

PHIL 265/2 AA

Introduction to Metaphysics

Fall 2005

“Philosophy, if it cannot *answer* so many questions as we could wish, has at least the power of asking questions which increase the interest of the world, and show the strangeness and wonder lying just below the surface even in the commonest things of daily life”
B. Russell

General Information

Location: LS - 419

Day: J

Hours: 18:00-20:15

Instructor: Andrea Falcon

Office Hours: J 16:00-18:00 or by appointment

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Course Description

Philosophy is concerned with specific problems and consists, ultimately, in the attempt to provide a solution to these problems. We shall focus on the following three distinct but related problems:

The Problem of the External World: the notorious problem of our knowledge of the world around us presents itself in its completely general form for the first time in Descartes. We shall try to understand the special *philosophical* character of this problem as well as the way Descartes treated it. We shall also discuss more recent attempts to treat the same problem.

The Problem of Objectivity: We shall begin with a discussion of the fact that we are subjects of experience and as such we have a unique perspective on the world around us. We shall continue with a discussion of the distinctively human ambition to transcend the human point of view in order to arrive at an objective description of the world around us.

The Problem of Rationality: There are radically different ways to understand the nature of rationality. We shall explore the idea that rationality is a constitutive feature of the mind. We shall read and discuss three recent contributions that Davidson has made to the particular problem of what distinguishes rational creatures from brutes.

Course materials

R. Descartes, *Meditations of First Philosophy* (Hackett 1993)

B. Russell, *Problems of Philosophy* (Hackett reprint of the 1912 edition)

A Reader containing the following articles:

- B. Stroud, *What is Philosophy?*, in C.P. Ragland and S. Heidt (eds.), *What is Philosophy?*
- B. Stroud, *Scepticism and the Possibility of Knowledge*, in B. Stroud, *Understanding Human Knowledge*.
- A.J. Ayer, *The Elimination of Metaphysics*, in A. J. Ayer, *Language Truth and Logic*
- G.E. Moore, *Proof of the External World*, in G.E. Moore, *Philosophical Papers*
- Th. Nagel, *What is it like to be a bat?*, in Th. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*

- Th. Nagel, *Knowledge*, in Th. Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*
- D. Davidson, *Rational Animals*, in D. Davidson, *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*
- D. Davidson, *The Emergence of Thought*, in D. Davidson, *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*.
- D. Davidson, *The Problem of Objectivity*, in D. Davidson, *Problems of Rationality*

Schedule

Week 1: Philosophy is concerned with certain problems and consists, ultimately, in the attempt to provide an answer to these problems. I think that at any given time philosophy must be understood, at least in part, within historical context. There is no way to understand the problems and what is at stake other than by seeing where they come from and why they present themselves at that time in the way that they do.

Required reading: B. Stroud, *What is Philosophy?*

The Problem of the External World

Week 2: First and Second Meditation

Required reading: R. Descartes, from *Meditations on First Philosophy*

Week 3: Appearance and Reality

Required reading: B. Russell, from *The Problems of Philosophy*

Week 4: The Problem of the External World

Required reading: B. Stroud, from *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*

Week 5: The Elimination of Metaphysics

Required reading: A.J. Ayer, from *Language, Truth and Logic*

Week 6: Proof of the External World

Required reading: G.E. Moore, from *Philosophical Papers*

Week 7: Exam 1

The Problem of Objectivity

Week 8: Mind and Experience

Required reading: Th. Nagel, *What is it like to be a bat?*

Week 9: The View from Nowhere

Required reading: Th. Nagel, from *The View from Nowhere*

The Problem of Rationality

Week 10: Mind and Rationality

Required reading: D. Davidson, *Rational Animals*

Week 11: Mind Language and Thought

Required reading: D. Davidson, *The Emergence of Thought*

Week 12: The Problem of Objectivity reconsidered

Required reading: D. Davidson, *The Problem of Objectivity*

Week 13: Exam 2

This schedule is tentative and may be subject to change. All changes will be made in class with ample time for adjustments.

Assignments and Grading

The final grade for the course is determined by 2 in-class exams, each counting 50% of the final grade. Each exam will consist of short-answer questions as well as questions that require a paragraph. It will be designed to test the extent to which you have absorbed the basic points of the readings that we discuss in class. Both exams must be completed in order to pass the class. *Participation can raise the grade.*

If you have special needs please contact the instructor to arrange a time to discuss your situation

Course polices

Regular attendance is required.

Papers must be handed in on time. Late papers will be downgraded in proportion to their lateness.

Be careful to cite all sources used. Plagiarism is a serious violation of academic integrity, and will result in a failing grade in the course.

Participation is expected and your final grade will benefit from the extent to which this expectation is fulfilled.

Your rights

You have the right to hear and to understand all of the material. If there is anything unclear, you have the right to ask about it. If you do not want to ask during class, you have the right to visit your instructor during office hours. If you cannot make office hours, you have the right to schedule an appointment. You have the right to have your papers returned promptly.

Your obligations

If you make an appointment and cannot meet it, you should notify the instructor. You are obligated to attend all the lectures. You are obligated to allow others to hear and understand the lectures. You should, therefore, refrain from chatting, reading newspapers or in any way disturbing others during lecture.