

Philosophy 610QA: Problems of Knowledge and Evaluation: Fall 2011

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Office hours: By appointment only. (Procedure: send me an e-mail mentioning several times you can definitely make a meeting and I'll respond with a time I can make. Meeting by appointment avoids congestion in the office and should save us both time.)

Teaching assistant: Glenavin White
Teaching assistant's office hours, by appointment. Glenavinwhite[at]gmail.com
Teaching assistant's office: WAG 309

Course description

This course examines some of the central problems of philosophy, using both contemporary readings and historical texts. Students will be introduced to philosophy's "tool kit" as well as its "greatest hits." Topics include: God, free will, moral responsibility, ethical theory, applied ethics, personal identity, and human knowledge. Further details are contained in the syllabus below. There are no prerequisites for this class.

Grading Policy

The final grade will be based on five components: (1) attendance and participation in section (there is no attendance requirement for class (25%); (2) one short paper (four-to-five pages, double-spaced, 12 point), due around mid term (25%); (3) a longer paper (five-to-six pages, double-spaced, 12 point), due at the end of the semester (30%); (4) a forty-five-minute in-class (closed book) writing exercise, to be held on the final day of class (20%). Note: plus and minus grades will be awarded.

Policy on Plagiarism

Students found to have plagiarized will receive a failing grade for the class. Note that, depending on the particulars of the case, sanctions may well include further penalties imposed by the Dean. Further advice on what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it will be given at the time of the first assignment.

Policy on late papers

Papers submitted late without a reasonable excuse (e.g., serious illness), will be docked one third of a grade for each part-day they are late. So a paper submitted more than 48 hours late but less than 72 hours late will be docked a whole grade; one more than 24 hours late but less than 48 hours late will be docked 2/3 of a grade (so, e.g., from B+ to

B-). Papers submitted more than 72 hours late without a reasonable excuse will receive no credit.

Policy on the use of computers in class/ civil behavior

Use of computers or phones (or other texting devices) in class is not permitted. From past experience, I know that students with computers are tempted to spend class time reading e-mail or looking at *Facebook*, etc. This degrades the quality of your education. (It bears mentioning that empirical studies show that the use of technology in the classroom does not necessarily enhance the learning experience.) Instead of checking e-mail/*Facebook* before class, please try re-reading your notes, formulating questions or reminding yourself of what puzzled you about the reading. This will make you more receptive to the material in the lecture and more able to participate in the discussion. You will also enjoy the class a lot more! (Naturally, exceptions will be made for students who need to use a computer for medical reasons.)

I would also ask students to not conduct private conversations during the class (including whispering) as I find this uncivil and distracting. You are of course permitted to ask questions and join in a free-wheeling discussion of the material.

Students with disabilities

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259. You should bring the relevant note to me early in the semester. I'll be happy to make the needed accommodations.

About the in-class writing exercise

The exercise will take 45 minutes. You will see six questions at least one week before the exercise, and will be expected to prepare answers during that week. In each exercise you will have to answer **three** of the six questions, which three being revealed by me at the start of the exercise. **So to be safe you will need to prepare answers to all six questions.** For each question you should aim to prepare an answer that will cover roughly 2-3 pages (I'm counting pages in the same way the textbook does: when you open it you see *two* pages) of a blue book double-spaced (i.e., writing on every other line). **You must bring your own blue book (or green book) to section. The exercise is closed-book (and closed notes). Except in the case of students with a medical note,** no computers are allowed; so you will have to write by hand. From the time the exercise is distributed (at least a week ahead) students shouldn't ask me for the answers to the questions assigned, though, obviously, I will be able to answer other questions, and students are, of course, free to consult any texts they wish during the preparation period.

Syllabus

The readings are all drawn from *Reason and Responsibility*, 14th edition, edited by Joel Feinberg and Russ Shafer-Landau. **This text is available at the Co-op on Guadalupe. The 13th edition is NOT suitable for our needs.**

Note: The quantity of reading assigned sometimes varies from lecture to lecture and on some days, when no new reading is assigned, students will be expected to complete long or involved readings assigned for the previous class. The syllabus is subject to change and supplementation. All page references are to the 14th edition of *Reason and Responsibility*.

You should be sure to have read the readings for a given lecture **before** that lecture.

I. God

Th, Aug 25. No reading. Introductory discussion of the nature of God

1.a) Two traditional arguments for the existence of God

Tu, Aug 30. William Paley: "The Argument from Design," 46-51.

Th, Sept 1. William L. Rowe, "The Cosmological Argument," 37-45.

1.b) Two arguments against the existence of God.

Tu, Sept 6. Are the divine attributes consistent? Is God possible?

[No readings, though students will be responsible in the in-class test for knowing the material presented in this class.]

Th, Sept. 8. The Problem of Evil Posed: Fyodor Dostoevsky, "Rebellion," 86-91; and B.C. Johnson, "God and the Problem of Evil," 113-116.

Tu, Sept 13. The Problem of Evil Addressed: Richard Swinburne: "Why God Allows Evil," 105-113.

1. c) Is faith without evidence rational?

Th, Sept 15, Pascal, "The Wager," 135-137. Blackburn, "Miracles and Testimony," 138-144.

Tu, Sept 20, Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," 117-121; Kelly James Clark, "Without evidence or argument," 130-134 **FIRST PAPER ASSIGNED**

II. Free will

I. a) The main positions on free will: hard determinism; soft determinism and libertarianism.

Th, Sept 22. Holbach, “The Illusion of Free Will,” 451-455.

Tu, Sept 27. David Hume, “Of Liberty and Necessity,” 470-474. A. J. Ayer, “Freedom and Necessity.” 475-480.

Th, Sept 29. Roderick Chisholm, “Human Freedom and the Self,” 430-437.

II. b) Free will and moral responsibility

Tu, Oct 4. Harry Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,” 481-486; Thomas Nagel, “Moral Luck,” 487-493.

III. Ethics

III a) Ethical Theory

Th, Oct 6. Joel Feinberg: “Psychological Egoism,” 514-524. **FIRST PAPER DUE TODAY IN CLASS.**

Tu, Oct 11. James Rachels, “Ethical Egoism,” [On blackboard—note: this means it will be made available on Blackboard nearer the time.].

Th, Oct 13. John Stuart Mill, “Utilitarianism,” 597-610; and John Harris: “The Survival Lottery,” 636-640.

Tu, Oct 18. Immanuel Kant, “The Good Will and the Categorical Imperative,” 625-639.

III b) Applied ethics

Th, Oct 20. Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence and Morality,” 630-635. James Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia,” 641-644. [This material should run over into the following meeting.]

Tu, Oct 25. Winding up last meeting’s material, *plus*: Peter Singer “All Animals are Equal.” [On Blackboard].

Th, Oct 27. Peter Singer, “Unsanctifying human life,” 645-651.

Tu, Nov 1. Leif Wenar, “Property Rights and the Resource Curse” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* vol. 36 no. 1 (2008): 2-32. [On Blackboard]

Th, Nov 3. Judith Thomson, "A defense of abortion," 652-657.

Tu, Nov 8. Don Marquis, "Why abortion is immoral," 658-664. **FINAL PAPER ASSIGNED**

IV. Personal Identity

Th, Nov 10. John Locke, "The Prince and the Cobbler," 373-376, and Thomas Reid, "Of Mr Locke's Account of Personal Identity," 376-378.

Tu, Nov 15. David Hume, "The Self," 379-381; Derek Parfit, "Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons," 381-385. [This material should run over to the following meeting].

Th, Nov 17. Winding up material from previous meeting plus: Daniel Dennett, "Where am I?", 386-394.

V. Human Knowledge

Tu, Nov 22. Bertrand Russell, "Appearance and Reality and the Existence of Matter," 175-181. **QUESTIONS DISTRIBUTED (IN CLASS) FOR THE IN-CLASS WRITING EXERCISE**

Th, Nov 24. No class. Thanksgiving.

Tu, Nov 29. John Pollack, "A Brain in a Vat," 153-154; Michael Huemer, "Three Sceptical Arguments" 155-159. **FINAL PAPER DUE IN CLASS.**

Th, December 1 **IN-CLASS WRITING EXERCISE (This is the final meeting of class)**