**Syllabus for Problems in Philosophy (Phil 120 F)**

*Fall 2014*

**Instructor:** Julia Staffel  
**Office:** Wilson 109  
**Office hours:** M/W 2.30-3.30 and by appointment  
**Email:** bayesian.epistemology@gmail.com  
**Classroom:** Cupples II/230  
**Class hours:** Monday/Wednesday 10-11.30am

**Teaching Assistant:** Tom Wysocki  
**Email:** writeyourpapersearly@gmail.com  
**Office Hours:** W 11.30-1 and by appointment  
**Office:** Wilson 116

**Class description:**
This class is an introduction to major problems in philosophy. You will learn about some of the big questions philosophers think about, and how you yourself can reason about them like a philosopher. Philosophers are concerned with fundamental assumptions about our place in the universe. There are lots of beliefs about fundamental matters that we are brought up with, but that often go unquestioned, such as ‘God exists’, ‘There is a real difference between right and wrong’, ‘We can freely choose how to live our lives’, ‘We can gain knowledge about the world’, and many others. As philosophers, we try to find out whether these beliefs can be supported with rational arguments, or whether we have to give them up in light of closer scrutiny.

We can only cover a small sample of philosophical questions in this class, but by learning about them, you will get an idea of the specific methodology and aim of philosophical inquiry. The semester is broadly divided into three topics:
- Philosophy of religion (Covering questions such as: Can we prove that there is a god? Is it rational to be religious?)  
- Epistemology (Covering questions such as: What is knowledge? What can we know?)  
- Philosophy of mind (Covering questions such as: What is the relationship between the mind and the body? Do we have free will?)

We will develop our own perspective on these issues, and we will also consult contemporary and historical philosophical texts to learn how other philosophers have thought about them.

**Learning Objectives:**
Students can expect  
- to gain familiarity with central philosophical questions and methods of argument,  
- to learn techniques for analyzing and formulating arguments that are useful across academic disciplines,  
- to practice abstract reasoning,  
- to experience a learning environment that encourages independent thought and discussion,  
- to hone their critical reading and writing skills.

**Expectations:**
This class has no prerequisites. Students are expected to attend all lectures, read the required texts, and do the best work they can on the assignments. Moreover, students are expected to take an active role in their learning by raising questions in class and participating in class discussion.

**Required class materials:**
It’s available in the bookstore. (You don’t need access to the online component of the book.)  
The textbook will be supplemented with additional readings, which will be posted on Blackboard.
Semester Overview:

Week 1:
Reading for this week:
Sober, Ch. 1, 2 (no homework)

Monday, Aug. 25:
Introduction and semester overview
Wednesday, Aug. 27:
Making arguments

Week 2:
Reading for this week:
Sober, Ch. 3 (homework due Monday, Sept. 1, 8am)

Monday, Sept. 1: Labor day, no class
Wednesday, Sept. 3:
Making arguments

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Week 3:
Arguments from Design
Reading for this week:
Sober, Ch. 5-7
De Cruz, The Enduring Appeal of Natural Theological Arguments
Paley, The Teleological Argument
(homework due Monday, Sept. 8, 8am)

Monday, Sept. 8:
The design argument
Wednesday, Sept. 10:
Creationism

Week 4:
The Ontological Argument
Readings for this week:
Sober, Ch. 8
Anselm, excerpts from Proslogion
Anselm vs. Gaunilo
(homework due Monday, Sept. 15, 8am)

Monday, Sept. 15
Can science prove everything?
Wednesday, Sept. 17:
The ontological argument

Week 5:
The Argument from Evil
Readings for this week:
Sober, Ch. 11
Mackie, Evil and Omnipotence
(homework due Monday, Sept. 22, 8am)
Monday, Sept. 22:
The problem of evil

Wednesday, Sept. 24:
More on the problem of evil

First take-home exam due Sunday, Sept. 28

Week 6:
Pascal’s Wager
Readings for this week:
Sober, Ch. 10
Pascal, excerpts from *Pensees*
Corte, Following God without Belief
(homework due Monday, Sept. 29, 8am)

Monday, Sept. 29:
The wager

Wednesday, Oct. 1:
The wager and the ethics of belief

THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Week 7:
What is knowledge?
Readings for this week:
Sober, Ch. 12
Zagzebski, What is knowledge?
(homework due Monday, Oct. 6, 8am)

Monday, Oct. 6:
Knowledge as a topic of philosophical interest

Wednesday, Oct. 8:
Trying to define knowledge

Week 8:
Descartes’ foundationalism
Readings for this week:
Sober, Ch. 13
Descartes, excerpts from *Meditations on First Philosophy*
(homework due Monday, Oct. 13, 8am)

Monday, Oct. 13:
Foundationalism

Wednesday, Oct. 15:
Descartes’ method of doubt

Week 9:
Reliabilism and epistemological methodology
Readings for this week:
Sober, Ch. 14
Nagel, Epistemic Intuitions
Week 10:
The Problem of Induction
Readings for this week:
Sober, Ch. 15-17
Hume, excerpts from *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*
(homework due Monday, Oct. 27, 8am)

Week 11:
Dualism and the Mind/Body Problem
Readings for this week:
Sober, Ch. 19
Descartes, sixth Meditation
Correspondence between Descartes and Princess Elizabeth, excerpts
(homework due Monday, Nov. 3, 8am)

Week 12:
Behaviorism
Readings for this week:
Sober, Ch. 20, 21
Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, Ch. 1, 2
(homework due Monday, Nov. 10, 8am)

Week 13:
The Mind/Brain Identity Theory
Readings for this week:
Sober, Ch. 22
Smart, Sensations and Brain Processes  
(homework due Monday, Nov. 17, 8am)

Monday, Nov. 17:  
Mind-brain identity theory

Wednesday, Nov. 19:  
Mind-brain identity theory

Third take-home exam due Sunday, Nov. 23

**Week 14:**  
**Functionalism**
Readings for this week:  
Sober, Ch. 23  
(homework due Monday, Nov. 24, 8am)

Monday, Nov. 24:  
Functionalism

Wednesday, Nov. 26: Thanksgiving break, no class

**Week 15:**  
**Free Will**
Readings for this week:  
Sober, Ch. 24, 25, 26  
(homework due Monday, Dec. 1, 8am)

Monday, Dec. 1:  
Free Will

Wednesday, Dec. 3:  
Wrapup

Friday, Dec. 5: final paper due

**Assignments and Grades:**
- **Homework** (15% of the grade)  
Every week you’ll have to complete a brief homework assignment on the readings for class. Usually, you’ll have to answer some questions about the reading. The homework assignments are due every Sunday at midnight. Send them by email to writeyourpapersearly@gmail.com.
You may miss 2 assignments without penalty.

- **Attendance and participation**; 10%  
You may miss 3 classes without penalty. If you are sick and you need to miss more classes, please contact me as soon as possible. You’ll need to provide me with a doctor’s note, and we’ll work out how you can make up for the content that you’ve missed.

- **3 take-home assignments** (1st =15%, 2nd = 20%, 3rd = 20%)  
Each of these take-home assignments will consist of several short essay questions. You’ll have several days to complete each assignment.

- **Final paper** (20%)  
For the final paper, you’ll be asked to write a short essay (around 2000 words). There will be several prompts to choose from.
Lateness policy:
- The weekly homework assignments cannot be submitted after the deadline, but you may skip two assignments to cover issues like illness.
- If you need an extension for a take-home exam or the paper, please talk to me before the deadline has passed. If a paper or exam is turned in late without excuse, I may deduct points for each day it is late.

Academic Integrity:
It is unacceptable to use the words or ideas of someone else without proper acknowledgment – it is in violation of the University’s codes of Academic Integrity. All assignments for this course will be checked for plagiarized content. If you are uncertain what constitutes plagiarism, it is your responsibility to inform yourself. Ask the instructor of the class for advice on how to avoid plagiarism. You can also find information here:
http://wustl.edu/policies/undergraduate-academic-integrity.html

Policy on Collaboration
Writers of all levels of experience often rely on feedback from others to help them improve their written work. This can take different forms: (i) **co-authors** are people who help you come up with and refine key ideas, and how to put them into words. Usually, all co-authors names are listed on the final piece of writing. (ii) **reviewers** comment critically on your writing and make suggestions for improvement, either verbally, or in the form of written feedback. The author then takes this feedback and figures out on her own how to improve her paper.

It is acceptable and encouraged that students seek out reviewers for their papers (e.g. the instructor or TA, a knowledgeable friend or classmate, the writing center, etc.). Co-authoring papers, by contrast, is not permitted. The language, structure, and content of the paper must be yours, and if you incorporate other people’s ideas, you must cite or reference their ideas appropriately.

Use of electronic devices in class:
Electronic devices are permitted in class, as long as they are used for academic purposes only, and not for browsing the web, accessing social media, etc. You have my undivided attention during class time, please give me yours in return.

To enhance your learning, you may consider writing your class notes by hand. Recent studies have suggested that students learn better with handwritten notes than by typing.

No Extra Credit
All students are expected to meet the same standards to pass the course. Doing additional assignments for extra credit or to supplement low or failing grades is not an option.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:
Students with disabilities can request various kinds of accommodations. You can find more information here:
http://cornerstone.wustl.edu/disabilityresources.aspx
If you need any accommodations for this class, please follow the steps described on the website and inform the instructor as soon as possible.

This syllabus may be changed if necessary. You will be notified of any changes made to the syllabus.