

PHIL 301: METAPHYSICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY

DRAFT

Class schedule: TR 9:30-10:50
Class Instructor: Katherine Valde
Office: DB 206

Class Location: DB 218
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Office Hours: Wednesdays 2-4pm

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:

Epistemological and metaphysical questions arise in pursuit of virtually every branch of philosophical inquiry and reflective living. This course explores the differences and relationships among metaphysical questions (What is there? What is the ultimate nature of reality?) and epistemological questions (What is knowledge? What can we know?). In epistemology, topics include the nature and limits of knowledge and reasonable belief, sources of justification, and varieties of skepticism. In metaphysics, topics include causation, the nature and existence of free will, the relationship between mind and body, and personal identity.

Course Objectives:

This course is designed to both provide an introduction to some basic questions in metaphysics and epistemology (M&E), and to inspire students' curiosity for such questions. Students will:

- Understand basic concepts and vocabulary in M&E
- Identify and discern arguments about metaphysics and epistemology
- Draw connections between ideas or arguments in M&E
- Evaluate the relative strength of different positions on particular issues
- Construct original responses to issues in M&E

Along the way, this course will also help to develop and students' own perspectives on metaphysical and epistemological issues and aims to inspire an excitement for creativity in approaching metaphysical and epistemic questions.

Required Text:

Pritchard, Duncan. *What Is This Thing Called Knowledge*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
Carroll, John and Ned Markosian. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2010.

All other readings will be provided on Moodle.

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. Some of the readings will be difficult, and you may have more questions than clarity. That's ok!

Grading:

Engagement – 20%

Engagement comes in many forms, and it is not the same as attendance. Engagement includes:

Preparation – reviewing materials and readings before class, eating, sleeping, etc.

Focus – avoiding distractions during class meetings

Presence – engaged and responsive during group activities

Asking questions – in class and out of class

Listening – hearing what other say, and also what they aren't saying

Specificity – referring to specific ideas from readings and discussions

Synthesizing – making connections between readings and discussions

Merely showing up and listening respectfully is considered C-level (70%) engagement.

Reflection Writings – 30% (10% each)

Each student will complete three reading responses during the semester. Each response piece will be no more than one-page single spaced (400-500 words). These assignments are scaffolded to help students build essential reasoning and reading comprehension skills. As such, no late assignment will be accepted as this would no longer be evaluating a student's own ability to read, comprehend, and substantially engage with the text. Should a student find themselves unable to complete their assignment before the due date, please reach out to me *before* the reading response is due.

Take-Home Exams – 50% (Exam 1 (Epistemology) 25%, Exam 2 (Metaphysics) 25%)

This course will have one take-home midterm which will consist of short answer and long answer questions designed to check students' comprehension of key ideas from this course.

Course Schedule:

Weeks 1-7: Epistemology

Week 1: Introduction to the Course

Plato: *Apology*

Week 2: The Value of Knowledge

Pritchard, Chapter 1: Some Preliminaries

Pritchard, Chapter 2: The Value of Knowledge

Plato: Selections from *Meno*

Week 3: Definition and Structure of Knowledge

Pritchard, Chapter 3: Defining Knowledge

Dharmottara, *Selections*

Pritchard, Chapter 4: The Structure of Knowledge

Linda Zagzebski, *What is Knowledge?*

Week 4: Sources of Knowledge

Pritchard, Chapter 7: Perception

Pritchard, Chapter 8: Testimony and Memory
Jennifer Nagel, *Testimony*
Pritchard, Chapter 9: A priority and Inference

Week 5: Skepticism

Pritchard, Chapter 10: The Problem of Induction
David Hume, *Skeptical Doubts Concerning the Operation of the Understanding*
Pritchard, Chapter 21: Radical Skepticism
Zhuangzi, The Parable of the Butterfly and The Parable of the Sage
Descartes: Meditation I

Week 6: Objectivity and Relativism

Pritchard, Chapter 14: Disagreement
Pritchard, Chapter 22: Objectivity and Truth
Lorraine Code: *Is the Sex of Knowers Epistemologically Significant?*

Week 7: Loose Ends and Epistemology Exam

Weeks 8-14: Metaphysics

Week 8: Transition to Metaphysics

C&M, Chapter 1: Introduction

Week 9: Freedom and Determinism

C&M, Chapter 2: Freedom and Determinism
George Ellis: *From Chaos to Free Will*

Week 10: Personal Identity

C&M, Chapter 3: Personal Identity
Peter Forrest: Identity of Indiscernables (SEP)
Locke, Selections from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
Anne-Sophie Meincke: *Biological Processes: A Bio-Processual Way Out of the Personal Identity Dilemma*

Week 11: Mind and Body

C&M: Chapter 6: Mental States
Jen McWeeny: *Princess Elisabeth and the mind-body problem*
Mūlamadhyamakakārikā by Nāgārjuna (with commentary by Jay L. Garfield)

Week 12: Time

J. M. E. McTaggart: *The Unreality of Time*
Matias Slavov: *No Absolute Time*
Carlo Rovelli: *Hot Black Holes and the Arrow of Time*

Week 13: Metaphysical Objectivity and Constructed Objects

Bas Van Fraassen and Anjan Chakravartty: *What is Scientific Realism?*
Ian Hacking: Chapter 1: What Ask What? (from *The Social Construction of What?*)

Week 14: Metaphysics Exams (during final exam week)