

Introduction to Philosophy

Class schedule:---

Class Instructor: Katherine Valde

Office hours: ---

Class Location: ---

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Office Location: ---

Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom. Thus, while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to what things are, it greatly increases our knowledge as to what they may be; it removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never traveled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect.

-Bertrand Russell

Course Description:

For the next fourteen weeks, we will confront some of great debates in the history of philosophy. We will address such questions as: Do we know anything? And if yes, how? Is there free will? What makes us morally responsible for our choices? Are our minds purely physical objects? Might a computer become capable of human-like consciousness? Through engaging in debates surrounding questions like these we will hope to understand something about the nature of philosophy, including why and how we should go about it.

Required Text: *What does it all mean?* By Thomas Nagel (1987) - All other readings will be provided via PDF.

Class Expectations:

Do the readings. *Think* about the readings. Our class will not be engaging for you if you do not come to class prepared. Treat each other and the instructor with respect. Be prepared to be challenged.

Plagiarism: The plagiarist is “the student or scholar who leads readers to believe that what they are reading is the original work of the writer when it is not...” For the BU policy on plagiarism see:

<http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/>

Grading:

Short Papers- 70%

You will complete 7 one page papers, each worth 10 points. Papers must answer the questions in the prompt. Papers must be no more than one page, and must be written with no less than an 11 pt font and 1.5 line spacing. Papers will be docked a full grade for each page that exceeds the limit of one, and for each day they are late. Except in the case of documented emergencies, *electronic submissions will not be accepted.*

Participation - 30%

5-min reading quizzes given at the beginning of randomly selected classes worth 1 points each. If you are late or absent on a given day, you will automatically receive a 0 for any quiz that may occur. You will also be asked to complete midterm and final assessments of the course and yourself. These will be graded only on completion, worth 5 total points. You may earn the final 10 points of your participation grade through your contributions to in class discussion.

Reading Schedule & Assignments:

Note: the schedule below may change as the term unfolds. You will be alerted of such changes via email.

Week 1:

Tuesday: Introduction. What is Philosophy? What is an Argument?
Thursday: Nagel ch5: *The Meaning of Words*

Week 2:

Tuesday: Kat Chow, “Politically Correct!: The Phrase Has Gone From Wisdom To Weapon”, *NPR*
Thursday: (no reading)
Question 1: Summarize the problem of meaning, argue for or against externalism about meaning.
Paper due by the end of class

Week 3:

Tuesday: Nagel ch4: *The Mind Body Problem*
Thursday: Alan Jasanoff, “The Cerebral Mistique”, *AEON*

Week 4:

Tuesday: (no reading)
Question 2: Summarize the mind-body problem, argue for or against physicalism.
Paper due by the end of class
Thursday: Nagel ch6: *Free Will*

Week 5:

Tuesday: selection from: Susan Wolf “Asymmetrical Freedom”, *The Journal of Philosophy*
Thursday: (no reading)
Question 3: Summarize the potential problem physicalism causes for moral responsibility, argue for or against human moral responsibility.
Paper due by the end of class

Week 6:

Tuesday: Nagel ch7: *Right and Wrong*
Thursday: Paul Boghossian, “The Maze of Moral Relativism”, *NYT The Stone*

Week 7:

Tuesday: (no reading)
Question 4: Summarize and evaluate the argument against moral relativism.
Paper due by the end of class
Thursday: Nagel ch8: *Justice*

Week 8:

Tuesday: Michael Huemer, “Is Taxation Theft?”, *Libritarianism.org*
Thursday: (no reading)
Question 5: Summarize and evaluate the argument that justice is fairness.
Paper due by the end of class

Week 9:

Tuesday: Nagel ch2: *How Do We Know Anything?*
Thursday: selection from: Miranda Fricker, “Epistemic Injustice”

Week 10:

Tuesday: (no reading)

Question 6: Summarize and evaluate the argument that we cannot know anything

Thursday: TBD (topics will be chosen using student interest surveys)

Week 11:

Tuesday: TBD (topics will be chosen using student interest surveys)

Thursday :TBD (topics will be chosen using student interest surveys)

Week 12:

Thursday (no reading)

Question 7: SURVEY DEPENDENT

Thursday: Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, ch. XV