

Problems of Philosophy

Ethics

1. *Wednesday, September 2.* MORAL ARGUMENT
Singer tries to establish a general moral principle with an argument. How does his argument work? That is, how does he move from premises about drowning children to conclusions about what, generally speaking, we are required to do?
Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1972), p. 231.
2. *Monday, September 7.* SINGER'S PRINCIPLE
Singer gives different formulations of his moral principle. What are the argumentative advantages and disadvantages of each? Does his argument do a better job of establishing one rather than the other?
Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality".
3. *Wednesday, September 9.* HOW FAR DOES OUR RESPONSIBILITY GO?
Cohen accepts the bulk of Singer's argument but rejects his conclusion. With some qualifications, he believes we are primarily responsible only for doing our share to alleviate suffering. What is his argument for this conclusion and how would Singer reply?
L. Jonathan Cohen, "Who is Starving Whom?", *Theoria* (1981).
4. *Monday, September 14.* ABORTION AND THE RIGHT TO LIFE
Most of the debate about abortion is about this question: do fetuses have the right to life? Thomson proposes a different way of thinking about it. Suppose a fetus has a right to life, just like an adult. Would that prove that abortion is wrong?
Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1971).

5. *Wednesday, September 16.* CRITICISMS OF THOMSON'S ARGUMENT
The violinist case is not exactly like most cases of abortion. Do the differences matter for Thomson's argument? Could abortion still be wrong even if the analogy is solid?
Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion".
6. *Monday, September 21.* MORAL REALISM
Where do moral rules come from? Many cultures give a religious answer: they are given to us by a supernatural being. Plato denies that makes sense. He believes that they cannot be created.
Plato, *Euthyphro*, 6e-11b.
7. *Wednesday, September 23.* MORAL RELATIVISM
According to Harman, moral beliefs are generated by societies and do not reflect anything real. How does he argue for this conclusion? Does it conflict with Plato's point?
Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality* (Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 3-10.
8. *Monday, September 28.* RELATIVISM AND TOLERANCE
The AAA's statement makes the case for moral relativism and argues that tolerance follows from it. Williams criticizes that move.
American Anthropological Association, "Statement on Human Rights" *American Anthropologist* 49 (1947), pp. 539-543. Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 20-5.
9. *Wednesday, September 30.* MORE ON RELATIVISM AND TOLERANCE
Would the truth of relativism at least undermine the reasons for intolerance? If so, wouldn't that amount to moving from the truth of moral relativism to conclusions about tolerance?
Julian Steward, "Comments on the Statement on Human Rights," *American Anthropologist* (1948), pp. 351-2.

Note First paper topics distributed.

Epistemology

10. *Monday, October 5.* **WHAT DOES KNOWLEDGE INVOLVE?**
This is Descartes's famous consideration of doubt about our knowledge of the external world. What does Descartes think it takes to know something? Is this standard the right one?
René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), First and Second Meditations, pp. 12-23.
11. *Wednesday, October 7.* **DESCARTES'S ANSWER TO SCEPTICISM**
Descartes finds things he can know in the Second and Third Meditations: he knows that he exists and that God exists. He uses his knowledge of God's existence to conclude that his knowledge in general is secure. Can he do that?
Descartes, *Meditations*, Second and Third Meditations, pp. 16-36.
12. *Monday, October 12.* **THE PROBLEM OF INDUCTION**
I think I know things using inductive reasoning from observations of the past to predictions about the future. For instance, I think the fact that the sun has always risen in the past enables me to know that it will rise tomorrow. Hume argues that those inferences are groundless and that we have as much reason for believing that the sun will rise tomorrow as we do for believing that it will not. We will pay special attention to Hume's argument that attempts to justify these inferences based on past experience involve reasoning in a circle (see paragraphs 6-8 in part 2). What does that mean? Where is the circle?
David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Hackett), Section IV.
13. *Wednesday, October 14.* **A DEFENSE OF INDUCTION?**

Does Hume judge induction by the wrong standard? We cannot logically deduce what the future will be like based on what the past was like. But who says that inductive reasoning has to be like that? What happened in the past just is good reason for beliefs about the future, period, isn't it?

Hume, *Enquiry*, Section IV.

Note First paper due Thursday, October 15.

14. *Monday, October 19.* NO CLASS
Fall break.
15. *Wednesday, October 21.* CAUSE AND CORRELATION
We don't have any reason to make inferences based on past experience, so why do we make them? Hume's answer is habit. When we see As consistently followed by Bs, we conclude that As cause Bs and, when we next see an A (or hear of an A's happening, etc.), we conclude that there will be (or must have been, etc.) a B. Is this enough to make sense of our idea of a cause? In particular, how does it distinguish between causation and correlation? If A causes B, then A made B happen. If A is merely *correlated* with B, then this is not so; the two just happen to occur in that order.
Hume, *Enquiry*, Sections V and VII.
16. *Monday, October 26.* MIRACLES, PART 1
We will address two questions about the first part of the section on miracles. First, what does the reference to Bishop Tillotson's argument at the beginning mean? Second, how does Hume argue that we can never have good reason to believe in miracles?
Hume, *Enquiry*, Section X, part 1.
17. *Wednesday, October 28.* MIRACLES, PART 2
Can Hume show that we should dismiss reported miracles out of hand, without investigation? What distinguishes the case of the sun from the one about the "queen's" resurrection?
Hume, *Enquiry*, Section X, part 2.

Note Second paper topics distributed

18. *Monday, November 2.* A DEFENSE OF MIRACLES
Lewis points out a significant problem for Hume's naturalism. Why does Hume get to use assumptions about the uniformity of nature and natural laws? He denied that we have any reason to believe in them! Does a supernatural source for natural order help?
C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: a preliminary study* (Harper-SanFrancisco, 2001), pp. 159-71.
19. *Wednesday, November 4.* NATURAL RELIGION
Instead of looking for disruptions in the natural order, some people regard the uniformity of nature as evidence of a supernatural designer. Here, Hume argues that the natural order gives us no reason to believe in a provident God. What does it mean to call God provident? Why doesn't the natural order show that God has that quality? It sure beats a disordered nature, after all!
Hume, *Enquiry*, Section XI.

Metaphysics

20. *Monday, November 9.* IDENTITY: PERSON AND MAN
Why is the continued identity of a thing a problem? How did Locke address this problem? What is the distinction between person and man?
John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 328-38.
21. *Wednesday, November 11.* LOCKE'S CASES
We will talk about how Locke uses cases, such as that of the prince and the cobbler, and what they mean for his account of personal identity.
Locke, *Essay*, pp. 338-48.

22. *Monday, November 16.* REVISIT THE CASES
Williams thinks Locke's cases went by too quickly. When you look at them more carefully, he thinks, it isn't obvious at all that people can switch bodies.
Bernard Williams, "The Self and the Future," *Philosophical Review* (1970).
23. *Wednesday, November 18.* ARE PEOPLE SPECIAL?
For most things, there need not be a determinate answer to questions about whether some object has survived some changes. Sometimes, there is no saying one way or the other. Is something similar true of us?
Williams, "The Self and the Future".
Note Second paper due Thursday, November 19.
24. *Monday, November 23.* THE BRANCH-LINE CASE
Could I survive being duplicated? On the one hand, no: two can't be one and there's only one of me. On the other hand, yes: two is more than zero.
Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 199–201.
25. *Wednesday, November 25.* NO CLASS
Thanksgiving travel day.
26. *Monday, November 30.* THE COMBINED SPECTRUM
Given what I'm made of, how could it be the case that questions about my identity over time must have determinate answers?
Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, pp. 229–43.
27. *Wednesday, December 2.* DEATH
Death is non-existence. But non-existence is no big deal: think of all the time before you were born. So why is death a bad thing?

Thomas Nagel, "Death," in *Mortal Questions*, pp. 1-10.

28. *Monday, December 7.* IMMORTALITY
Death may be bad, but immortality isn't the answer, according to Williams.
Bernard Williams, "The Makropoulos Affair: reflections on the tedium of immortality", in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge University Press, 1973).
29. *Wednesday, December 9.* FINAL EXAM
Review for the exam.

Goals

Students taking this course will become familiar with problems of philosophy that meet the following criteria. First, studying them gives insight into questions about how to live and our place in the universe. Second, the written material is exceptionally good. Third, the materials and questions are representative of the discipline of philosophy. This last point means that this course serves as an introduction to the discipline of academic philosophy. The first two points mean that the course should be valuable even to those who will pursue other academic interests.

The course emphasizes arguments and writing. Students who successfully complete this course will learn how to construct arguments, how to interpret analytical writing, how to raise objections to arguments, and how to write extended analytical essays of their own.

Materials

I ordered the following book through the Huntley Bookstore: David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Hackett).

The other readings will be made available electronically through the Resources section of the Sakai website for this course: <http://sakai.claremont.edu>. Sakai will also have links to my comments on class discussions, announcements, and any document I hand out.

Instructor

My name is Michael Green. My office is 207 Pearsons. My office hours are Tuesdays, 2-4. My office phone number is 607-0906. I only answer email once a day. I will reply, but if you need an answer quickly, you're probably best off calling or dropping by my office.

Assignments

Grades will be based on three assignments: two papers and a final exam. The papers will be limited to 1800 words which is about five or six pages. They will be due on Thursday, October 15 and Thursday, November 12. The Final Exam is scheduled for Monday, December 14 at 9 am. All three assignments will be weighted equally.

Grading policies

I am committed to seeing that my students are able to do very high quality work and that high quality work will be recognized. I do not employ a curve and there is nothing competitive about grading in my courses.

Grades apply to papers, not to people. They have no bearing on whether I like or respect you. Nor do they measure improvement or hard work, for two reasons. First, there is no fair way to assess these things. Second, it would be misleading since one may put a lot of effort into trying to make a bad idea work or produce a very good paper with ease. I think we make too much of grades, but they do communicate where written work stands on as objective

a scale as we can devise. Just bear in mind that this is really all that they involve.

What the grades mean

- A Work that is accurate, elegantly written, and innovative. It adds something original, creative, or imaginative to the problem under discussion. The grade of A is given to work that is exceptional.
- B Work that is accurate, well written, and has no significant problems. The grade of B is given to very good work. There is less of a difference between A and B work than you might think. Generally speaking, B papers are less innovative than A papers. This may be because the paper does not attempt to add much or because the attempt made is not fully successful.
- C Work that has problems with accuracy, reasoning, or quality of writing. The grade of C means that the paper has significant problems but is otherwise acceptable.
- D Work that has severe problems with accuracy, reasoning, relevance, or the quality of writing. Papers with these problems are not acceptable college-level work. Some papers that are fine on their own are nonetheless irrelevant. A paper is not relevant to my evaluation of work for this particular course if it does not address the question asked or if it does not display knowledge of our discussions. This sometimes trips up those taking a course pass/no credit.
- F Work that has not been completed, cannot be understood, or is irrelevant.

Final grades will be calculated using the College's 12 point scale as described on page 40 of the 2009-11 Catalog. The numerical average must be greater than half the distance between two grades in order to earn the higher grade.

Late papers and academic accommodations

Late papers will be accepted *without question*. They will be penalized at the rate of one-quarter of a point *per* day, including weekends and holidays. Exceptions

| Letter | Number | Range |
|--------|--------|-----------------------|
| A | 12 | $11.5 < A \leq 12$ |
| A- | 11 | $10.5 < A- \leq 11.5$ |
| B+ | 10 | $9.5 < B+ \leq 10.5$ |
| B | 9 | $8.5 < B \leq 9.5$ |
| B- | 8 | $7.5 < B- \leq 8.5$ |
| C+ | 7 | $6.5 < C+ \leq 7.5$ |
| C | 6 | $5.5 < C \leq 6.5$ |
| C- | 5 | $4.5 < C- \leq 5.5$ |
| D+ | 4 | $3.5 < D+ \leq 4.5$ |
| D | 3 | $2.5 < D \leq 3.5$ |
| D- | 2 | $1.0 < D- \leq 2.5$ |
| F | 0 | $0.0 < F \leq 1.0$ |

Letter and number grades

will be made in extremely unusual circumstances. Please be mindful of the fact that maturity involves taking steps to ensure that the extremely unusual is genuinely extremely unusual.

To request academic accommodations of a disability, please contact Dean Marcelle Holmes at 607-2147 or mdco4747@pomona.edu.