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INTRO TO PHILOSOPHY . FALL 2015

INSTRUCTOR: COLENA SESANKER

MEETING TIMES: MWF 1-1:50 D109

CONTACT INFO: CSESANKER@TRCC.COMMNET.EDU

TEXT: REASON AND RESPONSIBILITY 15<sup>th</sup> edition Feinberg& Shafer-Landau, ISBN# 978-1133608479 +  
VARIOUS PROVIDED TEXTS

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course is designed as an introduction to various problems and methods of western analytic philosophy. We will apply these methods of evaluation to the following topics: The problem of evil, the rationality of belief in God, the problem of free will, the relationship between the mind and the brain, the possibility of perception of and genuine knowledge of the External World, causation and questions of selfhood and personal identity. Many of these questions will be familiar to you and the conclusions reached in this class will, most likely, further evolve after the end of the term.

**OBJECTIVES:**

To further refine of your own world view.

To evaluate standard formulations of philosophical problems and some answers to these puzzles posed by historical thinkers.

Most importantly, to master a method of approaching such problems which, ultimately, will make you a more precise and critical thinker.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

30%	3 position papers (3 x 10%),
7%	participation including sporadic quizzes, written responses, group work, journal entries etc. (1%per topic plus 1)
55%	Topic Quizzes
8%	Final 'exam'

**MISSED ASSIGNMENTS:**

If there are special circumstances which make it necessary for a student to make up an assignment at a time other than the date scheduled, please be sure to contact me by email or in person *before* the missed assignment so that special arrangements can be made. Make-up writing assignments must be completed within a week of the originally scheduled date. A doctor's note or excuse of equivalent importance must be provided in order to be allowed a make-up exam.

SCHEDULE (further modification likely)

INTRO TO COURSE: AUG 31

INTRO TO ARGUMENTS: SEPT 2

TOPIC 1: SEPT 4-14

**1. Introduction: What is Philosophy? & Problem of Induction**

**An introduction to the problems and methods of Western Philosophy, Introduction to Arguments**

(Handout)

**What is Causation?**

Wesley Salmon "An Encounter with David Hume"

➤ *QUIZ 1*

TOPIC 2: SEPT 16-25

**2. What is free will? Do we have it?**

**Determinism and Free Will:**

Paul Holbach "The Illusion of Free Will"

**Compatibilism:**

A.J. Ayer "Freedom and Necessity"

**Freedom:**

Robert Kane "Free Will: An Ancient Dispute, New Themes"

Susan Wolf "Sanity and the Metaphysics of responsibility"

➤ *QUIZ 2*

➤ *POSITION PAPER1*

TOPIC 3: SEPT 28-OCT9

**3. Attempts to Prove the Existence of God**

**Ontological Proof**

Anselm of Canterbury: The Ontological Argument

**Cosmological Proof**

Samuel Clarke: A Modern Formulation of the Cosmological Argument

**Teleological Proof**

William Paley: The Argument from Design

➤ *QUIZ 3*

TOPIC 4: OCT 14-23

**4. Attempt to Disprove the Existence of God: The Problem of Evil & The Ethics of Belief**

**Is the existence of evil compatible with the existence of God?/ Is the Judeo-Christian conception of goodness coherent?**

Fyodor Dostoevsky "Rebellion"

B.C. Johnson "God and the Problem of Evil"

Richard Swinburne "Why God Allows Evil"

Eastern Perspectives: Happiness vs. Joy in the Upanishads and Gita

Pain vs. Suffering in the Dhammapada

**Is belief in God intellectually responsible?**

W.K. Clifford "The Ethics of Belief"

William James "The Will To Believe"

➤ *QUIZ 4*

➤ *POSITION PAPER2*

TOPIC 5: OCT 26- NOV 6

### 5. The Real World and our Knowledge of it

What is knowledge? What can we know about the world around us? How do we know it? What then?

John Pollock Brain in a Vat

Rene Descartes Meditations on first Philosophy. Meditations 1-3

G.E. Moore Proof of an External World

Eastern Perspectives: The Metaphysics of Chuang Tzu and Upanishads

(handouts provided)

➤ QUIZ 5

TOPIC 6: NOV 9-20

### 6. The Mind-Body Problem

What is the mind/what are you, really? Are you simply a product of your brain or is there something else to be said about it?

If you're interested in Dualism:

Brie Gertler "in Defense of Mind-Body Dualism"

If you're interested in the Qualia Problem:

Frank Jackson "The Qualia Problem"

If you're interested in Eliminative Materialism:

Paul Churchland "Functionalism and Eliminative Materialism"

(especially the section on Eliminative Materialism beginning on p.339)

If you're interested in the Chinese Room and Functionalism:

John Searle "Minds, Brains and Programs"

To think about puzzles concerning identity:

Daniel Dennett "Where am I?" (handout provided)

➤ QUIZ 6

➤ POSITION PAPER 3

← THANKSGIVING BREAK →

NOV30-DEC 11: TOPIC TBA

DECEMBER 14-18<sup>th</sup>..... STUDENT PRESENTATIONS AND REVIEW

**FINAL 'EXAM' DUE DEC 21**

## Grading in Philosophy 101

Essay questions in this class, whether in the tests or position papers, will *often* have no set correct answer. There is freedom in what position you choose to defend. Papers will be graded on the extent to which an understanding of the course material is demonstrated and the strength of the argument provided for the thesis.

### Topic Tests:

Will consist of a mixture of fill in the blank, multiple choice, true/false and essay questions

#### Grading Test Essay Questions:

- 0: no knowledge of course content, original thought or argument structure demonstrated
- 1: some original thought, argument structure or knowledge of basic concepts demonstrated
- 2: some original thought applied to course content or demonstration of mastery of the relationship of the concepts within an argument
- 3: particular insight applied to course content or evidence of superior understanding and application of the concepts at hand

### Position Papers:

Require that the student take a position on a question provided as a writing prompt. Papers will be graded on their ability to support their position, using concepts and ideas drawn from the content we cover in the course.

These are not research papers, they are opportunities to apply the concepts introduced in the text and in lectures.

#### Grading Position Papers

The following is a guideline for our writing assignments.

Position papers will require that you respond to a question or analyse a scenario by applying or critiquing the views and problems we cover. *It will require, therefore, that knowledge of theories and concepts covered is demonstrated.* Beyond this requirement, one should aim for the following:

- **Expository Clarity:**

A reader of your essay should be able to easily answer these questions:

1. What questions has the writer attempted to answer?
2. What has the writer claimed is the answer to that question?
3. What reasons did the writer give for that answer?

- **Presence of Argument:**

The thesis of a paper is the conclusion it purports to establish. The thesis plus the reasons given in its support are called an argument. A thesis without supporting reasons is a dogmatic statement of opinion and while biographically interesting, is not of philosophical value.

- **Cogency of Argument:**

The reasons given in support of the conclusion must *in fact* support the conclusion. A good argument is a set of considerations which lend weight or plausibility to the conclusion.

- **Originality/Subtlety/Imaginativeness/Degree of difficulty**

It is easy enough to argue cogently for an obvious or uninteresting conclusion. Consider-

- (i) All women are mortal
- (ii) Colena is a woman
- (iii) Therefore, Colena is mortal

There is nothing wrong with this argument, but it is certainly not very ambitious or informative. Credit will be given for tackling the harder questions and for being perceptive enough to pick up the subtler points in our texts and topics.

**Grades:**

**A:** All four of the above criteria are met

**B:** Three of the above criteria are met

**C:** Two of the above criteria are met