

Philosophy Work

Topic: Philosophical Methodology

PHIL 10056

Honours Course

2019-20

1. Course Information

Course Organiser: Tom Baker

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2. 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 of 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.

3. 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: Disagreement

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
- 2.3.8 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

5. Readings

Unit 1

Essential:

- Phillipa Foot (1967) '[The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect](#)', *The Oxford Review* 5.
- Judith Jarvis Thomson (1976) '[Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem](#)', *The Monist* 59(2): 204-217.
- Judith Jarvis Thomson (2008) '[Turning the Trolley](#)', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 36(4): 359-374.
- Judith Jarvis Thomson (2015) '[Kamm on the Trolley Problems](#)', in Eric Rakowski (ed.) *The Trolley Problem Mysteries* (OUP).

Background and Further Reading:

- F.M. Kamm (2015) *The Trolley Problem Mysteries*, Eric Rakowski (ed.) (OUP).
- Sharon Street (2005) '[A Darwinian Dilemma for Realists about Value Theory](#)', *Philosophical Studies* 127(1): 109-166.
- Peter Singer (2005) '[Ethics and Intuitions](#)', *Journal of Ethics* 9(3-4): 331-352.
- Fiona Woollard & Frances Howard-Snyder (2016) '[Doing vs. Allowing Harm](#)', Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Alison McIntyre, (2019) '[Doctrine of Double Effect](#)', Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Mark Alfano, Don Loeb & Alexandra Plakias (2018) '[Experimental Moral Philosophy](#)', Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Unit 2

Essential

- David Christensen (2007) '[Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News](#)', *Philosophical Review* 116(2): 187-217.
- Adam Elga (2007) '[Reflection and Disagreement](#)', *Noûs* 41(3): 478–502.
- Jennifer Lackey (2014) '[Taking Religious Disagreement Seriously](#)', in *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue* (OUP): 299-316.
- Peter van Inwagen (2010) '[We're Right. They're Wrong](#)', in Feldman & Warfield (eds.) *Disagreement* (OUP).
- Miriam Schoenfield (2014) '[Permission to Believe: Why Permissivism Is True and What It Tells Us About Irrelevant Influences on Belief](#)', *Noûs* 48(2): 193-218.

Background and Further Reading

- Jennifer Lackey (2008) '[A Justificationist View of Disagreement's Epistemic Significance](#)', in Millar, Haddock & Pritchard (eds.) *Social Epistemology* (OUP): 145-154.
- Adam Elga (2010) '[How to Disagree about How to Disagree](#)', in Feldman & Warfield (eds.) *Disagreement* (OUP).
- Christensen & Lackey (eds.) (2013) [The Epistemology of Disagreement: New Essays](#) (OUP).
- Alvin Goldman & Thomas Blanchard (2018) 'Social Epistemology', Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: [§3.4](#) only.
- Thomas Kelly (2005) '[The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement](#)', in Hawthorne & Gendler (eds.) *Oxford Studies in Epistemology* (OUP).

Unit 3

Essential

- Avicenna (Ibn Sina) from *On the Nature of God*, §24.1.1, in Bonevac and Phillips (eds.) *An Introduction to World Philosophy: a multicultural reader* (OUP: 2009): 545-547.
- Averroes (Ibn Rushd) [The Incoherence of the Incoherence](#): 1st & 4th Discussion only.
- Michael Della Rocca (2010) '[PSR](#)', *Philosophers' Imprint* 10(7): 1-13.
- Peter van Inwagen (2015) '[Necessary Being: The Cosmological Argument](#)', in his *Metaphysics* (Routledge): Ch. 7.

Principle of Sufficient Reason

- Shamik Dasgupta (2016) '[Metaphysical Rationalism](#)', *Noûs* 50(2): 379-418.
- Samuel Levey (2016) '[The Paradox of Sufficient Reason](#)', *Philosophical Review* 125(3): 397-430.
- Ghislain Guigon (2015) '[A Universe of Explanations](#)', in Bennett & Zimmerman (eds.) *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* vol. 9 (OUP).
- Ricki Bliss (2013) '[Viciousness and the Structure of Reality](#)', *Philosophical Studies* 166(2): 399-418.
- Alexander Pruss (2009) [The Principle of Sufficient Reason: a reassessment](#) (Cambridge University Press).

Background and Further Reading:

- Bradley Dowden (2013) '[The Infinite](#)', *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

- Bruce Reichenbach (2019) '[Cosmological Argument](#)', Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Yitzhak Y. Melamed & Martin Lin (2018) '[Principle of Sufficient Reason](#)', Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Olga Lizzini (2019) '[Ibn Sina's Metaphysics](#)', Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Sajjad H. Rizvi (2006) '[Avicenna \(Ibn Sina\)](#)', *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- H. Chad Hillier (2004) '[Ibn Rushd \(Averroes\)](#)', *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Unit 4

Essential

- W.V.O. Quine (1948) '[On What There Is](#)', *Review of Metaphysics* 2(5): 21-38.
- Terrance Parsons (1982) '[Are There Nonexistent Objects?](#)', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 19(4): 365-371.
- Peter Van Inwagen (1977) '[Creatures of Fiction](#)', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14(4): 299-308.
- Stacie Friend (2007) '[Fictional Characters](#)', *Philosophy Compass* 2(2): 141-156.
- Amie Thomasson (2003) '[Speaking of Fictional Characters](#)', *Dialectica* 57(2): 205–223.

Background and Further Reading:

- R.M. Sainsbury (2012) '[Of Course there are Fictional Characters](#)', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 262(4): 615-40.
- R.M. Sainsbury (2009) *[Fiction and Fictionalism](#)* (Routledge).
- Graham Priest (2005) *[Towards Non-Being: The Logic and Metaphysics of Intentionality](#)* (OUP)
- Maria Reicher (2019) '[Nonexistent Objects](#)', Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
- Johann Marek (2019) '[Alexius Meinong](#)', Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Phillip Bricker (2016) '[Ontological Commitment](#)', Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

6. Assessment

Your final mark will be determined on the basis of the following assignments:

- Two short essays of 1500 words each [Total 40%, ea. 20%]
- Two long essays of 2000 words each [Total 50%, ea. 25%]
- Ten short assignments [Total 10%, ea. 1%]

Semester 1 Deadlines

Posting 1: Thursday 26th September, by 12pm (Mid-day, UK time)

Posting 2: Thursday 3rd October, by 12pm (Mid-day, UK time)

Posting 3: Thursday 10th October, by 12pm (Mid-day, UK time)

Essay 1 (1500 Words): Thursday 24th October, by 12pm (Mid-day, UK time)

Posting 4: Thursday 14th November, by 12pm (Mid-day, UK time)

Posting 5: Thursday 28th November, by 12pm (Mid-day, UK time)

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

Semester 2 Deadlines

Posting 6: Thursday 6th February, by 12pm (Mid-day, UK time)

Posting 7: Thursday 13th February, by 12pm (Mid-day, UK time)

Essay 3 (1500 Words): Thursday 27th February, by 12pm (Mid-day, UK time)

Posting 8: Thursday 12th March, by 12pm (Mid-day, UK time)

Posting 9: Thursday 26th March, by 12pm (Mid-day, UK time)

Posting 10: Thursday 9th April, by 12pm (Mid-day, UK time)

Essay 4 (2000 Words): Thursday 23rd April, by 12pm (Mid-day, UK time)

6.1 Essays

Essay 1 (1500 Words)

Option 1. Explain and evaluate Thomson's original argument for the conclusion that whether one may turn the Trolley depends on the claims the one and the five have over you.

Option 2. Explain and evaluate Thomson's new argument for the claim that the Bystander may not turn the Trolley.

Essay 2 (2000 Words)

Option 1. Explain and evaluate the relevance of *permissivism* to debates about disagreement.

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?

Essay 3 (1500 Words)

Option 1. Is a collection of facts explained if we have explained every member of it?

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)

Option 1. Does Quine solve the problem of Plato's Beard?

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

If you wish to write your essay(s) on something other than one of the above options, you must clear it with me by email.

6.2 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 essays. 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.**

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.

Posting 2:

What is Thomson trying to show in the following passage? What is her argument?

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. ('Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem', 209)

Posting 3:

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. ('Kamm on the Trolley Problem', 122-3)

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.

Posting 4:

Consider the following two exchanges from Gary Gutting's interview of Louise Anthony about her atheism in the *New York Times*. (Complete interview available [here](#).) What views of peer disagreement best match Louise Anthony's answer in *Exchange 1* and her suggestion in the final sentence of *Exchange 2*?

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.

Posting 5:

In her article, 'Taking Religious Disagreement Seriously', Jennifer Lackey distinguishes three senses 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.

Posting 6:

Al-Ghazali argues against the idea of Aristotle and Avicenna that the universe is eternal, having no beginning. He offers the following objections.

Are the numbers of these revolutions [of the heavens] even or uneven or both even and uneven or neither even nor uneven? If you answer, both even and uneven, or neither even nor uneven, you say what is evidently absurd. If, however, you say 'even' or 'uneven', even and uneven become uneven and even by the addition of one unit and how could infinity be one unit short? You must, therefore, draw the conclusion that they are neither even nor uneven. (Al-Ghazali, *Incoherence of Philosophy*, quoted on p. 43 of *Incoherence of the Incoherence*)

We answer: Number can be divided into even and uneven; there is no third possibility...
(Al-Ghazali, *Incoherence of Philosophy*, quoted on p. 46 of *Incoherence of the Incoherence*)

Explain, in your own words, his argument.

Posting 7:

Briefly explain the following argument:

In order to explain what holds the world up in space, we posit the existence of a world turtle. In order to explain what keeps the world plus world turtle up, we supply a second world turtle, and so on. What we are seeking to explain is how something stays up in space, and, yet, at each stage of analysis we posit the existence of something whose capacity to stay up in space is in need of explanation. Invoking turtle *qua* object of support after turtle *qua* object of support shows us that we have explained nothing about how anything is supported at all. (Bliss, 'Viciousness and the Structure of Reality', 411)

Posting 8:

Using your own example, explain the problem of Plato's Beard.

Posting 9:

Why do sentences like the following lead van Inwagen to believe that Sherlock Holmes exists?

Some characters in novels are closely modelled on actual people, while others are wholly products of the literary imagination, and it is impossible to tell which characters fall into which of these categories by textual analysis alone. ('Creatures of Fictions', 302)

Posting 10:

Amie Thomasson discusses apparent inconsistencies in what we say about fictional characters. Using your own example, outline a context in which it would seem appropriate to say apparently inconsistent things, such as the following:

We want to say that Emma Woodhouse doesn't exist, but in other contexts we want to confirm that there are such fictional characters as Emma and her sister Isabella, while there is no such character as Emma's pesky kid brother. ('Speaking of Fictional Characters', 205)