

Introductory Handout Philosophy 1 The Nature of Philosophy
 Winter, 2009 Professor Richard Arneson

Lectures MWF 1:00-1:50 a.m. in Warren Lecture Hall 2113.

The final exam for this course takes place on Friday, March 19, 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. If you enroll in this class, be sure this required final exam fits into your schedule.

This course is an introduction to philosophy. Our assumption is that philosophy emerges from puzzles and problems that confront ordinary people in ordinary life. These problems appear not to be resolvable by gathering more empirical facts. For example, someone might demand some conduct from you, on the ground that omitting to do it would be morally wrong, and you might wonder whether there is a real distinction to be drawn between what's morally wrong and what isn't, or is this distinction bogus? For another example, some of us believe that the universe we inhabit was created and sustained by an all-powerful, all-knowing God, but how can we reconcile this belief with the plain fact that there is massive evil in the world? For another example, many of us believe that normal humans are agents responsible for their choices, but what does the idea of being a responsible agent amount to? Thomas Nagel worries, "I believe that in a sense the problem has no solution, because something in the idea of agency is incompatible with actions being events, or people being things"—yet Nagel also holds that actions are events and people are things. So, what gives? Trying to think straight about such matters, we tend to find deep conflicts among our ordinary concepts, our ordinary ways of thinking about the world. The question then arises whether further thinking can resolve these matters in some satisfactory way. Following along this path, we are doing philosophy.

In this course, we survey several topics: (1) how do we draw the line between science and pseudoscience, if there is such a line to be drawn, (2) the nature and existence of God and the nature of religious faith, (3) whether it makes sense to hold individuals morally responsible for their choices and the outcomes of their choices, (4) whether moral claims about what is right and wrong can be genuine assertions capable of being true or false or instead expressions of our attitudes and feelings, (5) on the assumption we are subject to moral duties, what determines their content and their extent?, (6) we think of human individuals as combining mental and physical features, but what is the relationship between the mental and the physical?, and (7) What is it that makes an individual now and a future stage of herself two stages in the life of the same person? (If the individual now doesn't care about future stages of herself, is there anything irrational about not caring?). This course is an introductory survey. We skim the surface of these topics; I don't claim to be settling any of them. (This is not to say the questions are rationally unsettleable, unresolvable.) One aim of the course is to gain greater understanding of the questions we start with and how one might reason to good answers to them. A second aim is to gain understanding of some classic philosophical texts. Writers have been grappling with these issues for hundreds of years. We examine ancient and contemporary samples of these grapplings.

Course texts: Joel Feinberg and Russ Shafer-Landau, eds., *Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy*; also Thomas Nagel, *What Does It All Mean? A Very Short Introduction to Philosophy*. Further readings will be available from the course web page—available at WebCT. You should check the course web page at least once a week for announcements, handouts, etc. The new 14th edition of the *Reason and Responsibility* text is available in the bookstore, but if you can locate a copy of an older edition, that will do fine. (Assigned readings included only in the 13th edition of Feinberg & Shafer-Landau or in the 14th edition but not in both will eventually be available at the course WebCT site.)

Course requirements: A midterm exam (Monday of week 5), a short writing assignment, five to seven pages in length, on topics to be assigned in class, and a regular comprehensive final examination. On the exams and writing assignment you will be graded according to the clarity of your prose, the cogency of your arguments, and the soundness of the understanding of course materials that you exhibit. The final examination will comprehend all course materials including requires readings, lectures, and handouts distributed in class.

Grading: If you are taking the class on a PASS/NOTPASS basis, you must get (1) a C minus or better on the final exam as well as (2) an overall average C minus grade on all course work in order to achieve a PASS grade, with one exception: If you have an A minus or better average on the midterm exam and writing assignment, and are enrolled on a PASS/NOT PASS basis, you need not take the final exam in order to earn a PASS grade.

The midterm exam counts for 30 per cent of your course grade, the writing assignment for 30 per cent, and the final examination for 40 per cent.

One key to success in this class is to keep up with the reading steadily. The reading varies in difficulty; some of it is quite challenging. You will have to put more time into reading philosophy material than you might initially suppose. If you do the reading before the lecture/discussion that deals with it, you will get more out of the reading and the lecture/discussion.

Note on the readings: The Feinberg & Shafer-Landau text includes introductions to the different readings grouped by topic (part 1, part 2, and so on). These introductions are useful for providing short overviews of the topics and themes. The relevant chapters in the Nagel book also provide short overviews. The course readings vary in difficulty. At one extreme, the Nagel book is very accessible without being misleadingly overly simple. At the other extreme, the two course readings by David Lewis are challenging.

Schedule of Readings and Lecture/Discussion Topics

Week 1. January 4-10.

Mon: Introduction; Science and falsifiability. Reading: Karl Popper, excerpt from *Science: Conjectures and Refutations*, in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau, & also available at course WebCT site. (Only sections 1 & 2 of the WebCT version are required reading; the rest is recommended reading; sections 8 & 9 are especially recommended.)

Wed: Normal science and scientific revolutions. Reading: Thomas Kuhn, excerpt from *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, available at course WebCT site.

Fri: More on the nature of science. Reading: Philip Kitcher, "Believing Where We Cannot Prove," pp. 268-277 in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Week 2. January 11-17.

Mon: Arguments for the existence of God; The Ontological Argument. Reading: Anselm of Canterbury, "The Ontological Argument," Gaunilo of Marmoutiers, "On Behalf of the Fool," and William L. Rowe, "The Ontological Argument," all in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Wed: The same topic continued. Reading: same as Monday's reading.

Fri: Arguments for the existence of God; the argument from design. Reading: William Paley, "The Argument from Design," also David Hume, "Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion," both readings in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Week 3. January 18-24.

Mon: Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday. **NO CLASS.**

Wed: More on the argument from design. Reading: David Hume, "Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion," in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Fri: God and the argument from evil. Reading: J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Week 4. January 25-31.

Mon: Responses to the argument from evil. Reading: George Schlesinger, "The Problem of Evil and the Problem of Suffering"; also Richard Swinburne, "Why God Allows Evil," both readings in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Wed: Conclusion of argument from evil discussion. Reading: D. Lewis, "Evil for Freedom's Sake?," available at course WebCT site.

Fri: Religious belief on the basis of faith not reason (Kierkegaard) or on the basis of a gamble (Pascal).

Reading: B. Pascal, "The Wager," in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau; also Soren Kierkegaard, "Subjectivity Is Truth," available at course WebCT site.

Week 5. February 1-7

Mon: **Midterm exam in class.**

Wed: Moral responsibility and free will: compatibilism. Introduction to the topic: Thomas Nagel, "Free Will," chap. 6 in Nagel book; also Peter Van Inwagen, "Freedom of the Will," in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Readings on compatibilism: A. J. Ayer, "Freedom and Necessity"; also Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," both readings in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Fri: Moral responsibility and free will: libertarianism. Reading: Roderick M. Chisholm, "Human Freedom and the Self"; also Robert Kane: "Free Will: Ancient Dispute, New Themes," both readings in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Week 6 . February 8-14.

Mon: Moral responsibility and free will: hard determinism. Reading: Derk Pereboom, "Why We Have No Free Will and Can Live without It," in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Wed: Can we be responsible for what lies beyond our power to control? Reading: Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck," in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Fri: Are ethical claims genuine assertions—could they be true or false? How so? Moral skepticism, relativism, and subjectivism. Reading: Russ Shafer-Landau, "Ethical Subjectivism," in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau; also Thomas Nagel, "Right and Wrong," chap. 7 in Nagel book.

Week 7 . February 15-21.

Mon: Presidents Day Holiday. **NO CLASS.**

Wed: The Divine command account of moral obligation. Reading: Philip L. Quinn, "God and Morality," available at course WebCT site.

Fri: Utilitarianism and consequentialism. Reading: John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism" in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Week 8 . February 22-28.

Mon: Moral pluralism. Reading: W. D. Ross, "What Makes Right Acts Right?", in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Wed: The limits of moral demands. Reading: Thomas Nagel, "Justice," chap. 8 in Nagel book; also Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Fri: What makes a being morally considerable? Abortion and infanticide. Reading: (1) Joel Feinberg "Introduction," available at course WebCT site; (2) Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion" and Don Marquis, "Why Abortion Is Immoral," both readings in Feinberg and Shafer-Landau; also (3) Mary Anne Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," available at course WebCT site.

Week 9 . March 1-7.

Mon: What makes a being morally considerable? Humans, persons, and animals. Reading: Peter Singer, "All Animals Are Equal. . .," ; also R. Arneson, "What (if Anything) Makes Human Persons Morally Special?", both available at course WebCT site.

Wed: Mind and its place in nature. Reading: Thomas Nagel, "The Mind-Body problem," chap. 4 in Nagel book. Brie Gertler, "In Defense of Mind-Body Dualism"; also Frank Jackson, "The Qualia Problem," both readings in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Fri: Mind and its place in nature: the identity theory; also eliminative materialism. Reading: Peter Carruthers, "The Mind Is the Brain"; also Paul M. Churchland, "Behaviorism, Materialism, and Functionalism," both readings in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Week 10. March 8-14.

Mon: More on functionalism and mind. Reading: David Lewis, "Mad Pain and Martian Pain," available at course WebCT site.

Wed: Personal identity. Reading: John Locke, "The Prince and the Cobbler"; also Thomas Reid, "Of Mr. Locke's Account of Our Personal Identity," both readings in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Fri: Skeptical puzzles about personal identity. Reading: David Hume, "The Self"; also Derek Parfit, "Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons," both readings in Feinberg & Shafer-Landau.

Arneson's office hours: Tuesdays 2-3 p.m. and Thursdays 11-12 a.m. in HSS 8057.

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