

Honors Introduction to Philosophy

TuTh 12:30-1:45, Malloy 215

Professor Sara Bernstein

This honors course will introduce students to central puzzles and questions of philosophy, including: what is space? What is time? Is time travel possible? How is the mind related to the brain? How do we know what we know, and how do we know that we know anything at all? What sorts of things exist? What are our moral and ethical responsibilities? What counts as art and music as opposed to lines and noise?

In addition to learning about some central questions in philosophy, the goal of this course will be to learn how to *do* philosophy, rather than merely study it. Students will leave the course with new powerful tools of analysis and argumentation, and be able to apply these new tools to anything they choose to study and do.

Assessment:

- 30% class participation*
- 15% short paper, due September 26
- 25% medium paper, due November 16
- 30% cumulative final paper, due 10:30am December 15 by email

There will be a few extra credit opportunities.

Schedule:

August 22: Introduction: What is Philosophy?

Metaphysics

August 24: Space and Time

- *Einstein's Dreams*, Alan Lightman, "14 April 1905" through "2 June 1905"
- *Metaphysics*, Alyssa Ney, pp. 138-152

August 29: Time Travel

- "Nowhere Man: Time Travel and Spatial Location", Sara Bernstein
- Video: "Metaphysics: the Grandfather Paradox", Agustín Rayo

August 31: Persistence through Time

- "The Ship of Theseus", Ludger Jansen
- Video: "Metaphysics: the Ship of Theseus", Jenn Wang

September 5: Causation

- *Metaphysics*, Alyssa Ney, pp. 223-236
- "The Metaphysics of Omissions," Sara Bernstein

September 7: Free Will

- *Metaphysics*, Alyssa Ney, pp. 239-258
- Short story: "What's Expected of Us", Ted Chiang

September 12: Holes

- "Holes", David and Steffi Lewis
- "Holes" (SEP entry), Roberto Casati and Achille Varzi

Epistemology

September 14: How do we know what we know?

- *Meditations on First Philosophy*, "Meditation 1", René Descartes
- Video: "Theory of Knowledge: The Problem of Skepticism", Jennifer Nagel

September 19: Radical Skepticism

- "Brains in a Vat", Hilary Putnam
- "Are you living in a Computer Simulation?", Nick Bostrom

September 21: What is knowledge?

- Video: "Theory of Knowledge (The Gettier Problem)", Jennifer Nagel
- "The Inescapability of Gettier Problems", Linda Zabzebski

September 26: Peer Disagreement

Short Paper Due

- "The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement", Thomas Kelly

Philosophy of Mind

September 28: What is the mind?

- "Dualism" (sections 1-3) (SEP Entry), Howard Robinson
- "Why I am not a Dualist", Karen Bennett

October 3: What is the relationship between the mental and the physical?

- "Can Consciousness be Reductively Explained?", David Chalmers (excerpt from *The Conscious Mind*)
- "Chalmers' Zombie Argument", Amy Kind

October 5: Mental/ Physical Identity

- "Mad Pain and Martian Pain", David Lewis

October 10: What kind of thing is consciousness?

- "The Knowledge Argument", Brie Gertler
- "Nagel's 'What is it like to be a bat?' argument against physicalism", Amy Kind
- Video: "Science, Can it Teach Us Everything?", Caspar Hare

October 12: Mental Causation

- "Mental Causation" (Philosophy Compass article), Karen Bennett

October 24: Review and catch-up

Ethics

October 26: Trolley Problems and Ethics

- "The Trolley Problem", Judith Jarvis Thomson
- Video: "Utilitarianism, Part 1", Julia Markovits

October 31: What are our moral obligations to others?

- "Famine, Affluence, and Morality", Peter Singer

November 2: How good must we be?

- "Moral Saints", Susan Wolf

November 7: What matters?

- "The Experience Machine", Robert Nozick
- Video: "Hedonism and the Experience Machine", Richard Rowland

November 9: Moral Expertise

- "Skepticism about Moral Expertise as a Puzzle for Moral Realism", Sarah McGrath

Applied Ethics

November 14: Can we harm by creating?

- "The Non-Identity Problem" (excerpt from *Reasons and Persons*), Derek Parfit
- Video: "Ethics: The Nonidentity Problem", Molly Gardner

November 16: Environmental Ethics

Medium Paper Due

- "The Ethics of Respect for Nature", Paul Taylor

November 21: Animal Rights

- "Animal Liberation" (excerpt), Peter Singer
- Video: "Ethics: Killing Animals for Food", Tyler Doggett

Aesthetics

November 28: What is art?

- "The Ontology of Art", Amie Thomasson

November 30: What is music?

- "Philosophy of Music" (SEP article), Peter Kivy

December 5: What is Aesthetic Subtlety?

- "The Virtue of Subtlety and the Vice of a Heavy Hand", Alex King

December 7: Review

A few notes concerning...

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is representing another person's work as one's own. Outside works must be clearly cited or placed in quotes. Any cheating will be handled according to the university's policy on academic dishonesty. Please see the Honor Code for more information.

Extensions

Everyone is permitted one 24-hour paper extension. The extension can be used on the short paper, the medium paper, or the extra credit assignment. Extensions must be requested three days in advance.

*Class Participation

Philosophical skill is best acquired by *doing philosophy* rather than passively learning about it. Active participation in class, which includes asking questions, coming up with cool and/ or silly examples, asking for clarification on confusing concepts, and/ or presenting an informed opinion about the reading, is central to learning to do philosophy. Talking once a week in class will be enough to do well in class participation.

Extra Credit

There will be several extra credit assignments involving outside reading and movies related to the topics discussed in class.

Extra credit will be due at the midpoint of the course (to be announced), and at the end of the course. Up to five percentage points may be earned on the extra credit.

Syllabus Changes

It is possible that topics will be added, removed, or changed on the syllabus. If this happens, it will be announced in class and over email. Please check your email before every class.

Ways to Reach Sara, or her Indistinguishable Robot Clone

Email: sbernste@nd.edu

Office Hours: 202 Malloy Hall, Tuesdays 11:15am-12:15pm, or by appointment.