Philosophy Work
Topic: Philosophical Methodology
Honours Course
2017-2018

Instructor:
Bryan Pickel
Office: Room 4.04b, Dugald Stewart Building
Office-hours: Please email me to book a Skype appointment. I’m happy to talk.

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 Organization:

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 earing 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. There will also be optional online discussion sections every other meet. These will be arranged once the course begins.

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?

1.4 The method of cases

Unit 2:

2.1 What to do when we disagree?
   2.1.1 Conciliationism
   2.1.2 Weak and Strong Exclusivism

2.2. Examples
   2.2.1 Religion
   2.2.2 Politics
   2.2.3 Aesthetics
   2.2.4 Philosophy
   2.2.5 Calculating the bill

2.3 Arguments for Exclusivism
   2.3.1 For Weak Exclusivism
   2.3.2 For Strong Exclusivism

2.4 Varieties of Conciliationism
   2.4.1 Skeptical Conciliationism
   2.4.2 No exact agreement (Elga and Lackey)
   2.4.3 Permissivism

2.5 Who is your epistemic peer?
   2.4.1 Same evidence and principles
   2.4.2 Same epistemic virtues
   2.4.3 Equally likely to be wrong

Unit 3: The Principle of Sufficient Reason

3.1 Avicenna's argument for the existence and unity of a necessary being
   3.1.1 Ancient cosmological arguments
   3.1.2 The necessary and the contingent
   3.1.3 The Principle of Sufficient Reason
   3.3.4 The unity of god

3.2 Avicenna's argument for the eternity of the world

3.3 Al Ghazali's challenges
   3.3.1 The materialist and “those who know truth”
   3.3.2 The incoherence of the philosophers’ god

3.4 Averroes's rebuttal.
   3.4.1 Efficient and essential causation
   3.4.2 The impossibility of an infinite chain of essential causation.
3.5 PSR Today
   3.5.1 PSR as a methodological principle
   3.5.2 Does PSR entail that nothing could be different?

Unit 4: Existence and Fiction

4.1 Nonexistent objects:
   4.1.1 The logical problem
   4.1.2 The semantic problem

4.2 Meinong
   4.2.1 Some things do not exist
   4.2.3 The characterization principle
   4.2.4 Two ways to have a property
   4.2.5 Problems

4.3 Quine
   4.3.1 General and singular existence statements
   4.3.2 Reinterpreting singular existence
   4.3.3 Arguing about existence

4.4 Quine and Fiction
   4.3.1 Three kinds of talk about fiction
   4.3.2 Non-Meinongian realism about fiction

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/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
- “Reflection and Disagreement”, Adam Elga: https://philpapers.org/rec/ELGRAD
- “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

Unit 3 Reading:

Essential
- Averroes, First and Third 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/
- “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

**Background Reading:**


**Unit 4:**

*Essential*

- Quine, “On what there is”: https://philpapers.org/rec/QUIOWT-7
- Parsons, “Are there nonexistent objects”: https://philpapers.org/rec/PARATN
- 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/

**Assessment**

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

- Ten posts on the online discussion board of under 300 words. [10%]
- Two short essays of 1500 words each [Total: 40%, ea. 20%]
- Two long essays of 2000 words each [Total: 50%, ea. 25%]
This document provides guidance for your work during Semester 1.

**Essays:**

**Essay 1:** 1500 Word, Due: Thursday 26th October 2017, by 12pm

- **Topic Option 1:** Explain and evaluate Thomson’s original argument 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.

In order to receive feedback on an Outline Frame, please submit an outline frame **by 9 October**.

In order to receive feedback on a Draft, please submit it by **16 October**.

**Essay 1:** 1500 Word, Due: Thursday 26th October 2017, by 12pm

- **Topic Option 1:** Explain and evaluate Thomson’s original argument 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.

In order to receive feedback on an Outline Frame, please submit an outline frame **by 9 October**.

In order to receive feedback on a Draft, please submit it by **16 October**.

**Essay 2:** 2000 Word Essay, Due: Tuesday 14 December 2017, by 12pm

- **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?
In order to receive feedback on an Outline Frame, please submit an outline frame by 9 October.

In order to receive feedback on a Draft, please submit it by 1 December.

**Assignments:**

Each 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.

**Posting 1 (Due: Friday 29 September):** Provide your own example of a case in which a person may permissibly taken an action knowing that it will result in five people dying and another person living even though that there is another action which would result in the five living and the one dying. (Max 300 Words)

**Posting 2 (Due: Friday 13 October):** 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 500 Words)

**Posting 3 (Due: Friday 20 October):**

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.

**Posting 4 (Due: Friday 3 November):**

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)

Complete interview available here:

**Posting 5 (Due: Friday 17 November):**

Second Semester Due Dates

**Essay 3**: 1500 Word, Due: Thursday 1st March 2011, by 12pm

**Essay 4**: 2000 Word Essay, Due: Monday 9 April 2018, by 12pm

**Posting 6 (Due: Friday 26 January):**

**Posting 7 (Due: Friday 9 February):**

**Posting 8 (Due: Friday 16 March):**

**Posting 9 (Due: Friday 23 March):**

**Posting 10 (Due: Friday 6 April):**