

Introduction to Doing Philosophy

HSSP Spring 2011

Instructor: Sophie Monahan

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Class: Saturdays 2:30pm-3:50pm

Room: 5-232

Online Readings: http://esp.mit.edu/learn/HSSP/2011_Spring/class_docs/4516

Course Outline

The goal of this course is to introduce you to basic methods of philosophy and a broad sample of philosophical topics.

This syllabus may be subject to change. Updated versions will be posted on the class website.

Short homework will be assigned each week after the first. Short readings, and optional additional background, will be posted at http://esp.mit.edu/learn/HSSP/2011_Spring/class_docs/4516.

Course Calendar

2/19 1. Introduction

- How do we classify topics in philosophy?
- What is an argument?
- Validity and soundness of arguments; writing arguments in logical form; critiquing arguments
- Some basic logic

2/26 2. Personal Identity

- The material and psychological criteria of personal identity
- The passage of time, personality change, amnesia
- Science fiction stories and personal identity: teletransporters, cloning, body-swapping and time-travel

3/5 3. Philosophy of Mind

- Dualism and physicalism; color phenomena; the Chinese Room; philosophical zombies; artificial intelligence

3/12 NO CLASS

- Try a SPARK class!

3/19 4. Ethics

- What is goodness?
- Consequentialism, utilitarianism, virtue-theory, deontology
- Moral psychology and ethics

3/26 5. Political Philosophy

- State of nature and social contract philosophers
- What is the role of government?
- What are laws and what makes them just or unjust?
- How would you design a society?

4/2 6. Philosophy of Physics

- Are space and time absolute or relative? Are they continuous or discrete?
- Relativity
- Quantum mechanics (maybe?)

4/9 7. Rationality Puzzles

- Evidential and causal decision theories
- Various puzzles

4/16 8. Guest Lecture

- Topic to be announced!