

Reading Questions for Phil 251.501, Spring 2012 (Daniel)

Class One: What is Philosophy? (Jan. 17)

- How is philosophy different from mythology?
- How is philosophy different from religion?
- How is philosophy different from science?
- What does it mean to say that the “love of wisdom” is concerned with the *justification* of opinions?
- Why is giving reasons for your beliefs important regarding the main areas of philosophy (e.g., metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and logic)?

Class Two: Philosophical Tools (Jan. 19)

- What is “logical consistency”? Give some examples.
- What is the difference between logical possibility and causal possibility?
- What is the difference between lexical and real definitions?
- What is the difference between necessary and sufficient conditions?
- What are thought experiments?
- In philosophy, what is an argument?
- What is the difference between a deductive vs. and inductive argument?

Class Three: Knowledge and Skepticism (Jan. 24)

- What distinguishes propositional knowledge, “knowing how,” and “knowledge by acquaintance”?
- How does Clifford’s insistence on having evidence highlight the moral significance of distinguishing belief and knowledge?
- What are the three necessary conditions for knowledge? Give an example of a Gettier-case exception—that is, a case of meeting these conditions that is still not knowledge.
- How are skepticism, empiricism, and rationalism different?
- What is the difference between global and local skepticism?
- What is Descartes’ method of doubt, and why does he adopt it?
- For Descartes, why can’t we trust knowledge based on sense experience?
- For Descartes, how are doubts raised by dreaming more profound than doubts about sensations?
- How are the thought experiments of the evil demon, the brain in the vat, or the matrix even more profound than doubts about sense experience or dreaming?
- How are skepticism, solipsism, and fallibilism possible responses to Descartes’ doubts?

Class Four: Huemer on Skepticism (Jan. 26)

- According to Huemer, the skeptic claims that knowledge (“justified true belief”) is unattainable: why?
- Why are there no justified foundational beliefs?
- Why can’t innate or *a priori* beliefs be the indubitable bases for our knowledge?
- What criteria can we use to determine that our ideas (“sense data”) are caused by external objects (i.e., things in the world)?
- How do we know we are not brains in a vat being stimulated to have our experiences?
- How can we know we are awake vs. dreaming? and why can’t we similarly distinguish real experiences vs. brain-in-a-vat experiences?

Class Five: Empiricism (Jan. 31)

- How is knowledge, for empiricists, contingent and *a posteriori*, not universal or necessary?
- Why, for the empiricist, does justification for what we “know” not have to be infallible?
- What is naive realism, and what are the standard objections to it?
- What is indirect realism, and how does Locke’s primary-secondary quality distinction exemplify it?
- How does Berkeley’s idealism avoid the problems raised by Locke’s account?
- Is error possible in Berkeley’s idealism? And why isn’t commonsense experience an obvious refutation of Berkeley?
- For Hume, what is the problem of induction (i.e., about universal claims regarding the uniformity of nature)?

Class Six: Rationalism (Feb. 2)

- How is knowledge, for rationalists, necessary and *a priori*, universal and necessary?
- Does knowledge based on self-evident (analytic) truths tell us anything about the world?
- Can some *a priori* truths (e.g., injustice is wrong, all events have causes) tell us anything about the world or how it has to be?
- Are such “truths” really knowledge about the world, and are scientific “laws” necessary?
- According to Plato (using Socrates as his spokesman), how are philosophers different from “lovers of seeing or listening” in terms of knowledge vs. opinion?
- What is the point of Socrates’ discussion of how individual things can be one kind of thing and its opposite as well?
- What does Plato mean by saying that the beautiful or good itself is a Form?
- How does Plato’s Divided Line explanation of the relation between the visible and intelligible world supposed to help us understand what knowledge (vs. opinion) is?
- How does his Allegory of the Cave show that Plato is a rationalist?

Essay One: Hume on Induction (Feb. 5)

According to Hume, why can’t we know “that the future will resemble the past, and that similar powers will be conjoined with similar sensible qualities,” and how are both claims based on a questionable appeal to cause and effect as merely “constant and regular conjunction”?

Class Seven: Free Will/Hard Determinism (Feb. 7)

- How is causality at the heart of the determinist denial of human freedom?
- What is the difference between hard determinism and fatalism?
- What role does the principle of sufficient reason play in the determinist account?
- How is moral responsibility used to deny hard determinism? and what is the hard determinist response to that challenge?
- What is indeterminism? and how is moral responsibility used as an objection to it?
- How are hard determinism, indeterminism, and libertarianism incompatibilist (vs. compatibilist) theories?

Class Eight: Compatibilism (Feb. 9)

- What are the central claims and arguments of traditional compatibilism?
- What is deep self-compatibilism? and what distinguishes the arguments against it (the consequence argument vs. the argument using the principle of alternative possibilities)?

Class Nine: Libertarianism (Feb. 14)

- How do libertarians use to distinction between agent causation and event causation to explain how human beings are free?
- What are three objections to libertarianism?
- How does Chisholm's starting assumption—that human beings are responsible for their acts—lead him to reject determinism and indeterminism?
- Why does Chisholm say that real freedom consists not in being able to have done otherwise but in being able to have *chosen* to do otherwise?
- What is the difference between transeunt and immanent causation? and why, according to Chisholm, does understanding the former depend on understanding the latter?
- If the debate about human freedom is irresolvable, why bother engaging in it?

Class Ten: “Firming Up Soft Determinism [Compatibilism]” (Feb. 16)

- According to Holmstrom, why does having control over our beliefs and desires—that is, not being compelled—make a difference in deciding the extent to which we are free?
- Why must free actions be based on desires that have not been coercively acquired?
- Why must free actions be based on desires consistent with second-order volitions?
- Why must free actions be based on desires that are in harmony with the integrated set of our other beliefs and desires?
- How does not knowing the causes of our beliefs or the motives of those who influence the formation of our beliefs make our beliefs coerced and our actions not free?
- How can we identify ourselves as the ultimate sources of our own beliefs and desires (i.e., self-determining beings)?
- Given the difficulty of changing the social conditions that determine our desires, how is it possible to act freely?

Essay Two: Strawson on Moral Responsibility (Feb. 19)

According to Strawson, how do compatibilism, libertarianism, and the “self theory” each fail to justify moral responsibility by failing to explain how an indeterministic *causa sui* is possible?

Class Eleven: Personal Identity: Illusion/Body/Soul Theories (Feb. 21)

- Why is the issue of persistence through time central in discussing personal identity?
- What is the illusion theory of identity, and what are the main objections against it?
- What is the body theory of identity?
- How are the prospects of an afterlife, body switching, total amnesia, or duplicate copies arguments against the body theory?
- What is the soul theory of identity?
- How is the possibility of multiple personalities in the same soul, the same consciousness in multiple souls, or fundamental changes in a soul arguments against the soul theory?

Class Twelve: Memory Theory, “Identity and the Past” Reading by Schechtman (Feb. 23)

- What is the memory theory of identity, and how does it allow for reincarnation, multiple personalities, and holding people morally responsible?
- Why think that memory theory could be inconsistent? The memory theorist's reply?
- How is memory theory circular because of its focus on *real* memories?
- What does Schechtman mean by saying that, for Locke, personal identity consists not in the identity of substance but in the “forensic” identity of consciousness?

- For Schechtman, how is Locke’s view of personal identity as continuity of consciousness too weak and too strong?
- How is developing a coherent and intelligible self-conception intended to improve on Locke’s memory theory?
- How can this self-conception include unconscious states (which we do not remember)?

Class Thirteen: Daniel Dennett, “The Origin of Selves” (Feb. 28)

- How is the “minimal self” an effort to create and maintain boundaries?
- How do we use narrations to create a sense of self?
- How does saying that “I own my body” indicate I am not the same as my body?
- What is Dennett’s point in appealing to claims of multiple personality disorder?
- Even though Dennett argues that we select as our *own* a “fictive self,” he does not deny that there is a real self: why not?

Mid-Semester Exam Questions (Mar. 1)

1. How can rationalists (Descartes, Plato) and empiricists (Locke) differ so profoundly on what justifies our beliefs and still agree that we *know* things about the world?
2. In describing how we become selves, how does Dennett support Holmstrom’s compatibilist view of “self-determination” more than Chisholm’s libertarianism?

Class Fifteen: Mind-Body Dualism (Mar. 6)

- How do physicalists, dualists, and idealists differ on solving the mind-body problem?
- How are (1) afterlife, (2) out-of-the-body experiences, (3) the conceivability of having no body, and (4) intentionality each arguments for substance dualism?
- What objections can be raised against each of those four arguments?
- Why is interaction a problem for dualism, and how are parallelism and occasionalism attempts to respond to that problem?
- What does it mean to say that mind-body dualism is based on a category mistake?

Class Sixteen: Behaviorism & Identity Theory (Mar. 8)

- What does it mean to say that, for the physicalist, minds not only depend on bodies but are explained solely in terms of bodies?
- What is the difference between methodological and logical behaviorism?
- How does the behaviorist account of minds/mental states solve the interaction problem?
- What are three objections to behaviorism, and how could behaviorists reply to them?
- How does the mind-body identity theorist explain what the mind and mental states are?
- What are the arguments for identity theory?
- How are (1) the subjective character of mental states and (2) not having to have a human brain to think arguments against identity theory?
- How could an identity theorist respond to those objections?

Class Seventeen: Functionalism & Eliminative Materialism (Mar. 20)

- How are mental activity and mind defined by the functionalist?
- How is the Turing Test central for the functionalist in defining mind?
- How does Searle use his Chinese Room argument to show that syntactic organization of symbols is not the same as (semantic) understanding (and thus mind)?
- Why do critics of functionalism invoke the conceptual possibility of robots and zombies?
- How could functionalists reply to Searle and the robot/zombie objectors?
- What is the eliminative materialist position on mind, and what are the arguments for it?
- What are two objections that can be raised against eliminative materialism?

Class Eighteen: John Searle, “Is the Brain’s Mind a Computer Program?” (Mar. 22)

- What is strong AI?
- What is the Chinese Room argument?
- Why, for Searle, does understanding require a semantics and not simply a syntax?
- What does Searle mean by saying that “brains cause minds”?
- How is the strong AI that Searle rejects (a.k.a. “functionalism”) based on a “residual behaviorism tied to a residual dualism”?
- How is the distinction between simulation and duplication important for Searle?

Essay Three: Nagel on What It’s Like to Be a Bat (Mar. 25)

How does thinking about what it’s like to be a bat indicate that an “objective phenomenology” would explain the subjective character of experience better than a physical theory of mind?

Class Nineteen: Arguments for Religious Belief, Religious Experience (Mar. 27)

- How is fideism based on subjective commitment and does not assume objective fact?
- What objections can be raised against fideism?
- How do classical theists, pantheists, and new age believers differ on the concept of God?
- How do theists, atheists, and agnostics differ about rational arguments for the existence of God?
- What distinguishes *a posteriori*, *a priori*, and pragmatic arguments for God’s existence?
- How are arguments against God’s existence (e.g., the existence of evil) different from those arguments for God’s existence that fail?
- What’s wrong with using religious experiences to justify belief in God’s existence?

Class Twenty: Cosmological Argument for the Existence of God; Clarke Reading (Mar. 29)

- What role does the principle of sufficient reason play in the cosmological argument’s claim that the existence of the cosmos depends on a *necessary* being?
- How are the following objections to the cosmological argument: (a) if God is necessary, why not the universe? (b) composition fallacy: just because individual things have causes, why think the universe a whole has a cause? (c) why think everything has a cause or reason? (d) why couldn’t the universe result from the big bang due to a quantum vacuum? (e) why think that a finite universe proves anything about an all-good, all-powerful God who cares about his creation?
- According to Samuel Clarke, why must something have existed from all eternity?
- Why can’t the universe exist necessarily as an infinite series of dependent beings?
- Why can’t we say that the material world exists necessarily?

Class Twenty-One: Design Argument for the Existence of God; Hume Reading (Apr. 3)

- How is the design argument proposed as the best explanation for the universe's intricacy?
- How is the theory of evolution a challenge to the design argument?
- How is Intelligent Design a response to the evolutionary explanation, and what are the evolutionary replies to this alternative?
- For Hume, why can't we conclude that, if parts of nature have causes, the whole of nature is caused?
- Why think that the supposed order of the universe has to be modeled on human reason?
- How does our not having experienced the origin of universes undermine the design proponent's appeal to analogy (i.e., the principle that "like effects prove like causes")?
- How does Hume show that, using analogy, we cannot conclude that the creator of the universe is wise, one, incorporeal, good, or even still existing?

Class Twenty-Two: Ontological and Wager Arguments (Apr. 5)

- What is Anselm's version of the ontological argument?
- What are Hume's two objections to the ontological argument?
- What is Kant's objection to the ontological argument?
- How is Pascal's wager an attempt to show how it is more reasonable to believe that God exists than not to believe?
- What are two objections to the Wager?
- What conclusions can we draw from not being able to prove rationally that God exists?

Essay Four: Kierkegaard on Faith and Paradox (Apr. 8)

For Kierkegaard, why must faith be based on paradox, absurdity, and fear? (Be sure to explain each of these concepts in Kierkegaardian terms.)

Class Twenty-Three: Arguments against Classical Theism (Apr. 10)

- What is the logical problem of evil?
- How is (a) seeing evil as part of God's plan (which we don't understand), (b) needing some evil to build character, and (c) allowing for the possibility of evil for freedom attempts to respond to this problem?
- What is the evidential problem of evil?
- How is noting that natural evils (e.g., natural disasters, disease) often cause undeserved suffering an objection to this problem?
- Other theodicies include claims that (a) evil is not real, (b) evil is a punishment for sin, (c) evil is needed so that we recognize the good; (d) evil is caused by the devil, and (e) evil is a test by which those who pass merit heaven. What are the replies to each of these?
- How could theism or atheism be preferable to agnosticism?

Class Twenty-Four: Ethical Relativism/Divine Command Theory (Apr. 12)

- What is the point of appealing to moral principles?
- What is the subjectivist version of ethical relativism, and what are some objections to it?
- What is the cultural version of ethical relativism, and what are some objections to it?
- How are moral values determined based on the divine command theory of ethics?
- What are at least four objections to the divine command theory?
- How could a divine command theorist reply to these objections?
- How could a critic respond to the replies given by the divine command theorist?

Class Twenty-Five: Utilitarianism (Apr. 17)

- Why is utilitarianism sometimes referred to as hedonistic consequentialism?
- How do Bentham and Mill differ on their appeal to the hedonistic calculus?
- What objections can be raised against utilitarianism, and what are the utilitarian replies?
- What is the difference between act and rule utilitarianism?
- According to Mill, who decides which pleasures are superior in quality?
- How does utilitarian morality embody Christian ethics?
- How is distinguishing the morality of an action from the person doing it helpful in understanding Mill's attitude toward supererogatory acts?
- According to Mill, why *should* we aim to promote happiness?

Class Twenty-Six: Kantian Ethics (April 19)

- In Kantian deontology, what makes an action immoral?
- How does using happiness and consequences for moral judgments violate autonomy?
- What does it mean to think of actions in terms of a *categorical imperative*?
- What are two formulations of the categorical imperative?
- How can a Kantian respond to the objection that consequences often outweigh duties?
- How can a Kantian respond to two other objections: (a) why not allow for exceptions to rules? (b) why not treat people and animals as means rather than ends in themselves?

Essay Five: Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (Apr. 22)

For Nietzsche, how is life negated by slave morality's promotion of "good and evil" in place of the master morality's noble (yet "egoistic") creation of values? [Egoism ≠ universal selfishness]

Class Twenty-Seven: Virtue Ethics (April 24)

- How are utilitarianism and Kantian duty ethics (deontology) different from virtue ethics?
- What does the virtue ethicist mean (practically speaking) by saying that acting virtuously is acting rationally, in moderation, and in ways that are committed to excellence?
- What objections can be raised against virtue ethics?
- How, for Hursthouse, do the same objections apply to utilitarianism and deontology?
- Hursthouse claims that as we develop virtues (e.g., concern for others), we adopt moral rules; but following moral rules is not what makes us virtuous. What's her point?
- For Hursthouse, how does virtue ethics' emphasis on moral wisdom resolve situations when two virtues seem to conflict?

Class Twenty-Eight: The Absurdity of Life (April 26)

- If life is absurd, would living longer or continuing to exist in an afterlife make our lives any less absurd?
- For Nagel, how is self-consciousness necessary for thinking that our lives are absurd?
- Why can't contributing to a larger purpose give meaning to our lives?
- How does a skeptical attitude toward the meaning of life result in a sense of irony?
- Nagel says that our response to the absurdity of life should not be heroism or despair but irony. What do we need to recognize in order to pull this off?

Final Exam Questions (May 4, 12:30-2:30)

1. How are Searle's criticisms of a functionalist theory of mind like Hume's criticisms of the design argument for God's existence?
2. How is the difference between the cosmological and ontological arguments for God's existence like the difference between utilitarianism and Kantian duty ethics?
3. How do virtue ethics and relativism, each in its own way, assume a sense of irony toward the absurdity of life that is not adopted by divine command theory?