

# PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY

## CONTACTS

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

The goal of this course is to have you gain some familiarity with the methods and subject matter of philosophy by looking at a series of classic questions: Do we have minds or souls that are distinct from our bodies? Do we have free will? What does it take for us to survive, and why does it matter to us? Should we fear death? Readings are primarily drawn from contemporary works, with a smattering of historical sources.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

The course requirements (for the non-writing sections) are two short papers, a midterm, a final exam, and regular attendance and participation in sections. All these grading mechanisms are testing the development of general philosophical abilities by having you engage with and reflect critically on material we cover in class. The readings for class are an entry point to lecture topics, but it is *the lectures* which are most geared towards helping you develop the skills on the basis of which you'll be tested. Also, since there is lots of material covered in lecture that is not covered in the readings, attendance of lectures will be critical to your success in the course.

Papers are about 4-5 pages in length and will be graded according to standards we'll discuss in class. Extensions on papers will generally be granted if a request is made for good reasons *well before (at least 3 days before)* the due date of the assignment. Otherwise papers are docked 1/3 a letter grade (i.e. A to A-, A- to B+) per day (including weekends and holidays). Your final grade for the course is tallied as follows:

- 15% Section Attendance and Participation
- 15% First Paper (4–5pp.)
- 20% Midterm
- 25% Second Paper (4–5pp.)
- 25% Final Exam

\*\*\*Note: Requirements and Grading for Writing Sections will be different!\*\*\*

## TEXTS

Several readings are drawn from the following texts available at the University book store.

- ♦ A Dialog on Personal Identity and Immortality (Perry)
- ♦ A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will (Kane)

Additional readings are posted on the course website at:

[www.jshaw.net/courses/problems.html](http://www.jshaw.net/courses/problems.html)

You will need a user-name and password to access restricted documents on the site. You can find this on the syllabus handed out the first day of classes. If you lose this password, you can find it on Blackboard.

## PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Evidence of dishonesty will be ruthlessly pursued, and confirmation of dishonesty results in an "F" for the course and notification of the undergraduate dean. You are responsible for understanding what plagiarism is.

## DISABILITIES

If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, you need to notify both your TA and Disability Resources and Services no later than the second week of term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call (412) 648-7890 to schedule an appointment. The Office is located in 140 William Pitt Union.

## FINAL EXAM

Our Final Exam is on **Thursday April 27th, 8am-9:50am**. It is your responsibility to be present. *Early exams will not be given to accommodate travel plans.*

## SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

This is a rough schedule of topics and readings that can change during the semester.

Thu., January 5	Introduction: Methods and Subject Matter of Philosophy
Tue., January 10	Argument Structure and Techniques <i>Read: Jim Pryor: How to Write a Philosophy Paper</i>

## THE MIND/BODY PROBLEM

- Thu., January 12 Dualism v. Materialism, Basic Arguments for Dualism  
*Read: Meditations on First Philosophy (Selections), Descartes*
- Tue., January 17 Arguments for Dualism and Leibniz' Law  
*Read: "Dualism and Physicalism" (Selection) van Inwagen*
- Thu., January 19 Causal Issues for Dualism  
*Read: Correspondence of Elisabeth of Bohemia and Descartes (Selections)*
- Tue., January 24 Materialism, First Pass: Identity Theory  
*Read: "Sensations and Brain Processes", Smart*
- Thu., January 26 **No Class and no Lecturer Office Hours**
- Tue., January 31 Materialism, Second Pass: Functionalism  
*Read: "The Nature of Mental States", Putnam*
- Thu., February 2 Functionalism Ct'd  
*Read: "A Conversation with Einstein's Brain", Hofstadter*
- First Paper Topics Distributed**
- Tue., February 7 Dualists Strike Back: the Knowledge Argument  
*Read: "Epiphenomenal Qualia", Jackson*

## FREE WILL

- Thu., February 9 Free Will and Determinism  
*Read: Kane, Ch. 1*
- Tue., February 14 Classical Compatibilism  
*Read: Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (selection), Hume & Kane, Ch. 2*
- \*First Paper Due Wednesday February 15th\***
- Thu., February 16 The Consequence Argument for Incompatibilism and a Reply  
*Read: Kane, Ch. 3 pp. 23–28*
- Tue., February 21 Further Troubles for Classical Compatibilism  
*Read: "Freedom and Determinism" (Selection), Taylor & Kane, Ch. 3 pp. 28–31*
- Thu., February 23 Libertarianism, its Indeterministic Discontents, and Dualist Extra-Factors  
*Read: Kane, Ch. 4–5 pp. 32–42*
- Tue. February 28 Hard Determinism and Skepticism: Can We Do Without Free Will or Moral Responsibility?  
*Read: Kane, Ch. 7*
- Thu. March 2 **\*\*In-Class Midterm\*\***

*\*\*\*Spring Break\*\*\**

#### PERSONAL IDENTITY AND SURVIVAL

- Tue. March 14      The Problem of Personal Identity  
*No New Readings*
- Thu., March 16      Dualist Theories  
*Read: Perry, First Night*
- Tue., March 21      Somatic Theories and Conventionalism  
*Read: Perry, Second Night*
- Thu., March 23      Psychological Theories  
*No New Readings*
- Tue., March 28      Fusion/Fission  
*Read: "What We Believe Ourselves to Be" (selection), Parfit*
- Second Paper Topics Distributed**
- Thu., March 30      Psychological v. Somatic Theories Finale  
*Read: Perry, Third Night*

#### DEATH

- Tue., April 4      Challenges to Harmfulness of Death  
*Read: "Letter to Menoecus" (selection) Epicurus &  
"On the Nature of Things" (selection), Lucretius*
- Thu., April 6      The Deprivation Account  
*Read: "Death", Nagel*
- \*Second Paper Due Monday April 10th!!\***
- Tue., April 11      The Deprivation Account ct'd  
*No Readings*
- Thu., April 13      **No Class and no Lecturer Office Hours**
- Tue., April 18      Wrap Up  
**Final Exam Questions Handed Out**
- Thu., April 20      Make-up Day OR (Optional) Exam Review

**\*\*\*Final Exam: Thursday April 27th from 8AM to 9:50AM  
in our normal room (CL 324)\*\*\***