METHODS AND PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT

PHIL XXXX
Summer 2009
Time: XXXXXX
Room: XXXXXX
Instructor: Sebastian Watzl (email: sw2258@columbia.edu)
Office Hours: XXXXXX or by appointment

Course Description
The aim of this course is to provide an introduction to philosophical thinking. On the one hand, you are going to learn what philosophy is by discussing some of the big philosophical problems: does god exist?, what can we know?, what is (good) science?, the mind-body problem, survival and death, freedom of the will, what is moral? We will use both classic and contemporary philosophical readings. The second goal is to learn how to do philosophy by developing your own critical and argumentative skills in engaging with these problems and the texts we read.

Texts
Almost all texts are in:


You are required to get this book. Some additional readings will be handed out in class.

Requirements
You are expected to attend all classes and have the readings for each class done before you come to class. The lectures will generally presuppose familiarity with the texts, and in order to follow and participate you need to have done the reading. Reading philosophy is hard. You should read carefully, and you will need to read each text more than once.

Since one of the main aims of this course is to help you develop your own argumentative and critical skills, you need to come to class and participate. Talking about philosophy is one of the best ways of learning how to do it (and a lot of fun!).

There will be three short paper assignments and a final exam. The paper assignments will ask you to analyze and discuss material covered in class. In order to develop your writing skills, I intend to give you detailed comments on your writing. Often papers improve significantly by re-writing. A draft of the first paper must therefore be submitted before it is finally handed in. This draft will not be graded, but not submitting it will lower your overall grade for the course by one third letter grade.
Deadlines are strict. No late papers! Late papers will be penalized by one third letter grade per day.

Grading:

- 20 % for first paper
- 20 % for second paper
- 30 % for third paper
- 30 % for final exam

**Academic Dishonesty**

Academic Dishonesty, like Plagiarism or cheating, will not be to be tolerated. If you are caught committing any form of academic dishonesty you will at least fail the course and will be reported to the University (which in severe cases might even result in expulsion). If you have any doubts about what might count as plagiarizing please talk to me.

**Additional resources**

**Guidelines on Reading and Writing Philosophy:**

- Philosophical Terms and Methods
  (http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/)
- Reading Philosophy
  (http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html)
- Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper
  (http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html)

I might also post stuff related to the course online. Check courseworks.

**Schedule**

1. *Introduction*

   **Reason and Religious Belief**

2. *The existence of god: the ontological argument*

   Anselm, St.: “The Ontological Argument. From Proslogium” (RR: 6-7)

   Rowe, W.: “The Ontological Argument” (RR: 11-23)

   *recommended*: Gaunilo of Marmoutiers: “On Behalf of the Fool” (RR: 8-10)

3. *The existence of god: the problem of evil*
Dostoevsky, F.: “Rebellion” (RR: 72-78)

Mackie, J.L.: “Evil and Omnipotence” (RR: 78-86)

4. **Pascals Wager**


Blackburn, S.: “Miracles and Testimony” (concentrate on second and third section) (RR: 122-128)

**Rationality and the Methods of Science**

5. *Reasons for Belief: evidentialism vs. pragmatism*


James, W.: “The Will to Believe” (RR: 106-114)

**Draft of First paper Due (Monday, July 13th)**

6. *The Problem of Induction*

Hume, D.: “An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding” (Section IV and V: Part I) (RR: 222-230)

*recommended*: Salmon, W. “An Encounter with David Hume” (RR: 245-263)

7. *Goodman’s New Riddle of Induction*


8. *Good Science, Bad Science and Pseudoscience*

Kitcher, Ph.: “Believing Where We Cannot Prove” (RR: 268-277)

**Mind and Body**

9. *The mind-body problem: Materialism*

Carruthers, P.: “The Mind is the Brain.” (RR: 301-309)

**First paper Due (Monday July 21st)**

10. *The mind-body problem: Dualism*

Nagel, T.: “What is it like to be a bat?” (handed out in class)

11. *Personal identity and survival I*

   Perry, J. “A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality” (The First and Second Night) (RR: 387-401)


12. *Personal identity and survival II*

   Perry, J. “A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality” (The Third Night) (RR: 401-406)

   Dennett, D.: “Where am I?” (RR: 378-386)

13. *Self or No Self?*


   **Determinism, Freedom and Responsibility**

14. *Hard Determinism*

   Holbach, P.: ”The Illusion of Free Will.” (RR: 458-63)

15. *Compatibilism*


**Second paper Due (Thursday July 31st)**

16. *Libertarianism*


17. *Moral Luck*

   Nagel, T.: “Moral Luck” (RR: 493-500)

   **Moral Questions**

18. *Psychological Egoism*

   Feinberg, J.: “Psychological Egoism” (RR: 520-532)

19. *Ethical Egoism*

   Rachels, J.: “Ethical Egoism” (RR: 532-540)
20. *Utilitarianism*


21. *Problems with Utilitarianism*

Caritt, E.F.: “Criticisms of Utilitarianism” (handed out in class)

**Third paper Due (Monday August 11th)**

22. *Famine problems*


23. *Another Look at Famine problems: Kantian Ethics*


24. *Morality and Other Cultures*


25. **Final Exam (Time and Place TBA)**