

# Problems of Philosophy

Philosophy I  
Fall 2006

## Schedule

### ETHICS

*Friday, 1 September*

#### FAMINE AID

Is there such a thing as moral argument? If so, how does it work?

READING: Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality", *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1 (1972).

*Monday, 4 September*

#### SINGER'S PRINCIPLE

Singer gives different formulations of his moral principle. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

READING: Singer.

*Wednesday, 6 September*

#### WHAT ARE WE RESPONSIBLE FOR?

Are we required to do more than our share? What if people die when we don't?

READING: L. Jonathan Cohen, "Who is Starving Whom?", *Theoria* 5 (1981).

*Friday, 8 September*

#### ABORTION AND THE RIGHT TO LIFE

Most of the debate about abortion concerns whether fetuses have the right to life. Thomson proposes a different way of thinking about it. Suppose a fetus did have a right to life, just like an adult. Would that prove that abortion is wrong?

READING: Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion", *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1 (1971).

*Monday, 11 September*

#### THOMSON'S ANALOGY

Why might someone dispute the analogy with the violinist? How does Thomson respond?

READING: Thomson.

*Wednesday, 13 September*

#### IS THERE A RIGHT TO ABORTION?

Suppose a fetus doesn't have a right to use its mother's body. Does it follow that there is nothing wrong with abortion? Does it follow that there is a right to abortion? Note that those are slightly different things.

READING: Thomson.

*Friday, 15 September*

#### MORAL LUCK

- Accidents play an important role in moral guilt. Does that make any sense?  
 READING: Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), chap. Moral Luck, 24–38.
- Monday, 18 September* MORAL LUCK II  
 Continued discussion of moral luck.  
 READING: Nagel, 24–38.
- Wednesday, 20 September* MORAL REALISM  
 Where do the moral rules come from? Many cultures give a religious answer called theological voluntarism: the moral rules are given to us by a supernatural being. Plato asks whether that makes sense.  
 READING: Plato, *Euthyphro*, 6e–11b.
- Friday, 22 September* NO CLASS  
 READING: None.
- Monday, 25 September* MORAL RELATIVISM  
 Another answer to the question of where the moral rules come from: they are social practices that vary from one culture to another. The American Anthropological Association used this explanation of the origin of moral rules to oppose the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is the explanation of their position.  
 READING: American Anthropological Association, “Statement on Human Rights”, *American Anthropologist* 49 (1947).
- Wednesday, 27 September* OBJECTIONS  
 Is there an argument from the truth of moral relativism to the conclusion that we should be more tolerant than we might otherwise be?  
 READING: Bernard Williams, *Morality* (Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 20–25.
- Friday, 29 September* 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?  
 READING: Williams, *Morality*, pp. 20–25.
- Monday, 2 October* RELATIVISM AND TOLERANCE II  
 Can moral relativists take other cultures seriously?  
 READING: Jeremy Waldron, “How to Argue for a Universal Claim”, *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* (1999).

## EPISTEMOLOGY

*Wednesday, 4 October*

## WHAT DOES KNOWLEDGE INVOLVE?

What does Descartes think it takes to know something? Is this standard the right one?

READING: René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), First and Second Meditations, pp. 12–23.

*Friday, 6 October*

## SKEPTICISM

In the Second Meditation, Descartes finds something that he knows. Notice the split between the things he is certain of and those that are still open to doubt.

READING: Descartes, First and Second Meditations, pp. 12–23.

*Monday, 9 October*

## DOUBTS ABOUT CAUSES

Begin with Hume's psychological theory: impressions, ideas, and the association of ideas. Then, the problem: what is the idea of necessary connection?

READING: David Hume, *An enquiry concerning human understanding*, edited by Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 96–107, 134–43.

*Wednesday, 11 October*

## DOUBTS ABOUT CAUSES II

Continued discussion of Hume's denials that we understand the necessary connection between cause and effect

READING: Hume, pp. 134–47.

*Friday, 13 October*

## NECESSARY CONNECTION

Hume's positive story. What is our idea of necessary connection?

READING: Hume, pp. 143–7.

*Wednesday, 18 October*

## CRITICISM

Why can't we say that A caused B without thinking that any other A would also have to cause B?

READING: G. E. M. Anscombe, "Causality and Determination", in: *Causation* (Oxford University Press, 1993).

*Friday, 20 October*

## MIRACLES

The first part of Hume's discussion of miracles.

READING: Hume, pp. 169–74.

*Monday, 23 October*

## MIRACLES II

What is the relationship between the two parts? Did Hume show that we don't have reason to believe in miracles in the first part? If so, what is the second part for?

READING: Hume, pp. 174–86.

*Wednesday, 25 October*

CRITICISM

More attention to the arguments in the second part.  
Broad's criticism of Hume's argument.

READING: C. D. Broad, "Hume's Theory of the Credibility of Miracles", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 17 NS (1917).

*Friday, 27 October*

CRITICISM II

Does Hume's argument prove too much?

READING: Richard Whately, *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte* (London, 1860).

*Monday, 30 October*

ARGUMENTS FROM DESIGN

Can we infer a benevolent God from the apparent design of the world?

READING: Hume, pp. 187–98.

*Wednesday, 1 November*

DESIGN II

More discussion of arguments from design

READING: Hume, pp. 187–98.

METAPHYSICS

*Friday, 3 November*

IDENTITY

Why is the continued identity of a thing a problem?  
How did Locke address it?

READING: John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 328–32.

*Monday, 6 November*

MAN AND PERSON

How does Locke distinguish between man and person?  
Why does he do so?

READING: Locke, pp. 332–8.

*Wednesday, 8 November*

PERSONAL IDENTITY

The cases Locke gives in favor of his view of personal identity. The cobbler and the prince. Socrates waking and Socrates sleeping. Etc.

READING: Locke, pp. 337–48.

*Friday, 10 November*

DISCUSSION OF LOCKE

Objections from the floor.

READING: Locke, pp. 328–48.

*Monday, 13 November*

REVISIT THE CASES

Let's take another look at the body-switch cases.

READING: Bernard Williams, "The Self and the Future",  
*Philosophical Review* 79 (1970).

*Wednesday, 15 November*    ARE WE BODIES?  
Does Williams's argument show that persons are bod-  
ies?

READING: Williams, "The Self and the Future".

*Friday, 17 November*    ARE PEOPLE SPECIAL  
For most things, there need not be a determinate an-  
swer to questions about whether some object has survived some changes. Some-  
times, there is no saying one way or the other. Is something similar true of us?

READING: Williams, "The Self and the Future".

*Monday, 20 November*    THE BRANCH LINE CASE  
Could I survive being "duplicated" or not?  
READING: Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford Uni-  
versity Press, 1987), pp. 199-201.

*Wednesday, 22 November*    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?  
READING: Parfit, pp. 229-243.

*Monday, 27 November*    WHAT IS DEATH?  
Given what death is, how could it be a bad thing?  
READING: Nagel, pp. 1-10.

*Wednesday, 29 November*    DEATH II  
Continued discussion of Nagel.  
READING: Nagel, pp. 1-10.

*Friday, 1 December*    IMMORTALITY  
Would immortality be a good thing?  
READING: Bernard Williams, "The Makropoulos Affair:  
reflections on the tedium of immortality", in: *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge Uni-  
versity Press, 1973).

*Monday, 4 December*    IMMORTALITY II  
Continued discussion.  
READING: Williams, "The Makropoulos Affair".

*Wednesday, 6 December*    WRAPPING UP  
Concluding discussion.  
READING: None

## Materials

The appropriate editions of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* may be purchased at the Huntley Bookstore. Check under "Philosophy 33". Everything else will be available in a xeroxed reader from King's Copies, 865 W. Foothill, 625-2002, kingsclaremont@yahoo.com.

All readings will be on reserve in the Honnold-Mudd Library.

Comments on lectures and announcements will be posted on the web at the Sakai site for this course.

## Instructor

My name is Michael Green. My office is 207 Pearsons. My office hours are Mondays and Wednesdays, 4-5 and Fridays 2-4. My office phone number is 607-0906. I have decided that my life will be much better if 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 four assignments: two papers, a mid-term, and a final exam.

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course. Late papers will be accepted without question. They will be penalized at the rate of one-half of a point *per* day, with grades based on the College's twelve point scale. Exceptions will be made in extremely unusual circumstances. Please be mindful of the fact that maturity involves taking steps to ensure that the extremely unusual remains extremely unusual.