Philosophy 120: Introduction to Philosophy (Fall 2005)

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Overview: Philosophy reflects on fundamental questions. Such questions often involve the nature of persons, underlying reality, the right and good, and the existence of God. This course will provide an introduction to these themes by discussing central topics in philosophy.

Goal: In the short term, our goal will be to understand and critically evaluate each theory that we cover. In the long term, I hope to give you each something that lasts beyond college: an ability to examine life by asking philosophically rich questions about the ultimate nature of the universe, and about our ability to know the nature of the universe, and about our place in it.

Texts (at the campus bookstore):
Simon Blackburn, Think.

Assessment: There will be quizzes after each section, a journal, an in class final.
Quizes: All of the exams require extensive knowledge of the readings and lecture material, as well as creative thought.

Journal: please purchase a small notebook for your journal assignments and bring it with you to each class meeting. This can be the same notebook as the one that includes the course notes. During class, I will occasionally check the assignments and at the end of the term, the entire journal will be due. Journal work is pass/fail, but providing detailed outlines of the readings for your journal is an excellent way to prepare for the exams, which will cover the readings. (15% of your grade).

Class attendance is key to learning philosophy, as is doing regular assignments, as learning is through slow reflection. (Quick cramming is discouraged). To pass the class, a student needs to attend 2/3 of the class meetings and bring her journal assignments to class with her on a regular basis.

For the next class please read John Pollock, “Brain in a Vat” in Feinberg and bring a few questions/comments (written in your journal) for discussion.

Note: I will be away giving talks at conferences and other schools on the following dates: Sept. 20-22 (Clemson); 20-21 Oct (University of Cincinnati). If possible, the film screenings will occur during the times I am away.

**Schedule**

Note: “O/R/Q” or “outline/reaction/questions” stands for “please bring write an outline or detailed summary for your journal, and bring this, together with a reaction and a few questions, to class.”

**TOPIC 1: ARE YOU IN A MATRIX? (THE LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE)**

John Pollack, “Brain in a Vat” in Feinberg (outline/reaction/questions)
Rene Descartes, excerpts from The Meditations in Feinberg. (O/R/Q)
Simon Blackburn, Ch. 1 of Think (O/R/Q)
Viewing of film: The Matrix or Vanilla Sky
Nick Bostrom at http://www.simulation-argument.com/ (the paper called “The Simulation Argument: Why the Probability that You are Living in the Matrix is Quite High”) (O/R/Q).

**Quiz 1**

**TOPIC 2: PERSONAL IDENTITY AND SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH**

Daniel C. Dennett, “Where am I?” in Feinberg (O/R/Q).
John Locke, “The Prince and the Cobbler”, in Feinberg. (O/R/Q)
David Hume: “The Self”, in Feinberg. (O/R/Q)
Derek Parfit, “Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons”, in Feinberg. (O/R/Q)
Viewing of film, Momento (Journal: please provide a case for/against the main character’s being the same person, after his memory loss. You must summon and explain one or more of the leading theories of personal identity).
Quiz 2

TOPIC 3: THE NATURE OF FREE WILL

Chapter on free will from Think. (O/R/Q)
Ted Honderich, “A Defense of Hard Determinism” (Feinberg) (O/R/Q)
A.J. Ayer, “Freedom and Necessity” (Feinberg) (O/R/Q)
Roderick M. Chisholm, “Human Freedom and the Self” (Feinberg) (O/R/Q)

Quiz 3

TOPIC 4: ETHICS AND APPLIED ETHICS

(O/R/Q for all reading assignments below).
Documentary film on the Milgram experiments.
James Rachels, “The Debate Over Utilitarianism” (On library reserve)
Onera O’Neill, “A Simplified Account of Kant’s Ethics” (reserve)
Aristotle on the virtues (reserve).
Applied ethics topic (if time allows): Animal rights. (a) Packet of short articles by Opposing Viewpoints. (reserve) (b) Utilitarianism about animal rights. Peter Singer, “All Animals are Equal” (Feinberg).

Quiz 4

TOPIC 5: THE EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD

(O/R/Q for all assignments below).

Comprehensive final exam (in class essay). At least half of the material will be on topic 5.

Some useful reference works:

(Both of these sources are in the reference section of your library).

Some warnings:
- I’m afraid that philosophy reading can be tough. Allow yourself a fair amount of time to read the material (and to let the material sink in). It is okay to be puzzled.
- Academic honesty issues will be treated in accordance with the Moravian policy listed in the Catalog and Student Handbook. Students who copy an assignment from another person will fail the assignment and possibly the class. Material taken off the web must be cited and cannot be
reproduced word for word (instead, it should be quoted). Students who take material off the web without citing and quoting will fail the assignment and possibly the class.

- Students are required to attend 2/3 of the classes to pass the class.