Introductory Handout  Philosophy 1  The Nature of Philosophy
Fall, 2016  Professor Richard Arneson  Teaching Assistant Peter Yong

Course readings, recommended readings, information on exams, lecture notes, and other course materials will be available at the TRITON-ED course site. (At the course page, click on the “Course Content” folder to access course materials.)

Lecture-discussions  Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:00-12:20 in Warren Lecture Hall (WLH) 2205. The final exam for this course takes place on Wednesday, December 7 from 11:30 a.m.-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) on the assumption there are moral duties, what is their content and extent?, (2) whether moral claims about what is morally right and wrong can be genuine assertions capable of being true or false or instead just expressions of our attitudes and feelings, (3) if moral claims can be genuine assertions, what determines that any particular claim is true or false?, (4) what, if anything, would make life meaningful or meaningless, (5) how do we draw the line between science and pseudoscience, if there is such a line to be drawn, (6) the nature and existence of God and the nature of religious faith), (7) we think of human individuals as combining mental and physical features, but what is the relationship between the mental and the physical?, and (8) whether it makes sense to hold individuals morally responsible for their choices and the outcomes of their choices.

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 grappling. A third course aim is to practice reading and understanding difficult readings and interpreting and assessing them in clear prose.

Course texts: Joel Feinberg and Russ Shafer-Landau, eds., Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy, 13th edition . This text is available online at the TRITON-ED course site (under the “Course Content” folder, “Required readings” subfolder, at the very top of the list, before list of weekly readings.). Further readings are available at the same TRITON-ED course site.

Course Requirements: There is a class participation course requirement (described in the next paragraph). The other course requirements are a midterm exam in class (Thursday of week 5), an analytical writing assignment (about five to seven pages in length), and a regular final exam. The writing assignment will not require extra reading, but will ask you to interpret and assess some course texts. On
the writing assignment you will have a choice among topics assigned in class. The writing assignment has two components: (1) write a draft or outline of your paper and discuss it with J.P. Messina or me and (2) complete and turn in a final draft of your paper. The final exam will comprehend all course materials (required not recommended readings, lectures, and handouts). The final exam will consist of one and a half hours of essay questions (these will somewhat emphasize material covered after the midterm) and one and a half hours of short “paragraph essay” questions testing reading comprehension (these will range over all required course readings). 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.

To encourage keeping up with the reading class by class and week by week, there will be a class participation component of your grade. About one-half of class time will be taken up with lecture and one-half with class discussion. On most class days, there will be class discussion for several minutes near the start of the class, usually on questions posed in advance of class (and relating to the readings assigned for that class). On any class day, even if we start with lecturing, you are encouraged to interject questions and comment. I will take notes after every class on the class discussion, and the quality and frequency of your contributions to discussion will be the basis of your class participation grade, along with two other components. (1) You may also participate in class discussion by sending me email questions or comments before class regarding some significant aspect of the assigned reading for that day. I will keep a file of these email messages for each student. (2) Also, at least once a week, and sometimes twice, throughout the quarter, there will be a writing exercise in class. This will ask you to write about some topic related to the reading for that day’s class (or maybe also on recent readings prior to that class). These writing exercises will be collected and graded in a rough-grained way. --So there are three components of class participation. At the end of the quarter, all of these participation efforts will be summed for each student and graded on a curve.

Grading: If you are talking 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, writing assignment, and class participation, and are enrolled on a PASS/NOT PASS basis, you need not take the final exam in order to earn a PASS grade.

Your class participation counts for 20 percent of your final grade, the midterm exam counts for 20 percent of your course grade, the writing assignment for 25 percent, and the final examination for 35 percent.

Only medical excuses certified by a note from your physician or a comparable certified excuse will be accepted for late submission of the writing assignment or absence from the midterm exam, or to justify the assignment of an Incomplete course grade.

Disability. If you have a certified disability that requires accommodation, you should register with the campus Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) and provide me a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by that Office. A copy of this same letter should also be given to the OSD liaison person in the Philosophy Department at the start of the term, so accommodation can be arranged. Please let me know your disability status at the start of the course, so I can work with the office to comply with the accommodation it stipulates as appropriate.

Academic Integrity. Integrity of scholarship is essential for an academic community. The University expects that both faculty and students will honor this principle and in so dong protect the validity of University intellectual work. For students, this means that all academic work will be done by the individual to whom it is assigned, without unauthorized aid of any kind. No dishonesty or cheating, in other words. See the University Policy on academic Integrity.
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. Most of the readings by Thomas Nagel also provide fairly accessible, short introductory overviews of the topics they treat.

A tip for success: The 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 class.

Office Hours: You are welcome and encouraged to come to my (Arneson’s) office hours or those of your TA whenever you want to talk about the course material and themes, the assignments, or any other course-related concerns you have.

Arneson’s office hours: Wednesdays 2-3 p.m. and Thursdays 3-4 p.m. in HSS 8057.
Arneson’s email: rarneson@ucsd.edu. Peter Yong’s email p1yong@ucsd.edu

Peter Yong’s office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30-1:30 at the Loft.

Schedule of Readings and Lecture/Discussion Topics


Week 2. September 26-October 2.
THUR: Under what conditions, if any, is killing morally permissible? The example of killing in warfare. Reading: Michael Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars (excerpt); also Jeff McMahan, “The Ethics of Killing in War,” both available at the TRITON course page. Recommended reading: Michael Walzer, Chapter 4 of Just and Unjust Wars; also Richard Arneson, “Just Warfare Theory and Noncombatant Immunity,” both available at TRITON course web page.

Week 3. October 3-9.

Week 4. October 10-16.

Week 5. October 17-23.
THUR: **MIDTERM EXAM IN CLASS.**

Week 6. October 24-30.

Week 7. October 31-November 6.

FRIDAY: **VETERANS’ DAY HOLIDAY.**

TUES: Deadline for discussing your writing assignment with Messina or Arneson. More on mind and body. Reading: Frank Jackson, “The Qualia Problem,” also Paul Churchland: “Functionalism and Eliminative Materialism,” both available at TRITON course page.
THUR: Free will and moral responsibility. Reading: Peter Van Inwagen, “The Mysteries of Free Will”; also Thomas Nagel, “Free Will,” both available at TRITON course page.

THUR: **THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY: NO CLASS.**