

## **Philosophy 610QA: Problems of Knowledge and Evaluation: Fall 2013**

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**Office hours:** By appointment and for 30 minutes immediately after class on both class days. (Procedure for meetings by appointment: Please send me an e-mail mentioning several times you can definitely make a meeting and I'll respond with a time I can make.)

**Teaching assistant:** Alex Grossman  
**Teaching assistant's office hours,** consult with Alex  
**Teaching assistant's office,** consult with Alex

### **Course description**

This course examines some of the perennial problems of philosophy, using both contemporary readings and historical texts. Students will be introduced to philosophy's "tool kit" and its heuristics, as well as its "greatest hits." Topics include: The existence of God, free will, moral responsibility, ethical theory, applied ethics, 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 four components: (1) attendance and participation in section (there is no portion of the grade reserved for attendance in class, but I expect students to attend and will be disappointed by unexcused absences) (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 etc. in class**

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 texting or looking at *facebook*, etc. This degrades the quality of your education. Instead of checking e-mail/*facebook* before class, please try re-reading your notes, formulating questions, chatting about the material with a classmate, or reminding yourself of what puzzled you about the reading. This will make the class more enjoyable and will help you to master the material. (Naturally, exceptions to the “no-computer” policy will be made for students who need to use a computer for medical reasons.)

### **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. Please 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.

**Text** The readings are all drawn from *Reason and Responsibility*, 15<sup>th</sup> edition, edited by Joel Feinberg and Russ Shafer-Landau. **Sorry Folks: Earlier editions are 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.

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

[Readings and topics are provisional]

## **I. God**

Thursday, Aug. 29<sup>th</sup>. No reading. Introductory discussion of the nature of God, the so-called 'Divine Attributes' and the question of their consistency

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

September 3. William Paley: "The Argument from Design"

September 5. William L. Rowe, "The Cosmological Argument"

*1.b) The Problem of Evil*

September 10. The Problem of Evil Posed: Fyodor Dostoevsky, "Rebellion," and B.C. Johnson, "God and the Problem of Evil"

September 12. The Problem of Evil Addressed: Peter Van Inwagen, "The Argument from Evil," John Hick "The Soul-Making Defense"

*1. c) Is faith without evidence rational?*

September 17, Pascal, "The Wager." Blackburn, "Miracles and Testimony"

September 19, Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," Kelly James Clark, "Without evidence or argument"

## **II. Free will**

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

September 24. HARD DETERMINISM. Holbach, "The Illusion of Free Will," D. Pereboom, "Why we have no Free Will and can live without it"

September 26. SOFT DETERMINISM. David Hume, "Of Liberty and Necessity," A. J. Ayer, "Freedom and Necessity."

October 1. LIBERTARIANISM. Roderick Chisholm, “Human Freedom and the Self”

*II. b) Free will and moral responsibility*

October 3. Susan Wolff, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility”.

October 8. Harry Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”; Thomas Nagel, “Moral Luck”

**III. Ethics**

*III a) Ethical Theory*

October 10. Joel Feinberg: “Psychological Egoism,”

October 15. James Rachels, “Ethical Egoism,” [On blackboard—note: this means it will be made available on Blackboard nearer the time.].

October 17. John Stuart Mill, “Utilitarianism,” and John Harris: “The Survival Lottery”

October 22. Immanuel Kant, “The Good Will and the Categorical Imperative”.

October 24. Hilde Lindeman, “What is Feminist Ethics?”

*III b) Applied ethics*

October 29. Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence and Morality.” James Rachels, “Active and Passive Euthanasia” [On Blackboard.] This material should run over into the following meeting.

October 31. Winding up last meeting’s material, *plus*: Peter Singer “All Animals are Equal.” [On Blackboard].

November 5. Peter Singer, “Unsanctifying human life,” [On Blackboard].

November 7. Judith Thomson, “A defense of abortion”

November 12. Don Marquis, “Why abortion is immoral”

November 14. Michel Huemer: “Is there a right to own a gun?”

<http://home.sprynet.com/~owl1/guncontrol.htm>.

Jeff McMahan. “Why gun ‘control’ is not enough’,” New York Times.

[http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/12/19/why-gun-control-is-not-enough/?\\_r=0](http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/12/19/why-gun-control-is-not-enough/?_r=0).

#### **IV. Human Knowledge**

November 19. Bertrand Russell, "Appearance and Reality and the Existence of Matter," 175-181. Questions for the in-class writing exercise assigned.

Th, Nov 21. John Pollack, "A Brain in a Vat," Michael Huemer, "Three Sceptical Arguments".

Nov 26. Edmund Gettier: "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"

November 28. No class. Thanksgiving.

December 3. Cornman, Lehrer and Pappas, "An Analysis of Knowledge"

December 5. In Class Writing Exercise