

Phil 100: Problems of Philosophy
Spring 2016
HUM 118

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Office hours: HUM 210, Monday 12-1 or by appointment

Overview and course objectives:

We'll look at some fundamental philosophical questions centered on the nature of persons. What makes people morally significant, and how (if at all) is our moral status different from the moral status of non-human animals? Do we have free will? Why are we responsible for our actions? What makes you the same person today as yesterday, or ten years ago?

The aim of this course is to familiarize you with philosophical questions and considerations surrounding the nature of persons, and to have more in-depth understanding of the questions you choose to write about in your papers. You will also develop and improve your skills at philosophical writing and discussion.

Assignments:

Super-Intense Reading Analysis

At the beginning of the course, you will complete a reading analysis of Carruthers' "Against The Moral Standing of Animals", using the method described in Concepción's "Reading Philosophy". (This basically involves carefully reading a paper, and taking notes on it.)

Less-Intense Reading Questions

Of course, you don't need to use Concepción's method for *every* paper we read. But even if you don't go into that much depth with every paper, please try to take some notes and come up with at least 1-2 questions as you're reading. (These might be objections, ideas, or just requests for clarification – identifying things that you don't understand in a paper can be a great way to get discussion going.) This should make you more prepared to talk about the readings in class, and everyone should expect to be regularly called on to raise questions/comments.

Exams

There are four take-home exams for this course, corresponding to the four major topics that we will cover. Expect short essay-style questions.

Paper

In addition to the exams, there is a 4-5 page paper due the last day of class. I will distribute paper prompts in advance, giving you an opportunity to write on any topic that we have talked about in class. If you prefer to propose your own paper topic, talk to me *well in advance of the due date*. ***You may write on your own topic only if I approve it beforehand.***

Extra credit talk writeup

The department regularly hosts philosophy talks, and you are encouraged to come along! If you'd like extra credit, you can go to a talk and write up a one-page (500 word) response. It should be turned in within a week of the talk that you went to. The response should address the following questions: (a) What was the speaker arguing for? (b) What was the most interesting

part of the talk? (c) What could the speaker have done better, either to argue more persuasively or to clarify her points? (d) What was the most interesting question or objection that came up in discussion afterwards?

A good write-up will raise your lowest exam grade by 1/3 of a grade (e.g., from a B to a B+). A schedule of talks for the semester is attached at the end of the syllabus.

Grading:

Grades are calculated as specified below. Late work will be marked down 1/3 of a grade per day (for example, from B+ to B). If you need an extension, come ask at least a week in advance and it will generally be granted.

Exam 1	15%
Exam 2	15%
Exam 3	15%
Exam 4	15%
Final Paper	25%
Reading Analysis	5%
Attendance & Participation	10%

Absence Policy:

Attendance is required to pass the class. I will regularly distribute a sign-in sheet. Things that will negatively affect this portion of the grade: missing more than three meetings; regularly coming to class late; regularly violating the 20th Century Policy; regularly being unprepared with reading/discussion questions when called on.

20th Century Policy:

This classroom exists in the 20th century. Please do not make use of any electronics that would not have been available to you in the 20th century. This includes all cell phones smaller than a Coke can and laptops weighing less than five pounds. Please let me know if you have a disability or special circumstance that will make it especially difficult to do the work required for class while adhering to the 20th Century Policy. If any student makes a serious request along these lines, the policy will be lifted for everyone.

Course Materials:

There are no required textbooks for this class. Readings are available on Owlspace.

Honor Code:

All assignments in this class are covered by the Honor Code. This means that written work should be written **entirely by you** (and written **for the purpose of this class**, this semester) unless otherwise specified. You are encouraged to talk to one another about assignments at early stages, but any sources you consult – including one another – must be properly cited. It is common philosophical practice to cite the names of those whose remarks in philosophical discussion (verbal or written correspondence), or comments on drafts of your paper that influenced your revisions.

If you are unsure of how or whether to cite a source, come ask me. It is always better to err on the side of too many citations rather than too few! You can also look here for guidelines:

<http://honor.rice.edu/>

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by work, and sometimes plagiarism can seem like the only solution. If you find yourself in this situation, it is always best to come talk to me, a dean, or a counselor rather than committing an Honor Code violation.

Students with disabilities: Please contact me to discuss your needs. You should also contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.

Schedule: (Subject to change. I will notify you of any changes.)

Topic 1: People and other animals

Week 1 January 11, 13, 15

Singer, Peter, "All Animals are Equal"
Steinbock, Bonnie: "Speciesism and the Idea of Equality"

Week 2 January 22 (no class January 18 *or* January 20)

Concepción, David. "Reading Philosophy"
Carruthers, Peter: "Against the Moral Standing of Animals"
SPH away 1/20 – no class. Use the time to work on your reading analysis.

Week 3 January 25, 27, 29

**** Reading analysis due 1/25**

Cohen, Carl: "The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research"
Norcross, Alastair: "Puppies, Pigs, and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases"
(on OwlSpace, but we will also watch his talk on dvd 1/29)

Topic 2: The badness (or not) of death

Week 4 February 1, 3, 5

Nagel, "Death"
Feldman, "Some Puzzles About the Evils of Death"
Kagan, "The Nature of Death" (video on 2/5)
<http://oyc.yale.edu/philosophy/phil-176/lecture-14>

Week 5 February 8, 10, 12

****First Exam due Feb. 8, before class**

Kagan, "The Badness of Death"
McMahan, "Eating animals the nice way"

Week 6 February 15, 17, 19

Harman, "The Moral Significance of Animal Pain and Animal Death"
McMahan, "The Comparative Badness for Animals of Suffering and Death"

Topic 3: Free will and moral responsibility

Week 7 February 22, 24, 26

**** Exam 2 due Feb 22, before class**

Ayer, A. J., "Freedom and Necessity"
Fischer, John Martin, "Responsiveness and Moral Responsibility"

Week 8 March 7, 9, 11

Chisholm, Roderick, "Human Freedom and the Self"
Strawson, P. F., "Freedom and Resentment"

Week 9 March 14, 16, 18

Pereboom, Derk, "Determinism *al Dente*"
Wolf, Susan. "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility"

Topic 4: Personal identity

Week 10 March 21, 23, 25

Sperry, R. W., "Hemisphere Deconnection and Unity in Conscious Awareness"
Puccetti, Roland, "Two Brains, Two Minds? Wigan's Theory of Mental Duality"

Week 11 March 28, 30 (no class April 1)

**** Exam 3 due March 28, before class**

Nagel, Thomas, "Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness"
Swinburne, Richard, "The Dualist Theory"

Week 12 April 4, 6, 8

Williams, Bernard, "The Self and the Future"
Perry, "A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality"

Week 13 April 11, 13, 15

Parfit, Derek, "Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons"
Lewis, David, "Survival and Identity"

Week 14 April 18, 20, 22

Judith Jarvis Thomson, "People and their Bodies"
Gendler, Tamar, "Personal Identity and Thought Experiments"

Final Paper due April 22, before class. Last exam due during exam week, time TBD.