

PHL 282: PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS

FALL 2021

INSTRUCTOR: Alison Peterman

TEXTS: All readings will be in the course reader, in Plato, *Five Dialogues*, or in Dostoyevky, *The B*

TIME AND PLACE: Tuesdays, 6-9 pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we will read and engage with philosophical works from several different periods, geographical regions, and areas of philosophy.

POLICIES

Please let me know right away if you have a condition that interferes with your learning.

Please review the class schedule sometime in the next week and let me know if there are any issues.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Please come to every class, have the reading for that day done before class time, abide by classroom expectations, and complete all of the assignments on time.

CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS AND GUIDELINES

My role is to help you get the most out of the course as possible, and the best way I know how to do that is to balance telling you what I know, helping each of you to work through the texts and your thoughts about them, and helping you learn from each other as a group by productively structuring class discussion.

So in class, you should expect a mixture of lecture and discussion. Sometimes in class, I will tell you about a topic for a little while. At those times, please raise your hand if you have a thought or a question, and I will either stop and invite you to speak or ask you to hold it until I reach the end of a topic. Other times, we will have a group discussion of some topic or question. You should also raise your hands to contribute at those times, and I will call on you in the order in which you raise your hands.

Participating in these discussions is a very important part of learning philosophy. I want you to learn about the texts and theories we read, but I also want you to get practice doing philosophy, which includes thinking carefully and critically about the things that people say. That includes the claims that the philosophers we read make, the claims that I make, and the claims that your

classmates make.

The best way to do this is by taking the following steps:

1. Read or listen carefully to what a philosopher (someone we read, or me, or your classmate) says, and try to understand precisely what they mean.
2. If you do not understand what they mean right away, try again by re-reading or re-thinking.
3. If you still do not understand what they mean, ask them a follow-up question to help clarify it.
4. Once you understand what they are claiming, identify their reasons for claiming it. This may be written in the text, or your classmate may say it. In other words, what is their argument or evidence that what they claim is true?
5. Try to understand their argument, reasons, or evidence as well as you can. Listen and read charitably. That means, attribute to them the strongest version of their argument that is possible.
6. Ask yourself whether the argument is good. This means evaluating two things: whether the premises are true and whether the conclusion follows from the premises.
7. Think about what you think about the claim. Is it true? False? What are your reasons for thinking that?

ASSIGNMENTS

PARTICIPATION (20%):

20% of your grade will be participation, which means coming to class whenever possible, carefully completing all the reading for that week, and participating in class discussions in an active and constructive way.

RESPONSE PAPERS (40%):

Eight times during the semester, you should compose a short writing assignment that responds to one of the readings assigned for that week. Each is worth 5%. The weeks are indicated, and should be about the reading for *that week*.

At the top of the response paper, you should write one sentence which is either a question about the reading (more substantive than "What does Smith mean by X?") or a criticism in the form of a sentence like "Smith's claim that X is wrong/unjustified because...". If it is a question, spend the rest of the response paper explaining what caused you to ask it and attempting to answer it as best you can. If it is a criticism, defend it. This should be an argument that a specific premise is incorrect or unsupported or that the argument's premises do not support the conclusion. You should come to class prepared to discuss your response paper.

FINAL PAPER (40%):

You should compose a final paper. It may extend and refine your thoughts in one of your response papers. I will provide more details about this during the semester.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Knowledge

- * Al-Ghazali: *Deliverance from Error*, Sections 1-17
- * René Descartes: The First Meditation
- * William James: “On Mysticism”

Response Paper 1 due

Week 3: Knowledge

- * Transcript of podcast with Cassim Quaassam
- * Transcript of podcast with Rosenblum and Muirhead
- * Transcript of “The Daily”
- * Rachel Fraser: “Epistemic FOMO”

Response Paper 2 due

Week 4: Knowledge

- * Mandelbaum and Quilty-Dunn: “Why Liberals Shouldn’t Watch Fox News”

Week 5: Language and (Un)Truth

- * J.L. Austin: “Performative Utterances”
- * Harry Frankfurt: “On Bullshit”
- * Souleymane Bachir Diagne: “Truth and Untruth”, selection
- * Ursula LeGuin: Introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*

Response Paper 3 due

Week 6: World

- * McTaggart: “The Unreality of Time”
- * David Lewis and Stephanie Lewis: “Holes”

* Week 7: World

- * Leibniz, *Theodicy* selections
- * Voltaire: *Candide*, Chapter 1
- * Voltaire: Poem on the Lisbon Earthquake
- * Rousseau: Reply to Voltaire

Week 8: (Social) World

- * Chike Jeffers: “What Is Race?”, Chapter 2

Response Paper 4 due

Week 9: Minds

- * Thomas Nagel: “What is it like to be a bat?”
- * Laura Ruggles: “The minds of plants”
- * Peter Godfrey-Smith: “On Being an Octopus” (<http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/peter-godfrey-smith-being-octopus>)

Response Paper 5 due

Week 10: Persons

- * Star Trek Episodes: “Imposter”, “Dax”, and “Tuvix”

Response Paper 6 due

Week 11: The Good

- * The *Dhammapada*
- * Émilie du Châtelet: “Discourse on Happiness”

Response Paper 7 due

Week 12: Meaning

- * Robert Nozick: “The experience machine”
- * Susan Wolf: “The meanings of lives”, selections

Response Paper 8 due

Week 13: The Good

- * Dostoyevky: selections from *The Brother Karamazov*

Week 14: Justice

- * Plato: *Apology*
- * Plato: *Crito*

Final Paper Draft Presentations

Week 15: Justice

- * Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”
- * Malcolm X: selections