Philosophy Work
Topic: Philosophical Methodology
Honours Course
2018-2019

Instructor:
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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. There are also 10 short assignments due over the course of the year.

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!) I will be in contact about arranging these tutorials.

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/KAMTTP
   • Singer, “Ethics and Intuitions”. https://philpapers.org/rec/SINEAL-4
   • SEP Entry on “Doing vs Allowing”: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/doing-allowing/
Unit 2 Reading:

**Essential**
- “Reflection and Disagreement”, Adam Elga: [https://philpapers.org/rec/ELGRAD](https://philpapers.org/rec/ELGRAD)
- “We’re Right, They’re Wrong”, Peter van Inwagen: [https://philpapers.org/rec/VANWRT](https://philpapers.org/rec/VANWRT)
- “Permission to Believe”, Miriam Schoenfield: [https://philpapers.org/rec/SCHPTB](https://philpapers.org/rec/SCHPTB)

**Background Reading**
- “How to Disagree about how to disagree”, Adam Elga: [https://philpapers.org/rec/ELGHTD](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](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology-social/#PeeDis)

Unit 3 Reading:

**Essential**
- “PSR”, Michael Della Rocca: [https://philpapers.org/rec/ROCP-3](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](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/](https://westviewpress.com/books/metaphysics/)
- “Metaphysical rationalism”, Shamik Dasgupta: [https://philpapers.org/rec/DASMR-2](https://philpapers.org/rec/DASMR-2)
• “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: 50%, ea. 30%]
- Ten short assignments [Total 10%, ea. 1%]

Essays:

Essay 1 (1500 Words)
Due: Thursday 25th October 2018, by 12pm (Mid-day, UK time)

Essay 2 (2000 Words)
Due: Thursday 13th December 2018, by 12pm (Mid-day, UK time)

Semester 2 Essay Deadlines:

Essay 3 (1500 Words)
Due: Thursday 28th February 2019, by 12pm (Mid-day, UK time)

Essay 4 (2000 Words)
Due: Thursday 18th April 2019, by 12pm (Mid-day, UK time)

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.

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**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?

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**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?

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**Short Assignments:**

Each short assignment is worth 1% of your final mark. The assignments are intended to help you develop and receive feedback regarding specific philosophical skills, many of which are relevant to the midterm essay and final exam. Each assignment will be marked on a scale of 0 to 10. The mark will reflect how well the response completes the assigned task. Each assignment has a maximum of 300 words.

**Postings 1, 2, and 3 are due October 19. Postings 4 and 5 are due November 29.**

**Posting 1:** Provide your own example of a case in which a person may permissibly take an action knowing that it will result in five people dying and another person living even though there is another action which would result in the five living and the one dying. (Max 300 words)
Posting 2: Consider the following passage from p. 209 from Thomson’s “Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem”.

I think we may be helped if we turn from evils to goods. Suppose there are six men who are dying. Five are standing in one clump on the beach, one is standing further along. Floating in on the tide is a marvellous pebble, the Health-Pebble, I'll call it: it cures what ails you. The one needs for cure the whole Health-Pebble; each of the five needs only a fifth of it. Now in fact that Health-Pebble is drifting towards the one, so that if nothing is done to alter its course, the one will get it. We happen to be swimming nearby, and are in a position to deflect it towards the five. Is it permissible for us to do this? It seems to me that it is permissible for us to deflect the Health-Pebble if and only if the one has no more claim on it than any of the five does.

What is Thomson trying to show in this passage? What is her argument? (Max 300 Words)

Posting 3:

In her article, “Kamm on the Trolley Problem”, Thomson objects to Kamm’s proposed treatment of the trolley problem using the following case:

But no further. In a certain possible case—we might as well call it Bat—we can save the five by removing the trolley, but we can remove the trolley only by hitting it with a heavy bystander. If we remove the trolley, (i) we will save the five by removing it, and (ii) the time of the end-point of our removing the trolley is the time of the onset of the five’s being safe from death by the trolley. Therefore, the proposal that Kamm would have us take seriously yields that we may kill the one in Bat. It hardly needs saying that that won’t do. (pp. 123-4)

As briefly as possible, state Kamm’s view on the Trolley problem and why Thomson’s case is meant to be a counterexample to it. (Max 300 words)

Posting 4

Consider the following two exchanges from Gary Gutting’s interview of Louise Anthony about her atheism in the New York Times.

Exchange 1:

L.A.: I don’t think that when two people take opposing stands on any issue that one of them has to be irrational or ignorant.
G.G.: No, they may both be rational. But suppose you and your theist friend are equally adept at reasoning, equally informed about relevant evidence, equally honest and fair-minded — suppose, that is, you are
what philosophers call epistemic peers: equally reliable as knowers. Then shouldn’t each of you recognize that you’re no more likely to be right than your peer is, and so both retreat to an agnostic position?

L.A.: Yes, this is an interesting puzzle in the abstract: How could two epistemic peers — two equally rational, equally well-informed thinkers — fail to converge on the same opinions? But it is not a problem in the real world. In the real world, there are no epistemic peers — no matter how similar our experiences and our psychological capacities, no two of us are exactly alike, and any difference in either of these respects can be rationally relevant to what we believe.

**Exchange 2:**

G.G.: Many atheists hold a much stronger view: that they have good reasons and theists don’t. Do you agree with this?

L.A.: [...]. Justificatory relations are objective. But they are complex. So whether any given belief justifies another is something that depends partly on what other beliefs the believer has. Also, there may be — objectively — many different but equally reasonable ways of drawing conclusions on the basis of the same body of evidence.

What views of peer disagreement best match Louise Anthony’s answer in **Exchange 1** and her suggestion in the final sentence of **Exchange 2**? State the views as succinctly as possible. (Max: 300 words)


**Posting 5:**

In her article, “Taking Religious Disagreement Seriously”, Jennifer Lackey distinguishes three sense of ‘peer disagreement’: EP1, EP2, and EP3. Describe a case in which two agents seem to be epistemic peers in the sense of EP2, but not EP1. Then describe a case in which two agents seem to be epistemic peers in the sense of EP3, but not EP1. (Max: 300 words)

Postings 6 – 10: TBA.