

Reading Questions for Phil 251.200, Fall 2012 (Daniel)

Class One: What is Philosophy? (Aug. 28)

- 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: The Activity of Philosophy and The Life of Reason [two readings] (Aug. 30)

- How is the appeal to reason different from an appeal to authority, emotion, and self-interest?
- What are the criteria for determining whether your reasons for doing or believing something are justified (i.e., “good” reasons)?
- According to Socrates, “the unexamined life is not worth living”: why?—especially since it is obvious that human beings are not essentially or inherently rational.
- How can reason be used to resolve conflicts in feelings and among different people?
- Why is appealing to reason preferable to relying on authority or allowing people to believe whatever they want about the world?

Class Three: Knowledge and Skepticism (Sept. 4)

- 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: Hume on “Skeptical Doubts” (Induction) (Sept. 6)

- What is the difference between relations of ideas and matters of fact?
- Why is inductive reasoning not only not certain but also not even probable?
- How is our knowledge of anything beyond what we immediately experience based on the cause-effect relation?
- Why is it significant that our knowledge of the cause-effect relation is not a priori but is based on experience?
- Why doesn’t “constant and regular conjunction” justify our belief in cause and effect?

- What difference does it make that past regularity does not guarantee future regularity or that the course of nature could change?
- Why can't we say that the future will resemble the past, or that similar things must behave similarly based on an “intuitive” link between what we experience (“sensible qualities”) and the “secret powers” of things?

Essay One: Huemer on Skepticism (Sept. 9)

How are Huemer’s four arguments against being able to *know* anything about the world related to one another? (Of course, you have to discuss the details of each argument.)

Class Five: Empiricism (Sept. 11)

- 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 and Plato [**two readings**] (Sept. 13)

- 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?
- What is the point of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave?
- What does Plato mean by saying that the good itself is a Form?
- Why does Plato say that those who have experienced the source of truth and intelligence (viz., philosophers) should govern?
- How does his Allegory of the Cave show that Plato is a rationalist?

Class Seven: Kant’s Epistemology (Sept. 18)

- How is the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments different from the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* propositions?
- What does Kant mean by saying that “every event has a cause” is a synthetic *a priori* proposition?
- How does Kant’s explanation of what makes synthetic *a priori* propositions possible amount to a Copernican Revolution in epistemology?
- How does Kant’s reconciliation of the central insights of rationalism and empiricism come at the cost of knowing things as they are in themselves?

Class Eight: Free Will/Hard Determinism (Sept. 20)

- 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 Nine: Compatibilism (Sept. 25)

- 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 Ten: Libertarianism (Sept. 27)

- How do libertarians use the 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?

Essay Two: Chisholm on Freedom and the Self (Sept. 30)

How does Chisholm use the distinction between immanent and transeunt causality regarding agent causation to show that we can act and choose freely?

Class Eleven: Strawson on Freedom & Responsibility (Oct. 2)

- According to Strawson, why are we not morally responsible for any of our actions based on our choices? How is this the Basic Argument?
- Why can't we be said (as Chisholm suggests) that we are the causes of our actions in virtue of being the causes of ourselves?
- How does the compatibilist argument for moral responsibility fail because it relies on an indeterministic (i.e., chance, random) account of ourselves as *causae sui*?
- If being free is a requirement for moral responsibility, why not simply assume we are free or that free acts are indeterminate?
- Why not think that our “real” self is free (i.e., a *causa sui*), even if our character or personality is determined by genetics or environment?

Class Twelve: Personal Identity: Illusion/Body/Soul Theories (Oct. 4)

- 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 Thirteen: Memory Theory (Oct. 9)

- What is the memory theory of identity?
- How does memory theory allow for reincarnation and multiple personalities?
- How does memory theory account for 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?

Class Fourteen Mid-Semester Exam (Oct. 11)

1. How can Hume's analysis of our knowledge of causation be used (a) to support and (b) to undermine both compatibilism and libertarianism?
2. How does Descartes' claim that we *know* we are thinking things affect the decision about whether personal identity is defined in terms of body, soul, or memory?

Class Fifteen: Mind-Body Dualism (Oct. 16)

- 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 (Oct. 18)

- 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 (Oct. 23)

- 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: Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” (Oct. 25)

- How does the essential subjectivity of consciousness make it *logically impossible* to know what it is like to be a bat?
- Why can’t the “phenomenological” features of experience be explained in terms of a purely physical (e.g., functionalist) account?
- How can an *objective phenomenology* of the structural features of experience provide an account of the subjective character of experience without reducing it to physical features?

Class Nineteen: Arguments for Religious Belief, Religious Experience (Oct. 30)

- 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 (Nov. 1)

- 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:
 - if God is necessary, why not the universe?
 - composition fallacy: just because individual things have causes, why think the universe a whole has a cause?
 - why think everything has a cause or reason?
 - why couldn’t the universe result from the big bang due to a quantum vacuum?
 - why think that a finite universe proves anything about an all-good, all-powerful God who cares about his creation?

Essay Three: The Design Argument and Hume’s Critique (Nov. 4)

How can Hume’s objections regarding the limits of human reason and appeals to analogy be used to reply to the Intelligent Design account of the universe?

Class Twenty-One: Ontological and Wager Arguments (Nov. 6)

- 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?

Class Twenty-Two: Problem of Evil (Nov. 8)

- 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-Three: Kierkegaard on Faith, Paradox, Absurdity, Fear (Nov. 13)

- How is there justice only in the spiritual world but not in the material world?
- How is Abraham a person of faith in virtue of the moral fear and anxiety required by his religious "plunge into the absurd"?
- Why can't God and the tragic hero speak to one another?
- How is "infinite resignation" or complete surrender to God's will *not* faith because it fails to affirm the paradox of belief?

Class Twenty-Four: Ethical Relativism/Divine Command Theory (Nov. 15)

- 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?

Essay Four: Mill's Utilitarianism (Nov. 18)

How can distinguishing between (a) the quality vs. quantity of happiness, (b) specific acts vs. rule-governed behaviors that produce happiness, and (c) the morality of action vs. the person doing the action address objections raised against utilitarianism?

Class Twenty-Five: Kantian Ethics (Nov. 20)

- 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 acting in terms of a *categorical imperative* (i.e., from duty)?
- What are three dimensions ("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?

Class Twenty-Six: Nietzsche on Morality (Nov. 27)

- How is life negated by slave morality's promotion of "good and evil"?

- How can the master morality's creation of values—the “self-overcoming of man”—be noble and yet “egoistic”?
- How is the morality of utility an example of slave morality?
- How is the justified “egoism” of the master different from the misplaced vanity of the slave, in that the master does not endorse universal selfishness?
- How do the master and slave differ in accounting for the origins of moral obligations?

Class Twenty-Seven: Virtue Ethics (Nov. 29)

- How are utilitarianism and Kantian duty ethics (deontology) different from virtue ethics?
- For Aristotle, how is human well-being or happiness (*eudaimonia*) linked to being a good person and living a good life rather than simply doing the right thing?
- What do virtue ethicists mean (practically speaking) by saying that acting virtuously is:
 - acting rationally?
 - in moderation, adopting the “golden mean”?
 - in ways that are committed to excellence?
- How are (a) the lack of specific guidance, (b) conflicts in virtues, (c) conflicts among virtuous persons, and (d) circular reasoning objections raised against virtue ethics?
- What replies can be given to those objections?

Class Twenty-Eight: Nagel on the Absurdity of Life (Dec. 4)

- 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 (Dec. 12, 1-3 p.m.)

1. How does Nagel's account of what it's like to be a bat pose problems for mind-brain identity theorists and functionalists without endorsing a strategy that subjectivist or cultural moral relativists could use?
2. How are the cosmological argument and theodicies (pick two) different from Pascal's wager and even Kierkegaard's religious “plunge into the absurd” in failing to address Nagel's claim that life is absurd?
3. How does a Kantian critique of divine command theory and utilitarian ethics lead to an ethics of duty that Aristotle and Nietzsche would reject because of how they differ on what “virtue” means?