
PHILOSOPHY 101

INSTRUCTOR: COLENA SESANKER
MEETING TIMES: MWF 1:00-1:50 KTRCC E206
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TEXT: REASON AND RESPONSIBILITY 13th edition Feinberg & Shafer-Landau, ISBN# 9780495094920 +
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:

5 in-class position papers (10% each), participation including sporadic quizzes and written responses (10%), Midterm Exam (20%), Final exam (20%)

SCHEDULE (subject to further modification)

F. Aug 26th: Welcome and introduction to the problems and methods of Western Philosophy

WEEK of 30th- Sept 3rd: Introduction continued: What is Philosophy?

Introduction to Arguments

*Handout

What is Causation?

*Wesley Salmon "An Encounter with David Hume" p.224-243

**Assignment: in class position paper topic of causation and the problem of induction*

(NO CLASS M9/6)

W9/8, F9/10, M9/13, W9/15:

The Problem of Free Will

What is free will? Do we have it?

Determinism and Free Will:

- ▶ Paul Holbach "The Illusion of Free Will"
- Ted Honderich "A defense of Hard Determinism"

Compatibilism:

- ▶ A.J. Ayer "Freedom and Necessity"
- Walter T. Stace "The Problem of Free Will"

Freedom:

- ▶ Robert Kane "Free Will: An Ancient Dispute, New Themes"
- Susan Wolf "the importance of Free Will" (handout)

Assignment: position paper on the topic of Free Will and Determinism

Skepticism and the existence of the External World

What do we know and how can we know it?

Kinds of Knowledge:

- ▶ Descartes Meditations 1&2 only p.182-191
- Indirect Realism:
- ▶ Bertrand Russell: Appearance and Reality p. 175

John Locke: The Causal theory of Perception p.215

Idealism:

- ▶ George Berkeley: Of the Principles of Human Knowledge p. 223
- Skepticism:
- ▶ Hume again
- Common Sense:
- ▶ G.E. Moore: Proof of an External World p.234

Assignment: In-Class position paper on the topic of Proof of the External World

Monday Oct. 25th

MIDTERM EXAM

Proof of God

Is it rational to believe in God?

The Ontological Argument

- ▶ Anselm of Canterbury: The Ontological Argument from Proslogion
- William L. Rowe: The Ontological Argument

The Cosmological Argument

- ▶ Samuel Clarke: A Modern Formulation of the Cosmological Argument p.36
- William L. Rowe: The Cosmological Argument p.37

The Teleological Argument

- ▶ William Paley: The Argument from Design p.46

Snippets of the Creationist/Evolutionist debate

Does the orderliness of the Universe suggest that it was created with a purpose?

- ▶ Handout- David Berlinski, Michael Behe, Kenneth Miller: Irreducible Complexity

The Problem of Evil (Proof against God's Existence)

Is the existence of evil compatible with the existence of God?

- ▶ Fyodor Dostoevsky "Rebellion"
- B.C. Johnson "God and the Problem of Evil"
- Richard Swinburne "Why God Allows Evil"
- J.L. Mackie "Evil and Omnipotence" (handout)

Assignment: position paper on topic of Proof of God's existence and the Problem of Free Will

Other Motivations for religious belief

Must religious belief be rationally justified?

Pragmatic Considerations

- ▶ Blaise Pascal: The Wager p.135

The Ethics of Belief and The Will to Believe:

- ▶ W.K. Clifford: The Ethics of Belief p.117
- William James: The Will to Believe p.122

The Possibility of Evidence in the form of Miracles

- ▶ Simon Blackburn: Miracles and Testimony p.138

Assignment: Position paper on the topic of whether or not belief in God is intellectually responsible

What is the Self?

What makes you you?

The essentially subjective account

- ▶ Thomas Nagel "What is it like to be a bat?"

The possibility of empirical investigation of the self

- ▶ Hume's Critique of the Self from his Treatise on Human Nature
- Daniel Dennett "Where am I?" from Brainstorms

Comparing Eastern and Western conceptions of self

Is there a self at all?

- ▶ Descartes' Meditations p. 149-152; 173
- Excerpts from the Dhammapada, The Upanishads, Chuang Tzu

Assignment: In class position paper on the Self

Final Exam December 15th

Exam Review December 13th

Assignments:

You will be asked to take a stance on some position related to what we've been reading about in class. No research will be required. Outside relevant knowledge is wonderful and useful, but not necessary. The idea will be to show that are

familiar with the positions we have considered in the class and then give an analysis of the strength of at least one of the conclusions.

Knowledge of the authors' conclusions and reasons for those conclusions is necessary. A summary of their article is not required or desired. The key is to know what the important parts are and pick them out. Be able to diagram the argument you are considering. In any bit of persuasive writing, there must be at least the pretense of an argument. (Remember that this applies to the writing you will be doing also). If you cannot find the argument in a bit of writing that claims some strong conclusion, you have been given no good reason to believe it, and that writing is trivial. We have no respect for empty rhetoric here.

Take home essays should be 2000-2400 words

In-class position papers should be done in 25 minutes or less

The exam will be the equivalent of a few in class position papers

Grading Criteria*:

- **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.

When Reading:

Reading for this course requires that you read pieces of writing that are not always easy to fully appreciate on a first pass. If you find that you need to read them more than once to pick up the lines of reasoning, do not get frustrated. It is *expected* that you'll need to read them more than once. The way you read for this class is not the same as the way you would read a story, and you will usually not be able to get through it at the same pace, or as smoothly. You may find that you need to:

- stop to check earlier parts for supporting reasons for claims you failed to notice the first time.
- reread parts of the text in order to understand the way a term is being used in the context of the present reading.
- skim the entire article and get an understanding of the structure and conclusion of the thing before a more thorough reading. Read the first paragraph, the last paragraph and either the first or last lines of every paragraph in between, then read through thoroughly. This allows you to know what argument you are looking for and can evaluate it as you read for more efficient reading.

This is reading critically. If you find yourself doing it, though it can be slow, you're doing the right thing. It does require some patience, and if you're not used to reading this way, it can get frustrating, but it can also be very rewarding.