

Course description

Content

Philosophy is so argumentative that any definition of it is bound to be disputed by philosophers themselves. Roughly though, it is the *argumentative* pursuit of answers to *normative* questions: what *should* we do with our lives? How *should* we decide what to believe? And so on.

The “basic problems” we’ll tackle in this course are about half from moral philosophy and half from other areas, mostly philosophy of mind and epistemology. (Philosophy of mind is about the nature of thought and personhood, while epistemology is about knowledge: what it is, what it’s good for, and how we should go about trying to get it.)

In addition to learning about philosophical views we will develop skills in doing philosophy ourselves: developing creativity and clarity in the claims and arguments we make. This will be primarily through short writings done weekly for seminars, and discussions of those writings in the seminars. Doing philosophy develops these skills, but of course they are important no matter what one does in life.

Work

For each lecture you will do some preparatory reading, which (starting January 14) you’ll be quizzed on at the start of the lecture. (Get your clicker for that, at the bookstore.) The lectures will elaborate on, and supplement, the reading material and offer an opportunity to ask questions about it. Each week you’ll contribute a brief piece of writing to your seminar’s Graduate Teaching Assistant (using the course website to submit it), and these will form the basis of seminar discussions, to which you will be required to contribute.

There will also be one in-class test and a final examination.

Textbooks

- *The elements of moral philosophy*, seventh edition, by Stuart Rachels. ISBN 978-0-07-803824-2. (This book has [a Kindle edition](#), about half the price of the print version.)
- *Problems from philosophy*, third edition, by James Rachels and Stuart Rachels. ISBN 978-0-07-353589-0.

You’ll need to get a clicker, available at the Bookstore. Be sure you can read its serial number, because you will need to register it (using the link at left).

Lectures

Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:30am–12:20pm in [Alexander Hall](#) 100.

Seminars

For seminar information see the “contact” page.

Grading

<i>Item</i>	<i>Value</i>
Quizzes (all 22 are graded, best 18 count)	18
Writings	$10 \times 2 = 20$
Seminar participation	17
Test	20
Final exam	25

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