

Introduction to Philosophy

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T/TH 12:00-2:30pm, University Hall 412

Office Hours: Thursdays, 2:30-4:30pm, University Library 3640

Course Description

This course serves as a historical introduction to philosophy, focusing on the topic of philosophical doubt or skepticism. Over the course of the history of philosophy, some philosophers have relied on skepticism – the questioning of our most closely held beliefs – as a means for arriving at philosophical positions that are not susceptible to such doubts. Others have embraced skepticism wholeheartedly, arguing that we can never justify some of our most closely held beliefs. We will consider two varieties of skepticism: First, skepticism that our understanding of the external world accurately reflects the world around us. Second, skepticism that there is an objective moral code that applies to humans, and that such a code is worth following. In taking this focus, the course introduces students to two principal areas of philosophical inquiry: theoretical philosophy (considering questions about the contents of the world and what we can know about them) and practical philosophy (considering moral questions).

Required Texts

All required readings for the course will be posted on Canvas. Students are required to print out and bring the reading for the day to lecture.

Evaluation

20% participation

30% first paper (+outline)

30% second paper (+outline)

20% final exam

Participation

Participation will be calculated based on the following criteria:

- 2 in-class reflections per class
- Contributions to discussion
- In-class debates and writing assignments

In-class reflections: During the first five minutes of class, students will write a paragraph raising a question about the reading for that day. During the last five minutes of class, students will write one thing they learned during class, and one thing they still have questions about.

Papers

Each paper should be no more than four pages long: 12pt font, double-spaced. Students are required to submit a one-page, single-spaced outline for each paper (failure to do so will result in a penalty for the overall paper score). Papers should be submitted on Canvas on the due date.

Final Exam

The final exam will be cumulative. It will consist of quote identification and multiple choice questions. You will have an hour to complete the exam; the exam will be held during our last class.

Course Policies

Attendance

- Students will be permitted one unexcused absence without penalty
- Each subsequent unexcused absence will result in a 2-point penalty taken off the final grade
- Students must make up classwork for each missed class

Class Conduct

No use of electronic devices during class. Lateness will negatively affect your participation grade.

Plagiarism

All plagiarism and cheating is prohibited. All cases of alleged violation of academic integrity will be referred to the Assistant Dean for Advising and Academic Integrity. For more on plagiarism, see: <http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html> and <http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/how-to-avoid-plagiarism.html>.

Schedule

Tuesday, June 20

Introduction: Heraclitus and Parmenides

Thursday, June 22

Moral Skepticism

Session 2 Reading: Plato's Republic, Book 1 327a–331d, 336a–354c

In-class writing assignment: Dialogue

Tuesday, June 27

The Soul and The Cave

Session 3 Reading: Plato's Republic, Book IV, 434d–445b; Book VII, 514a–525c

In-class debate

Thursday, June 29

Faith and Skepticism

Session 4 Reading: Augustine's Confessions VII, paragraphs 1-7 and 11-27;

Michel de Montaigne's "That it is madness to judge..."

Optional Reading: Augustine's Confessions II

Paper topics distributed; outline assignment review

Tuesday, July 4 NO CLASS; HOLIDAY

Thursday, July 6

Theoretical Skepticism

Session 5 Reading: Descartes' Meditations 1-3

Outline Workshop

OUTLINE DUE

Tuesday, July 11

Theoretical Skepticism (continued)

Session 6 Reading: Descartes' Meditations 4-5, end of 6 (pp.44-57, 61-70);

Correspondence with Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia

FIRST PAPER DUE (on Canvas, before class at noon)

Thursday, July 13

Causal Skepticism

Session 7 Reading: Hume's Enquiry IV, V and VII (pp.336-349; pp.351-359)

In-class debate

Tuesday, July 18

Kant on Theory and Morality

Session 8 Reading: Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, A-Preface (99-105), I-VI (136-148); Onora O'Neill, "Kantian Approaches to Some Famine Problems" (546-551)

Thursday, July 20

The Return of Theoretical Skepticism

Session 9 Reading: Nietzsche, Gay Science Preface 1-4 (pp.3-9); 108-132 (pp.109-123); 283-290 (pp.160-164); 374-375 (pp.239-240)

In-class writing assignment: Aphorism

Second Paper Topics Distributed

Tuesday, July 25

Religious, Moral Skepticism

Session 10 Reading: Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morality Book 1

Outline Workshop

OUTLINE DUE

Thursday, July 27

Skepticism as a Political Position

Session 11 Reading: Odo Marquard, "Another Autobiographical Introduction"

In-class writing assignment: autobiographical essay

FINAL EXAM

Sunday, July 30 **SECOND PAPER DUE (on Canvas, by midnight)**

