIG QUESTIONS

INSTRUCTOR: Scott Wilson
OFFICE: Millett 385
OFFICE HOURS: Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:00-2:00, and by appointment
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REQUIRED TEXT

John Perry, Michael Bratman, & John Fischer, eds. Introduction to Philosophy: Classic and Contemporary Readings, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Philosophy begins with a sense of wonder, and proceeds by way of critical questioning and exploration of our most basic beliefs. Philosophers pursue the “big questions” of life, which is exactly what we are going to do in this class. Time permitting, our discussion will focus around five of these big questions: (1) Can you survive the death of your body, and if not, can it be bad for you to die? (2) Is there a God? (3) Is it rational to be moral? (4) Are there “right answers” to ethical questions, or is ethics just subjective? (5) What is the meaning of life? We will examine these questions and put our own beliefs about them under critical scrutiny. Our goal in these discussions will not be to arrive at the truth of these matters, but will instead be to appreciate the complexities and difficulties each raises for our most fundamental and deeply held beliefs.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

PHL 2040 satisfies Area 4 of the Wright State Core Requirements:

Area 4 requirements will help students develop an intellectual and aesthetic appreciation of significant artistic works and of important literary, religious, and philosophical texts. Students will explore how such works express both personal vision and cultural concerns. They will also examine the specific means writers, composers and creative and performing artists adopt to communicate with their audience.

More specifically, we can divide the goals into two broad categories: familiarizing students with certain important philosophical ideas on the one hand (the *content* of the course), and on the other developing in students important *skills* needed to be productive, self-aware, and flourishing people.

In terms of the goals focusing on the *content* of the philosophical ideas we will consider, this course will allow students to:

- Learn about the ideas and arguments of some of the historically most important philosophers
- Discover the interconnections between these ideas and arguments
- Appreciate how these ideas and arguments are relevant to the concerns of any intelligent person

In terms of the goals focusing on the *skills* gained by studying philosophy, this course will allow students to

- Develop their critical thinking skills by forcing them to search for *reasons* for various beliefs and to evaluate the *strength* of those reasons
- Sharpen both their written and oral communication skills
- Increase *precision* and *rigor* in thinking and writing
- Extend their imaginations of what is possible

INTEGRATED WRITING LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will be expected to produce writing that:

- Demonstrates their understanding of course content,
- Is appropriate for the audience and purpose of a particular writing task,
- Demonstrates the degree of mastery of disciplinary writing conventions appropriate to the course (including documentation conventions), and
- Shows competency in standard edited American English.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- (1) Argumentative essay (rough draft required), worth 350.
- (2) Three in-class tests, each worth 200 points.
- (3) Attendance and participation, 50 points.
- (4) In order to receive a passing grade, students must complete all papers and all tests.

There are a total of 1000 possible points to earn for the course. Grades will be assigned as follows: 1000-900= A; 899-800 = B; 799-700 = C; 699-600 = D; 599 and below = F.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Weeks 1-2: Can you survive the death of your body?

- 1.) Perry, "Dialogue Concerning Personal Identity and Immortality", pp. 312-33.

Weeks 2-3: Can it be bad for you to die?

- 1.) Nagel "Death", pp. 813-17.
- 2.) Brueckner, "Why is it Bad to Die?", pp. 818-24.

Weeks 4-5: Can we prove that God exists?

- 1.) Anselm, "The Ontological Argument" pp. 42-43.
- 2.) Descartes, "Meditation 5", pp. 151-53.
- 3.) Aquinas, "The Existence of God", pp. 44-47.
- 4.) Descartes, "Meditation 3", pp. 142-47.
- 5.) Paley, "Natural Theology", pp. 47-52.
- 6.) Pascal, "The Wager", pp. 52-56.

Week 6: Can we prove that God does not exist?

- 1.) Leibniz, "The Best of All Possible Worlds", pp. 95-96.
- 2.) Perry, "A Dialogue on Good, Evil, and the Existence of God" pp. 97-120.

Weeks 7-9: Is it rational to be moral?

- 1.) Plato, "The Republic", pp. 639-676.
- 2.) Gauthier, "Morality and Advantage"

Weeks 10-12: Is morality objective?

- 1.) James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism", (handout)
- 2.) James Rachels, "Subjectivism in Ethics", (handout)
- 3.) Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values", pp. 708-19.

Weeks 12-15: What is the meaning of life?

- 1.) Nagel, "The Absurd", pp. 755-62.
- 2.) Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus", pp. 762-65.
- 3.) Richard Taylor, "The Meaning of Human Existence", pp. 765-782.
- 4.) Wolf, "The Meaning of Lives", pp. 782-794.

CLASS POLICIES

A.) Policy on academic dishonesty

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. You are required to be familiar with the guidelines of Academic Integrity as stated in the Student Handbook. A link to this statement can be found at this address:
http://www.wright.edu/students/judicial/stu_integrity.html

B.) Policy on late papers / missed tests

Late papers will almost never be accepted. If you cannot turn in a paper on time, then you must come and see me to discuss why the paper is late and I will decide on a case-by-case (yet impartial) basis whether to allow the late paper to be turned in. You can avoid all of that mess by turning your papers in on time. Likewise, there are very few good reasons to miss a test. Make-up tests will only be given to students who have a legitimate and verifiable reason to have missed the test. If you miss a test, see me as soon as possible.

C.) Cell phone policy

Turn your phones off before entering class. Do not let me catch you using your cell phone, either by talking on it, text messaging other people, or checking your text messages. Turn them off and leave them off.

D.) Class etiquette

The main rule here is this: **be respectful of others**. Do not ever make fun of, or otherwise harass, other students. Let everyone express their views, and do not shun or mock anyone for disagreeing with you. It is disrespectful to talk while someone else has the floor. If you want to talk, address the class. If you do not want to address the class, then be quiet. Getting up to leave class early and entering class late are rude as well. Shuffling your papers before class is over, in an attempt to indicate that you think class is nearing completion, is also rude. Be still and pay attention. **If you cannot be respectful of others, you should not be in college and are not welcome in my classes.**