

Introduction to Philosophy (Phil 020-01)

Summer 2017 – Georgetown University
MTWRF 8:30 – 10:30 AM
Maguire 104

Course Instructor: Quentin Fisher
Email: qaf2@georgetown.edu
Office Hours: TBA (or by appt.)

Course Description

Human beings are peculiar animals. We can think, act, love, and speak, but we can also think about the meaning of our actions, commitments, thoughts, and words. We are, in other words, essentially reflective or – better – philosophical animals. In this course we will investigate some of the core questions in theoretical philosophy: What is a mind? What or who am I? Is objective knowledge possible? Can intelligence be “artificial”? What – if anything – has value? We will look at both historical and contemporary treatments of these questions. Along the way we will work to develop a set of analytical tools useful for investigating theoretical questions, both philosophical and otherwise.

Required Texts

Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, Harvard University Press, 2008.

Graham Priest, *Logic: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

All other readings will be available for free download on the Canvas site.

Assessment¹

2 Papers (Each worth 25% of your grade)
Daily Reading Responses (25%)
Participation/ Preparedness (25%)

Papers:

You must write two 5-7 page papers. In the first paper, you must explain in detail, using tools from formal logic, an argument that was discussed in class or in the readings. You must then offer one criticism of this argument. In the second paper, you will choose any topic discussed over the course of the term and offer (i) an analytical reconstruction of an argument relevant to that topic, (ii) a criticism of that argument, and (iii) a rejoinder to the argument in (ii). All paper topics must be approved by course instructor. More information to

¹ The instructor reserves the right to revise the nature of the assignments throughout the course.

come in class.

Reading Responses

Before *each class meeting*, you must email me a reading response. This response can be an observation about the reading, a question you have, or a worry/ objection you want to raise. Your response should be a **maximum of four sentences and must be emailed by 9:30PM the night before class and on the reading for that class.** Anything received after 9:30PM will not receive credit.

Participation

Since this is a *discussion* based course, participation and preparedness make up 25% of your grade. I expect you to come prepared having done the reading(s) and ready to engage in discussion about the material. Participation does not necessarily mean speaking as frequently as you can. While I will not be evaluating you on the content of your comments, I will be looking for thoughtful contributions that demonstrate a serious attempt to think about the ideas under discussion. I also expect you to be respectful and courteous toward both your peers and me in class. Not only is this important for creating a welcoming environment, but it is *essential* for doing good philosophy. Engaging charitably, even with ideas with which you strongly disagree, is a central philosophical and intellectual virtue. If you are worried for any reason about your ability to participate, please talk to me. I am very sympathetic to concerns of this kind, and I am happy to find ways to accommodate many different learning styles.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. Please do not be late. We will begin class at 8:30AM sharp. You are given two excused absences, no questions asked. If you are late to class more than 3 times, it will affect your participation grade. Each unexcused absence after 2 absences will lower your participation grade by one whole grade – e.g., from an ‘A’ to a ‘B’.

Academic Integrity

Students found to be in violation with the Georgetown University honor code will be reported to the Honor Council and will receive a failing grade on the assignment, or in the course, or worse, depending on the severity of the infraction. We will discuss in class proper citation conventions in philosophy.

Course Schedule²

² Schedule subject to change

May 22	Introduction – No assigned reading
May 23 What is the mind?	Searle, pp. 1-40
May 24 The modern mind: A Saga	Haugeland, pp. 15-45
May 25 Logical Interlude: Validity, Truth Functions, Quantifiers	Priest, pp. 1-23
May 26 Logical Interlude: Existence, Self-Reference, Modality, Conditionals	Priest, pp. 24-54
May 29 (Memorial Day)	NO CLASS
May 30 The mind and mental disorders	Radden, “Personal Identity, Characterization Identity, and Mental Disorder”
May 31 Epistemology: an introduction	Zagzebsky, “Epistemic Value and What We Care About”
June 1 Skepticism	Stroud, “The Problem of the External World”
June 2 Social Identities and Knowledge	Alcoff, “Sotomayor’s Reasoning”
June 5 Science and Ideology	Michaels, “Manufactured Uncertainty”
June 6 Contestable Concepts	Conant, “The Concept of America”
June 7 Jonathan Lear <i>Radical Hope</i> – “After this, nothing happened”	Lear, pp. 1-21.
June 8 “Breakdown”	Lear, pp. 24-41
June 9 “The Death of the Crow Subject”	Lear, pp. 42-62
June 12 “Dreams”	Lear, pp. 62-91
June 13 “Radical Hope”	Lear, pp. 91-117
June 14 “Courage and Hope”	Lear, pp 118-136
June 15 “Vindication”	Lear, pp. 136-154
June 16 Wrap up/ lingering questions	No assigned reading