Philosophy Work
Topic: Philosophical Methodology
Honours Course
2018-2019

Instructor:
Patrick Todd
Office: Room 4.04b, Dugald Stewart Building
Office-hours: Please email me.

Course Description:

For students not earning credits at a host university, this course will cover major methods and principles in philosophical debates: the method of cases, the relationship between theory and evidence, the principle of sufficient reason, and ontological commitment. We will do so by investigating in detail a specific debate in which these methods and principles are deployed: the Trolley Problem, the proper response to finding oneself in disagreement with one’s peers or with those one regards as experts, the cosmological argument for the existence of god, and the status names in fiction.

Course Purpose:

This course is meant for students studying philosophy and at least one language during their mandatory third year abroad. These students need to earn 40 credits in philosophy. Some students satisfy this requirement by earning 20 ECTS credits at a host university. Those who do not must complete a course on philosophical methodology. The course will be delivered by online videos posted to the learn page, together with group online tutorials.

Organization:

The course is based around (a) readings, (b) online video lectures, and (c) tutorials we will have online via Blackboard collaborate.

There are two units per semester, and one essay due per unit.

We will arrange the online group tutorials once the semester begins. There will be at least one group tutorial per unit, and students must participate in at least one such tutorial per unit. (It is not always possible for everyone to participate in the same tutorial, given our different schedules!)

Students must also participate in at least one individual tutorial with the instructor per unit. These can be over the phone (or via Skype) and ideally should be to discuss your plans for your essays.

The online videos have been created by Dr Bryan Pickel.

Topics
Unit 1: Trolley Problems

1.1 The Trolley Problem
   1.1.1 One dies to save five: The Drug and the Driver
   1.1.2 Killing one to save five
   1.1.3 The Doctrine of Double Effect
   1.1.4 Positive and negative duties

1.2 The Bystander
   1.2.1 Bystander cases
   1.2.2 Duties

1.3 Turning the trolley
   1.3.1 The Bystander's third option
   1.3.2 Can the driver really turn the trolley?
   1.3.3 Why do we think that the bystander can turn the trolley?

Unit 2:

2.1 What to do when we disagree?

2.2 Conciliationism and Exclusivism
   2.2.1 Religion
   2.2.2 Politics
   2.2.3 Philosophy
   2.2.4 Science
   2.2.5 Conciliationism
   2.2.6 Weak and Strong Exclusivism
   2.2.7 For Weak Exclusivism
   2.2.8 For Strong Exclusivism

2.3 Responses
   2.3.1 No Perfect Peers? (Elga and Lackey)
      2.4.1 Same evidence and principles
      2.4.2 Same epistemic virtues
      2.4.3 Equally likely to be wrong
   2.3.2 Permissivism

Unit 3: The Principle of Sufficient Reason

3.1 PSR
   3.1.1 The Nature and Scope of the Principle
   3.1.2 Indiscernible Cases, Causation, and Necessitation
   3.1.3 Infinite Descent

3.2 Simple Cosmological Arguments
   3.2.1 Three Views of the Universe
   3.2.2 Kalam Cosmological Arguments
3.3 The Eternity of the World
   3.3.1 Avicenna on the Eternity of the World
   3.3.2 Avicenna's Cosmological Argument
   3.3.3 The Unity of the Necessary Being

3.5 PSR Today
   3.5.1 Conceivability Arguments Against PSR
   3.5.2 PSR and hyper-essentialism

Unit 4: Existence and Fiction

4.1 Nonexistent objects:
   4.1.1 General and singular existence statements
   4.1.2 The logical problem
   4.1.3 The semantic problem
   4.1.4 Reinterpreting singular existence
   4.1.5 Arguing about existence

4.2 Quine and Fiction
   4.2.1 Three kinds of talk about fiction
   4.2.2 Non-Meinongian realism about fiction
   4.2.3 Non-Existence Statements

4.3 Meinong
   4.3.1 Some things do not exist
   4.3.2 The characterization principle

Readings

Unit 1 Reading:
Essential:
   • Thomson (1976), “Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem”. The Monist 59/2

Background Reading:
   • Kamm et al. (2015), The Trolley Problem Mysteries. https://philpapers.org/rec/KAMTP
   • Singer, “Ethics and Intuitions”. https://philpapers.org/rec/SINEAI-4
   • SEP Entry on “Doing vs Allowing”: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/doing-allowing/
   • SEP Entry on “Double Effect”: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/double-effect/
• SEP Entry on “Experimental Moral Philosophy”:
  https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/experimental-moral/

Unit 2 Reading:

**Essential**
- “Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News”, David Christensen:
  https://philpapers.org/rec/CHREOD
- “Reflection and Disagreement”, Adam Elga:
  https://philpapers.org/rec/ELGRAD
- “Taking Religious Disagreement Seriously”, Jennifer Lackey
  https://philpapers.org/rec/LACAJV
- “We’re Right, They’re Wrong”, Peter van Inwagen:
  https://philpapers.org/rec/VANWRT
- “Permission to Believe”, Miriam Schoenfield:
  https://philpapers.org/rec/SCHPTB

**Background Reading**
- "How to Disagree about how to disagree”, Adam Elga:
  https://philpapers.org/rec/ELGHTD
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Entry on “Social Epistemology”,
  section 3.4 only: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology-social/#PeeDis
- “The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement”, Thomas Kelly:

Unit 3 Reading:

**Essential**
- Averroes, First and Fourth Discussion of “The Incoherence of the Incoherence”:
  http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ir/tt/
- “PSR”, Michael Della Rocca: https://philpapers.org/rec/ROCP-3
- “The Cosmological Argument” chapter 7 in *Metaphysics* by Peter van Inwagen:
  https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=JstVDgAAQBAJ&dq=van+inwagen+metaphysics&source=gbs_navlinks_s

**Principle of Sufficient Reason**
- "Necessary Being: The Cosmological Argument”. Chapter 3 of Metaphysics by Peter van Inwagen:
  https://westviewpress.com/books/metaphysics/
- “Metaphysical rationalism”, Shamik Dasgupta
  https://philpapers.org/rec/DASMR-2
- “The paradox of sufficient reason”, Samuel Levey:
  https://philpapers.org/rec/LEVTPO-35
• “A universe of explanations”, Ghislain Guigon: https://philpapers.org/archive/GUIAUO.pdf
• "Viciousness and the structure of reality", Ricki Bliss: https://philpapers.org/rec/BLIVAT
• The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment, Alexander Pruss

Background Reading:

• Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Infinite”: http://www.iep.utm.edu/infinite/
• Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cosmological-argument/

Unit 4: Essential

• Quine, “On what there is”: https://philpapers.org/rec/QUIOWT-7
• Parsons, “Are there nonexistent objects”: https://philpapers.org/rec/PARATN
• Stacie Friend: “Fictional Characters”: https://philpapers.org/rec/FRIFC
• Thomasson, “Speaking of fictional characters”: https://philpapers.org/rec/THOSOF

Background Reading:

• Sainsbury, “Of course there are fictional characters”: https://philpapers.org/rec/SAIOCT
• Sainsbury: “Fiction and Fictionalism”: https://philpapers.org/rec/SAIFAF-4

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

• "Nonexistent objects": https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nonexistent-objects/
• “Meinong”: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/meinong/
• "Ontological commitment": https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ontological-commitment

Assessment
Your final mark will be determined on the basis of four assignments.

- Two short essays of 1500 words each [Total: 40%, ea. 20%]
- Two long essays of 2000 words each [Total: 60%, ea. 30%]

**Essays:**

**Semester 1:**

**Essay 1: 1500 Words**

**Topic Option 1:** Explain and evaluate Thomson’s original argument for the conclusion that whether one can turn the Trolley depends on the claims the one and the five have over you.

**Topic Option 2:** Explain and evaluate Thomson’s new argument for the claim that the Bystander may not turn the Trolley.

**OR:** Come up with your own topic and clear it with me by email.

**Essay 2: 2000 Words**

**Topic Option 1:** Explain and evaluate permissivism, the claim that a single body of evidence can be used by different agents to rationally draw conclusions that are incompatible with one another. Explain the relevance of this thesis to debates about disagreement.

**Topic Option 2:** Would learning that you have an epistemic peer (in any relevant sense) who sincerely disagrees with you about an important religious or political matter require you to revise your view?

**OR:** Come up with your own topic and clear it with me by email.

**Second Semester**

**Essay 3: 1500 Words**

**Topic Option 1:** Is a collection of facts explained if we have explained every member of it?
**Topic Option 2:** Does the principle of sufficient reason entail that every truth is necessary? If so, is that a reason to reject it?

**Essay 4:** 2000 Words

**Topic Option 1:** Does Quine solve the problem of Plato's Beard?

**Topic Option 2:** Do fictional characters such as Sherlock Holmes exist? If so, did Sherlock Holmes live 221b Baker Street between 1881-1904?