

PHIL-UA 1: Central Problems in Philosophy

Instructor: Martín Abreu Zavaleta

July 6 – August 15

MTWR 1:30 – 3:05pm

1 Contact Information

- Office hours: Thursday 10am–12pm
Make an appointment at <http://goo.gl/fLR5yN>
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2 Course Description

This course is an introduction to the methods of Philosophy by way of some of its most interesting problems. The course will start by addressing some philosophical problems you may have already encountered and gradually build up to questions of a more theoretical nature. The topics include: the good life, personal identity, the nature of identity statements, the nature of the mind, among others.

3 Grading and Requirements

There is a reading assignment for most sessions of the course. You should do the readings carefully, and be ready to discuss them in class. Participants in the course will have to write three papers and take a final exam. Importantly, the third paper will be a revision of the second one and must show substantive improvement. I will offer details during the first session.

There are two required textbooks for the course:

- Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Terence Irwin. Hackett Publishing Company, ISBN 0872204642
- Perry, John. *A dialogue on personal identity and immortality*. Hackett Publishing Company, ISBN 0915144530

The rest of the readings will be provided to you via NYU Classes.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

- 10% Participation
- 10% Quizzes

- 10% First paper
- 20% Second paper
- 30% Revision of second paper
- 20% Final exam

4 Schedule of Topics and Readings

4.1 The Good Life

July 6: Nozick, R. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pp. 42-45.

4.1.1 Aristotle's Conception of the Good Life

July 7: Aristotle. NE, book 1

July 8: Aristotle. NE, book 1

July 9: Aristotle, NE, book 2

4.1.2 Consequentialism

July 13: No reading for this session.

July 14: No reading for this session.

4.1.3 The Meaning of Life

July 15: Railton, Peter, 1984. "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13: 134-71.

July 16: Wolf, Susan, 1997. "Happiness and Meaning: Two Aspects of the Good Life" in *Social Philosophy and Policy* 14: 207-25. Nagel, Thomas, 1970. "The Absurd", *Journal of Philosophy* 68: 716-27

4.1.4 The value of death

July 20: Excerpts from Lucretius.

July 21: Williams, B. "The Makropulos case: reflections on the tedium of immortality" in *Problems of the Self*.

4.2 Personal Identity

July 22: Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter XXVII ("On Identity and Diversity")

July 23: Perry, John. *A Dialogue on Personal Identity*, first and second nights.

July 27: Perry, John. *A Dialogue on Personal Identity*, third night.

4.3 Frege's puzzle

July 28: Frege, G. "On Sense and Reference"

July 29: Same as July 28

July 30: Russell, B. "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description".

August 3: Russell, B. "On Denoting"

August 4: Excerpts from Kripke, S. "Naming and Necessity"

August 5: Perry, John. "The essential indexical"

4.4 The Nature of the Mind

August 6: Descartes. Meditations II and VI. Exchange with Elizabeth.

August 10: Smart, J. Sensations and Brain Processes

August 11: Turing, A. Computer Machinery and Intelligence.

August 12: Putnam, H. The Nature of Mental states, Searle. Can computers think?

August 13: Final exam

5 Written assignments

I'll grade your papers and be as fair as I possibly can. Since I may be unconsciously biased favorably or unfavorably towards some features that you or some of your classmates exhibit, the papers will be blinded. Blinding helps eliminate the effects of implicit bias, and this is why it is important.¹ Here are the rules and policies with respect to written assignments and class participation:

- I will **only** accept written assignments in PDF format. I will not accept assignments in any other format, including but not limited to Word, .rtf and hard copies.
- I will **not** change grades, unless I make an arithmetic mistake, e.g. I didn't sum up your points correctly. However, feel free to come to my office hours to discuss the comments I make to your written assignments.
- I will **not** accept assignments that are not properly blinded. An assignment properly blinded is one that satisfies **all** the following conditions:
 - The name of the file is your N-number.
 - Your name doesn't appear anywhere in the document.
 - The title of your paper (if it has one) doesn't appear in the name of the file.

¹Go here to learn something about implicit bias: http://med.stanford.edu/diversity/FAQ_REDE.html

- I will **not** accept late assignments, unless you have an excuse. If your assignment is going to be late, be sure to inform me **beforehand** and ask for an extension. If I grant you an extension, there will be still a penalization on the grade for that assignment.
- Cases of plagiarism will be thoroughly examined and taken to the competent authorities at NYU. The punishment for plagiarism can go from failing the assignment to expulsion from the university, depending on the verdict of the competent authorities. NYU's policy on plagiarism is clear, and you can consult it here: <http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity>