

Teaching Portfolio

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Teaching Statement

Students are not accustomed to thinking about abstract concepts and arguing about the beliefs that they take for granted. One of the best ways to learn how to do philosophy is by seeing it done in practice and attempting to mimic it. In my classes, the examples come from the readings and from what I do in lecture. The students practice doing philosophy through their participation in class and doing the right type of assignments.

I begin class by putting things into perspective. In my introductory courses, I keep a running narrative that connects the topics we've discussed. For example, when I teach moral theory, I make a connection between the theories by looking at how each theory answers the following two questions: (1) what things count as good? And (2) how should the goods be distributed? After, I typically introduce an argument or objection in premise-conclusion format. We then ask whether the argument is sound. I then connect the material with concrete contemporary examples. This is easier to do with ethics, for example, than it is with skepticism. With the more difficult cases, my go-to examples typically come from the sciences. For instance, when I discuss Cartesian skepticism, initially I find students unimpressed with the problem. To show them the importance of the problem, I introduce it as a type of underdetermination argument. We have two hypotheses—the Cartesian hypothesis, and the mind-independent external world hypothesis—and the skeptic claims that both hypotheses equally support the evidence we have. The same type of problem can be raised against scientific theories. The skeptical worry is just a more general problem than the scientific problem of underdetermination. Most students care about whether scientific theories are approximately true, and once this connection is made, they begin to appreciate the nature of the problem.

When it comes to participation, there is no one rule that fits all cases. Strategies that help facilitate discussion have to be malleable. For example, one semester I had a small group of students who spoke up all the time, but the rest almost said nothing. Once I realized this trend, I changed my strategy. I started by asking whether students whom I haven't heard from would like to say anything. This helped, but not very much. A few students who typically did not say anything started speaking up, but many of them still didn't speak up. I then tried to split up the students into groups. Although there was progress, I still noticed that the groups were dominated by one or two of the students. I then asked each student to talk to their neighbor, making it a group of two students. I wrote two different questions on the board and asked the students to ask each other only one of the questions. They both were able to participate. This was much more fruitful than the previous attempts.

Getting students to do the right type of assignments is key to teaching them how to do philosophy well. With introductory students, they begin the writing process by writing a précis of one of the assigned texts. The difficult part of writing this précis is that it must be 600 words, plus or minus 10 words. Otherwise, there is a grade penalty. The word limit forces the students to make difficult choices about what content to include or exclude. Later in the semester, they are asked to write a longer paper that includes a critical evaluation section. By this time, they've seen ample examples of what philosophical objections look like, so the students find it easier at this stage of the class to come up with objections than they would have earlier in the class. I also assign reading outlines. Philosophical texts are difficult to read. They are even more difficult when you're not taking notes. The reading outlines motivate the students to do the reading and to do it actively.

Doing philosophy well is hard work. As a graduate student who was an undergrad not too long ago, I have the advantage of remembering what it is like to be in my first philosophy course. I did not understand most of the material, and found philosophical writing difficult. I remind myself of this experience to help me sympathize with my students. This motivates me to work on new ways to make the material more accessible and engaging.

Teaching Experience

Primary Instructor

Course Title	Type	Semester(s)	University
Individual Morality & Social Justice	lower division	Summer 2019	UC Berkeley
Beginning Philosophy	lower division	Spring 2012, Fall 2011	Texas Tech University

Teaching Assistant

At UC Berkeley:

Course Title	Type	Semester	Primary Instructor
Moral Psychology	upper division	Spring 2020 (note)	Kwong-loi Shun
Chinese Philosophy	upper division	Fall 2019	Kwong-loi Shun
Contemporary Ethical Issues	upper division	Summer 2018	Tim Crockett
Modern Philosophy	lower division	Spring 2018	Kristen Primus
Ethical Theories	upper division	Fall 2017	Jay Wallace
Modern Philosophy	lower division	Spring 2017	Tim Crockett
Man, God, & Society in Western Literature	lower division	Fall 2016	Hubert Dreyfus
Knowledge & Its Limits	lower division	Spring 2016	John Perry
Ancient Philosophy	lower division	Fall 2015	Klaus Corcilius

At Texas Tech University:

Course Title	Type	Semester	Primary Instructor
Introduction to Logic	lower division	Spring 2011	Kevin Coffey
Beginning Philosophy	lower division	Fall 2010	Kevin Coffey
Introduction to Ethics ¹	lower division	Spring 2010	Jeremy Schwartz

¹ I did not hold discussion sections for this class, so there are no student evaluation scores.

Student Evaluations UC Berkeley

Below is a quantitative summary of student evaluations *from University of California, Berkeley*. The quantitative summary is calculated by adding up the responses on the last question of the student evaluations. The last question on the student evaluations for the teaching assistants (called “GSIs” at Cal) is slightly different than the last question for a primary instructor:

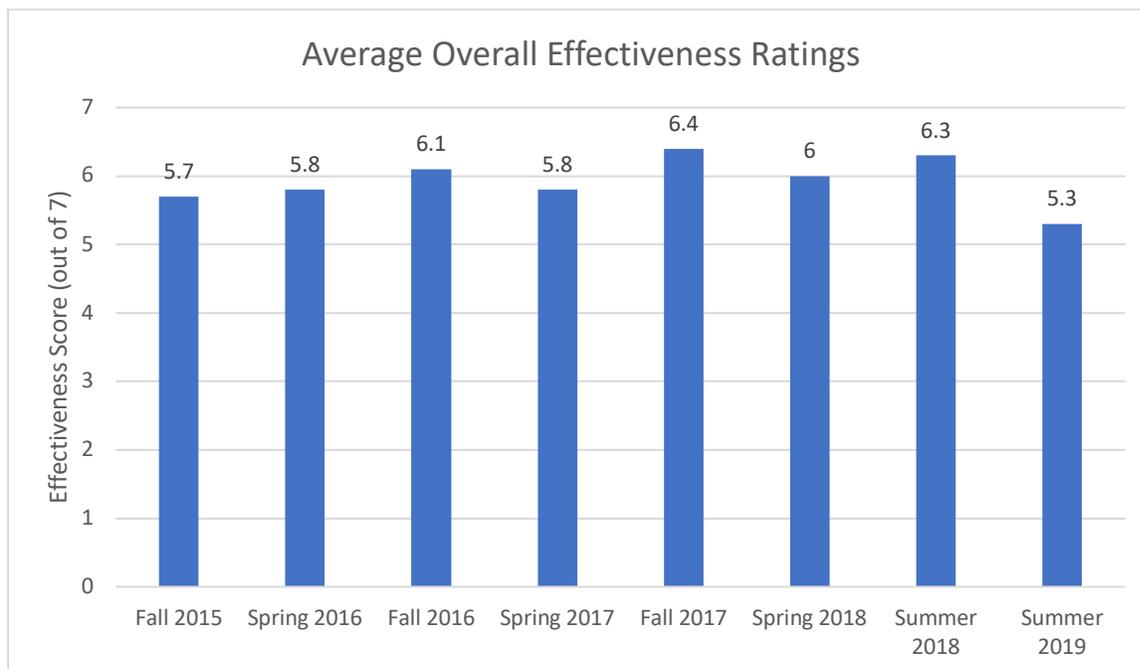
For GSI: “Overall, how *effective* was your GSI [Graduate Student Instructor]?”

For primary instructor: “Considering both the limitations and possibilities of the subject matter and course, how would you rate the overall teaching effectiveness of this instructor?”

The response ranges from 1 to 7, 1 being “not at all effective” and 7 being “extremely/very effective.” Full scans of student evaluations are available upon request.

(S = Summer; F = Fall; SP = Spring; * = primary instructor)

Course Title	Semester	Evaluations	Mean	Mode	Median
Individual Morality & Social Justice*	S 2019	3 ²	5.3	N/A	6
Contemporary Ethics	S 2018	13	6.3	7	7
Modern Philosophy	SP 2018	32	6.0	6	6
Ethical Theories	F 2017	27	6.4	7	7
Modern Philosophy	SP 2017	26	5.8	6	6
Man, God, & Society in Western Lit	F 2016	14	6.1	7	6.5
Knowledge & Its Limits	SP 2016	38	5.8	6	6
Ancient Philosophy	F 2015	31	5.7	6	6



² This class consisted of five students. Only three of them were present on the day I did evaluations.

Texas Tech University

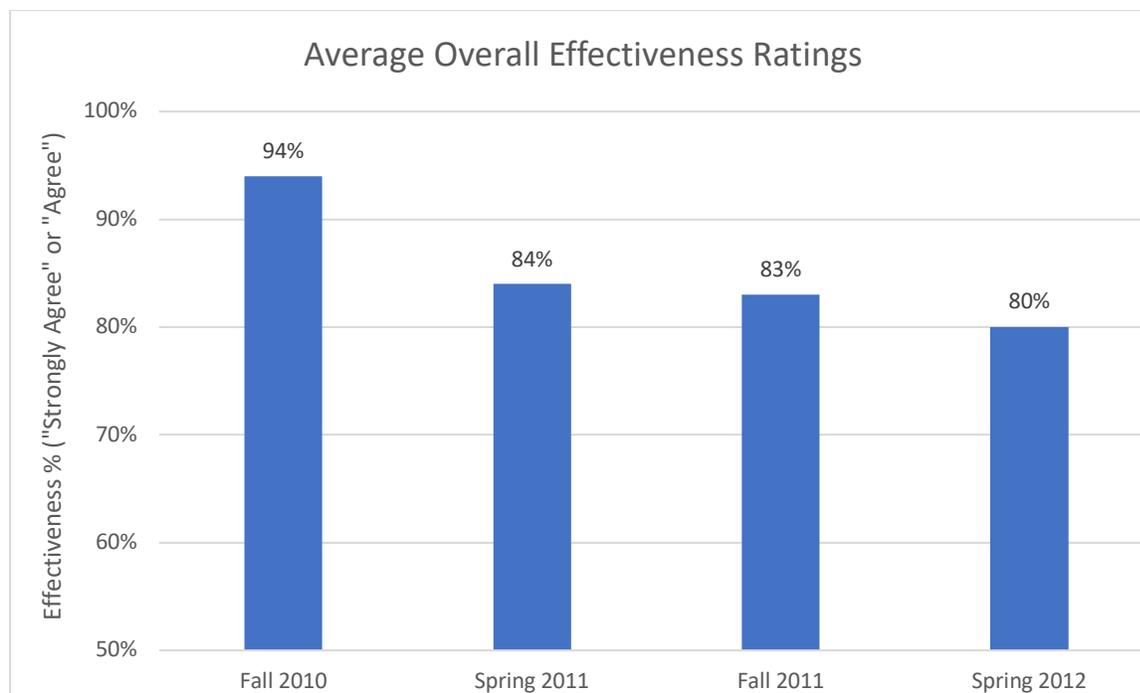
Below is a quantitative summary of student evaluations *from Texas Tech University*. The quantitative summary is calculated by adding up the percentage of students who responded with either “strongly agree” or “agree” on the following question:

“Overall this instructor was effective”

The available responses are: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree, or no answer. Full scans of student evaluations are available upon request.

(F = Fall; SP = Spring; * = primary instructor)

Course Title	Semester	Evaluations	Percentage
Beginning Philosophy*	SP 2012	20	80%
Beginning Philosophy*	F 2011	18	83%
Introduction to Logic	SP 2011	26	84%
Beginning Philosophy	F 2010	18	94%



Select Comments

The student comments below are not ordered by the questions asked, but by theme.³

Class Environment

“He was very approachable and encouraged people to participate without too much pressure.”

“He involved everyone and provided lots of helpful insight.”

“Omar maintained a great environment”

“I felt comfortable talking in class.”

“He was good at answering questions, and always encouraged us to speak”

“He was always receptive to questions we asked”

“His calmness combined with his sense of humor gave the impression that he was open to any and all of the crazy questions people would ask.”

“Omar’s dry but entertaining humor and down to earth nature made the class less intimidating”

“Lots of opportunities to ask questions”

“I felt most comfortable the day in class when we broke up into smaller groups and reviewed a certain passage from the text. It gave me time to develop my ideas and I felt more confident sharing”

“Very likeable & welcoming environment”

“I really enjoyed the causal discussion-oriented sections. I felt very comfortable expressing my thoughts and adding to the conversation. Omar created a welcoming and intellectually stimulating atmosphere”

“I think the GSI did an amazing job this course. What was distinctive about my GSI was that he really cared about the subject and wanted everyone to learn”

“He ALWAYS answered questions in an understandable way, [and] never made anyone feel dumb for not understanding the provided explanation”

“Omar made everyone feel comfortable in sections and was very helpful. He did not make sections stressful”

“Every section was well organized and well presented. Omar did a great job of getting others involved in asking/answering questions”

³ The student comments are from the UC Berkeley evaluations. The TTU evaluations do not have student comments.

“GSI is really intelligent and listens to our opinions patiently”

“Omar was just unusually approachable and explained things during office hour more clearly than most”

“Omar was a very attentive and organized GSI. His feedback on papers is always helpful. He always tries to make sure that everyone is included and has a chance to say what’s on their mind”

Effectiveness

“Omar did a great job of stimulating a discussion and fielding various questions clearly and thoroughly”

“[Section] really helped me to understand the overall course material at a deeper level. The GSI was good at giving examples and breaking things down”

“Omar is always very clear and concise. He’s very easy to talk to”

“I would not be able to understand this class without this section class. Concepts are broken down and made simple. Extremely helpful! Omar really cared and listened to each student individually.”

“Omar made sections very understandable and easy to grasp – often we would go over what we said in lecture to clarify anything that we did not understand.”

“Would not have had such a thorough understanding of the material without [section]”

“His thought process was very clear for me to understand”

“He was REALLY good at clarifying things from class that people, including myself, were confused about”

“Omar’s questions to the students made me think for myself which helped me write papers using my own thoughts, not just those derived from lecture”

“The GSI (Omar) was very prepared for sections. He was also very helpful in office hours when it came time to write our papers”

“He did a really good job of taking complex or unclear ideas and making them clearer. The comments on the papers were always good”

“One of the best. He helped me improve my writing skills & analytical skills”

“Our GSI made the course very clear. Omar would speak down the difficult parts of the course into smaller sections in order for us to understand it. Omar’s comments on my first paper made me write a better [and] concise second paper”

“I really benefited from office hours & detailed description on how to write the papers”

“Discussion really helped with breaking down the readings. I wouldn’t have been able to do the papers without Omar’s help”

“Discussion was where I learned the most, GSI is very clear at explaining content”

“As the first philosophy course I’ve taken, the GSI guided me through writing a philosophy paper & concepts very well”

“Omar did a phenomenal job of explaining the course material! He really made complex concepts clear to me and that is impressive because this is my first time in a philosophy course”

“Meeting with him in office hours was the most helpful”

“Omar did a very good job of teaching philosophy. He was very clear in his explanations and was always helpful in answering our questions. Philosophical writing skills were mostly developed during office hours”

“Omar did an excellent job of presenting material clearly. He is good at facilitating discussion, and he is directly and clearly responsive to student questions. He is knowledgeable about the subjects we studied”

“Upon receiving my work from the GSI, I was able to clearly improve my writing because of helpful comments written on them”

“The way our GSI handled discussing text was extremely helpful”

Pedagogy

“He used the board a lot, which was really useful. He also engaged with all of our questions which helped produce lively discussions”

“Omar was great because not only did he have an impeccable understanding of the material, but he also had a far greater body of knowledge that he drew on to help explain concepts to us”

“He has an in-depth knowledge regarding the abstract subject in the course. His ancient history knowledge is exceptional. Great communicator and he made the class fun and engaging. He was very respectful”

“Omar was engaging and really good at using visuals to synthesize all the information in lecture”

“His diagrams and outlines were really good.”

“It was helpful that he had a concrete way of explaining ideas and then allowed for discussion by challenging thoughts”

“In class Omar often raised interesting questions and other cases to examine to help with understanding the course”

“I think my GSI’s examples were very useful in illustrating concepts. He also gave his own responses to students’ remarks, adding to the conversation”

“Brought in outside sources and perspectives to ground material historically/philosophically. Very knowledgeable and quite good at directing conversation in interesting ways”

“Interesting examples. Lots of stick figures haha”

“He used the board very well, making concepts easier to grasp by illustrating them.”

“Omar clarified whatever unclear topics the professor had talked about. Discussion was always a really nice review of everything we had gone over in class. Omar was also very clear in what he wanted from his assignments”

“His explanations, definitions, diagrams, and analogies were extremely helpful”

“Helpful: in-depth explanation, relevant examples”

“He broke down complicated concepts into simpler ones to make understanding easier”

“Helpful diagrams in class. Excellent knowledge of the material. Used modern day examples. He was very helpful to break down the difficult arguments with simple language and his reconstructions of the argument to make their main points more clear”

“Very interactive, asked what we thought often. Never made a question feel stupid”

“GSI was prepared for section and left valuable comments on written work”

“The group work done on occasion really aided in the understanding of the material”

“He did a good job of connecting all of the material together and building on the concepts”

“He always had things prepared for us to discuss and he was clear and responsive to most questions”

“Omar pretty much outlined main arguments and walked us through readings that were confusing when I first read them. This was helpful for when it came to writing essays”

“Sometimes we had handouts that included charts, close readings, or guided questions. These were great for helping to organize information and concepts”

“He knew the material extremely well, came prepared, facilitated discussions, and was responsive. He also speaks clearly and uses helpful drawings”

“For each section, we would summarize the syllogisms of the main arguments we were discussing. Made discussion very fruitful.”

“Omar used several diagrams and analogies which helped simplify and explain concepts”

Generic Praise

“He was super helpful and a good GSI”

“Omar was very informative when we had questions!”

“He would answer any question with a thorough & wise response.”

“Omar was well informed, knowledgeable, helpful, and approachable.”

“He wasn’t boring which was good b/c lots of GSI’s are boring.”

“Omar was absolutely perfect”

“Omar is very good [at] doing his job!”

“Omar is one of the best GSI’s I’ve had at Cal”

“I thought he was especially knowledgeable”

“Super helpful and always willing to answer questions – Omar was great!!!”

“Omar really knew his material and always had a clear explanation available to help with questions about philosophy”

“Omar knew how to explain course material in the best way possible”

“Excellent, one of my top 3 GSI’s. The best thing about Omar was that he listened. He was willing to help when other GSI’s did not. Early in the semester I reached out to several and they did not want to understand my issue – they wanted someone else to handle it”

“Omar knew the course material very well, which is the most important aspect of a discussion section”

“He definitely knows his philosophy and facilitated an open discussion in which we could state our ideas freely. He provided excellent written feedback on the papers”

“GSI clearly knew the material well and explained it well. He was responsive to questions and provided good feedback”

“I personally thought that the section was often much more interesting than lecture. It was a great way to understand and discuss the assigned readings”

“He was so helpful and encouraging I would not have survived this class if it were not for Omar! He is going to be such an amazing professor and lecturer”

Sample Syllabi

Applied Ethics

Lower division

Course Description

This is a topical course on issues in applied ethics. We begin by considering important issues that might hinder even attempting to answer some of the questions in we will discuss in this course. These include issues about moral relativism, and psychological and ethical egoism. After we clear away these roadblocks, we will turn to discussing issues about applied ethics. We will look at topics such as: abortion, death penalty, animal rights, famine, immigration, pornography, affirmative action, gun control, and just war theory. As you will see, some of these issues are interestingly connected. For example, your stance on what makes someone part of our moral community will impact your views in the abortion and animal right debates. Certain stances in the gun control debate will impact your views on immigration and affirmative action. An important part of this course is to keep an eye out for these types of connections. In fact, your final paper for this course will ask you to discuss some of these connections. The aim of this course is to help you come to appreciate critical thinking and philosophical investigation.

Learning Goals:

- Be able to clearly and concisely exposit arguments.
- Be able to critically assess arguments by either objecting directly or indirectly to a specific claim, or by exposing a logical mistake.
- Be able to understand, state, and describe the main philosophical problems and positions discussed in the reading and in lecture.
- Be able to write a well-developed philosophy paper that explains the key moves in a given argument and critically evaluate it.
- Be able to articulate and provide reasons for one's own position or lack thereof.

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance and Participation 10% - Attendance and participation is mandatory. Come to sections and class having done all the assigned reading.
2. Ten Reading Outlines 15% - You are required to write 10 reading outlines. A reading outline summarizes the *structure* of a given text. Aim at summarizing the main arguments and the author's train of thought. You must summarize all the main content in the reading that you decide to write an outline on. At the end of each outline, you must include one philosophically critical question that deals heavily with the main points of the text. The entire outline should not be shorter than $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page or longer than 1.25 pages, *single*-spaced (font 12). You get to pick *any* 10 readings you would like to write an outline on (with the exception of the logic reading assignment). You are not allowed to write an outline on a reading we already covered.

That is, when you write an outline, you must write it on the reading that is due the day you wish to turn the outline in.

3. Précis 20% - A précis is a concise and clear summary of the main claims and arguments of a given text. Being able to identify the main moves and arguments in a difficult text and putting them in your own words is an important skill to have. *The précis should not be shorter than 590 words and no longer than 610 words*, double-spaced. The word limit range is important because it will force you to make difficult choices about what to include or exclude in the précis. It will also force you to write concisely and to avoid being verbose. You are also not allowed to quote verbatim from the text. It is important that you put things into your own words.
4. Shorter Critical Paper 25% - This paper should have two clearly identifiable sections: an expository and critical section. The prompt will ask you to expound an argument or a view and to critically evaluate it. The paper will be about 3 double-spaced pages, with 12pt font and regular margins.
5. Longer Critical Paper 30% - This is the final paper, and it will function as your final for this class. Like the shorter paper, this paper should also contain two clearly identifiable sections: an expository and critical section. The prompt will ask you to deal with the views or arguments of two or more of the readings. The paper will be about 5-6 double-spaced pages, and it will be due the day your final exam is scheduled.

Required Text:

There is no required text for this course. I will upload handouts for the reading on the course website.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Ethical Relativism

Ruth Benedict: A Defense of Ethical Relativism
Louis Pojman: A Critique of Ethical Relativism

Week 2: Moral Disagreement

George Sher: But I Could be Wrong
Renford Bambrough: Proof

Week 3: Egoism

Ayn Rand: The Virtue of Selfishness
James Rachels: Egoism and Moral Skepticism

Week 4: Abortion

Judith Thomson: A Defense of Abortion
Mary Warren: On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion

Week 5: Abortion continued

Don Marquis: Why Abortion Is Immoral
Lee and George: The Wrong of Abortion

Week 6: Death penalty

Burton Leiser: The Death Penalty Is Permissible

Hugo Adam Bedau: No, the Death Penalty Is Not Morally Permissible (pp. 693-702)

Week 7: Animal rights

Peter Singer: The Case for Animal Liberation

Carl Cohen: The Case Against Animal Rights

Week 8: Famine

Peter Singer: Famine, Affluence and Morality

John Arthur: Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code

Week 9: Immigration

Christopher Wellman: Immigration and Freedom to Association

Chandran Kukathas: The Case for Open Immigration

Week 10: Pornography

Andrew Altman: The Right to Get Turned On: Pornography, Autonomy, Equality

Susan Brison: The Price We Pay? Pornography and Harm

Week 11: Affirmative Action

Albert Mosley: A Defense of Affirmative Action

Celia Wolf-Devine: Preferential Policies Have Become Toxic

Week 12: Gun Control

Jeff McMahan: Why Gun 'Control' Is Not Enough

Michael Huemer: Gun Rights as Deontic Constraints (manuscript)

Week 13: Just War Theory

Douglas Lackey: Just War Theory

Jeff McMahan: The Ethics of Killing in War

Week 14: Extra Time

Political Philosophy

Lower division

Course Description

This is an introductory course in political philosophy. We will begin this course by considering political philosophy as a “first philosophy.” By that we mean that it is a discipline that is fundamental in answering other important questions we typically have about the world. This requires us to rethink the way we typically think about doing political philosophy. With this new machinery in place, we will then look at some important topics in political philosophy. These include political authority, distributive justice, equality, liberalism, communitarianism, citizenship, nationalism, and democracy. In this course, we will take on questions, such as: is patriotism good? How should we understand democracy and is it something we should strive for? Is equality a moral ideal that we should aim for? And many other similar questions. The aim of this course is to help you come to appreciate critical thinking and philosophical investigation.

Learning Goals:

- Be able to clearly and concisely exposit arguments.
- Be able to critically assess arguments by either objecting directly or indirectly to a specific claim, or by exposing a logical mistake.
- Be able to understand, state, and describe the main philosophical problems and positions discussed in the reading and in lecture.
- Be able to write a well-developed philosophy paper that explains the key moves in a given argument and critically evaluate it.
- Be able to articulate and provide reasons for one’s own position or lack thereof.

Course Requirements:

6. Attendance and Participation 10% - Attendance and participation is mandatory. Come to sections and class having done all the assigned reading.
7. Ten Reading Outlines 15% - You are required to write 10 reading outlines. A reading outline summarizes the *structure* of a given text. Aim at summarizing the main arguments and the author’s train of thought. You must summarize all the main content in the reading that you decide to write an outline on. At the end of each outline, you must include one philosophically critical question that deals heavily with the main points of the text. The entire outline should not be shorter than $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page or longer than 1.25 pages, *single*-spaced (font 12). You get to pick *any* 10 readings you would like to write an outline on (with the exception of the logic reading assignment). You are not allowed to write an outline on a reading we already covered. That is, when you write an outline, you must write it on the reading that is due the day you wish to turn the outline in.
8. Précis 20% - A précis is a concise and clear summary of the main claims and arguments of a given text. Being able to identify the main moves and arguments in a difficult text and putting them in your own words is an important skill to have. *The précis should not be shorter than 590*

words and no longer than 610 words, double-spaced. The word limit range is important because it will force you to make difficult choices about what to include or exclude in the précis. It will also force you to write concisely and to avoid being verbose. You are also not allowed to quote verbatim from the text. It is important that you put things into your own words.

9. Shorter Critical Paper 25% - This paper should have two clearly identifiable sections: an expository and critical section. The prompt will ask you to exposit an argument or a view and to critically evaluate it. The paper will be about 3 double-spaced pages, with 12pt font and regular margins.
10. Longer Critical Paper 30% - This is the final paper, and it will function as your final for this class. Like the shorter paper, this paper should also contain two clearly identifiable sections: an expository and critical section. The prompt will ask you to deal with the views or arguments of two or more of the readings. The paper will be about 5-6 double-spaced pages, and it will be due the day your final exam is scheduled.

Required Text:

- (1) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*
- (2) Aristotle, *Politics*

Course Schedule

Part 1: Rethinking political philosophy

Week 1: Politics as “first philosophy”

Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 1
Aristotle: *Politics*, book 10

Week 2: Political realism

Hans Sluga: *Politics and the Search for the Common Good*, introduction
Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*, pp. 23-59.

Part 2: Political Authority

Week 3: The state of nature as a state of war

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapters 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 21

Week 4: The State of nature and the law of nature

Locke: *Second Treatise*, chapters 2, 3, 8, 9

Week 5: No State or no contract

Murray Rothbard: *Society Without a State*
Virginia Held: *Non-Contractual Society: A Feminist View*

Part 3: Justice

Week 6: Distributive justice

Robert Nozick: *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, pp. 160-4, 168-74
G. A. Cohen: Where the Action Is

Week 7: Equality

Harry Frankfurt: Equality as a Moral Ideal
Derek Parfit: Equality and Priority

Week 8: Liberalism

Michael Sandel: *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, pp. 82-95, pp. 175-83
John Rawls: The Domain of the Political and Overlapping Consensus

Week 9: Communitarianism

Amy Gutmann: Communitarian Critics of liberalism
Charles Taylor: Cross-purpose: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate (in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, pp. 159-81).

Part 4: Nationality

Week 10: Diversity

Iris Young: Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship
Bhikhu Parekh: Contemporary Liberal Responses to Diversity

Week 11: Patriotism

Alasdair MacIntyre: Is Patriotism a Virtue?
David Miller: In Defense of Nationality

Part 5: Democracy

Week 12: varieties of democratic politics

John Elster: The Market and the Forum
Joshua Cohen: Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy

Week 13: The will of the people vs what is right

Michael Walzer: Philosophy and Democracy

Week 14: Extra time

Introduction to Philosophy

Lower division

Course Description

This introductory course will cover five major sub-disciplines in philosophy: Epistemology, Philosophy of Science, Metaphysics, Ethics, and Philosophy of Religion. You will be reading both historical and contemporary authors. On top of these five areas, you will be introduced to the basics of argumentation in the beginning of the semester. During this time, you will learn foundational concepts such as how to formulate arguments, basic reasoning skills, and some logical fallacies. The overall aim of this class is to introduce students to important and engaging philosophical questions. Questions such as: what can we know? What distinguishes a scientific theory from a pseudo-scientific theory? Are we a mind or a body? Is morality relative to custom? Does God exist? And other similar questions. The aim of this course is to help you come to appreciate critical thinking and philosophical investigation.

Learning Goals:

- Be able to clearly and concisely exposit arguments.
- Be able to critically assess arguments by either objecting directly or indirectly to a specific claim, or by exposing a logical mistake.
- Be able to understand, state, and describe the main philosophical problems and positions discussed in the reading and in lecture.
- Be able to write a well-developed philosophy paper that explains the key moves in a given argument and critically evaluate it.
- Be able to articulate and provide reasons for one's own position or lack thereof.

Course Requirements:

11. Attendance and Participation 10% - Attendance and participation is mandatory. Come to sections and class having done all the assigned reading.
12. Ten Reading Outlines 15% - You are required to write 10 reading outlines. A reading outline summarizes the *structure* of a given text. Aim at summarizing the main arguments and the author's train of thought. You must summarize all the main content in the reading that you decide to write an outline on. At the end of each outline, you must include one philosophically critical question that deals heavily with the main points of the text. The entire outline should not be shorter than $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page or longer than 1.25 pages, *single*-spaced (font 12). You get to pick *any* 10 readings you would like to write an outline on (with the exception of the logic reading assignment). You are not allowed to write an outline on a reading we already covered. That is, when you write an outline, you must write it on the reading that is due the day you wish to turn the outline in.
13. Précis 20% - A précis is a concise and clear summary of the main claims and arguments of a given text. Being able to identify the main moves and arguments in a difficult text and putting them in your own words is an important skill to have. *The précis should not be shorter than 590*

words and no longer than 610 words, double-spaced. The word limit range is important because it will force you to make difficult choices about what to include or exclude in the précis. It will also force you to write concisely and to avoid being verbose. You are also not allowed to quote verbatim from the text. It is important that you put things into your own words.

14. Shorter Critical Paper 25% - This paper should have two clearly identifiable sections: an expository and critical section. The prompt will ask you to exposit an argument or a view and to critically evaluate it. The paper will be about 3 double-spaced pages, with 12pt font and regular margins.
15. Longer Critical Paper 30% - This is the final paper, and it will function as your final for this class. Like the shorter paper, this paper should also contain two clearly identifiable sections: an expository and critical section. The prompt will ask you to deal with the views or arguments of two or more of the readings. The paper will be about 5-6 double-spaced pages, and it will be due the day your final exam is scheduled.

Required Text:

Pojman, Louis P., and Lewis Vaughn. *Philosophy: the quest for truth*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

The rest of the readings will be handed out.

Course Schedule

(* = handout)

Week 1: Introduction

Why study philosophy?*

Jennifer Nagel: Introduction*

Excursus: A Little Bit of Logic (pp. 33-52)

Part 1: Epistemology

Week 2: What can we know?

Descartes: Cartesian Doubt and the Search for Foundational Knowledge (pp. 118-194)

Roderick Chisholm: The Problem of the Criterion*

Week 3: Knowledge and testimony

Linda Zagzebski: The Inescapability of Gettier Problems*

Jennifer Lackey: Testimony: Acquiring knowledge from others*

Part 2: Philosophy of Science

Week 4: Induction, demarcation, and causation

Hume: Skeptical Doubts Concerning the Operations of the Understanding (pp. 259-269)

Karl Popper: Science: Conjectures and Refutations*

Nancy Cartwright: Causal Laws and Effective Strategies*

Part 3: Metaphysics

Week 5: What are we?

Descartes: Substance Dualism (pp. 285-292)

Barbara Montero: The Body Problem*

Week 6: What are we?

B. F. Skinner: The Causes of Behavior*
Karen Bennett: Why I Am Not a Dualist*

Week 7: Do we have free will?

Patricia Churchland: Is Determinism Self-refuting?*

Roderick Chisholm: Human Freedom and the Self (pp. 435-442)

Part 4: Ethics

Week 8: Relativism, anti-realism, and the demands of morality

James Rachels: Morality is Not Relative (pp. 483-493)
Sharon Street: Does Anything Really Matter or Did We Just Evolve to Think So?*

Susan Wolf: Moral Saints*

Week 9: Abortion

Mary Anne Warren: On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion (pp. 661-667)
Don Marquis: Why Abortion Is Immoral (pp. 647-660)

Week 10: Death penalty

Burton Leiser: The Death Penalty Is Permissible (pp. 688-693)
Hugo Adam Bedau: No, the Death Penalty Is Not Morally Permissible (pp. 693-702)

Week 11: Animal rights

Peter Singer: The Case for Animal Liberation (pp. 704-708)
Carl Cohen: The Case Against Animal Rights (pp. 708-712)

Week 12: Famine and the meaning of life

Peter Singer: Famine, Affluence and Morality (pp. 714-723)
Camus: Life Is Absurd (pp. 616-621)
Ecclesiastes*

Part 5: Philosophy of Religion

Week 13: Against theism

Plato: Euthyphro*
Johnson: Why Doesn't God Intervene to Prevent Evil? (pp. 120-125)
Hume: The Unreasonability of Belief in Miracles*

Week 14: For theism

Paul Copan: The Moral Argument*
Eleonore Stump: The Problem of Evil*
Lara Buchak: When is Faith Rational?*

Ancient Philosophy

Course Description:

This is an introductory course in ancient philosophy. The bulk of the course will focus on three main ancient philosophers: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. We will discuss the so-called pre-Socratic philosophers at the beginning of the course, but the majority of the time will be spent on the three major figures. History will be an important component of this class, but this class is a *philosophy* class first and foremost. It is designed to introduce students to philosophy through primary texts written by important ancient philosophers from the western tradition. As such, there are no required prerequisites.

We will begin the course by drawing a contrast between the way the ancient poets and the philosophers explained reality. The ancient poets claimed that finite humans could not come to learn ultimate truths about the cosmos on their own. How can we come to know what happened at the beginning of the cosmos if we weren't there? The poets claim that we need to learn these truths from the testimony of the gods who were there from the beginning, and who have been around long enough to understand the mysteries of the cosmos. By contrast, the philosophers sought to explain the world around them not through the traditions and the testimony of the gods, although they had things to say about those things, but through naturalistic means. They begin to develop views that aim to answer two questions: (1) what is the basic stuff? And (2) what explains change? In the first part of the course, we will look at the answers that ancient philosophers gave to these two questions, and the reasoning for their answers.

Plato and Aristotle had a lot to say about questions (1) and (2), and we'll look at what they had to say, but they also had a lot to say about more practical questions. During the second half of the course, we will read big sections of Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. These two important and very influential texts paint a picture of the good life and why it should be pursued.

The aim of this class is twofold. The first is for you to learn ancient philosophy. The second is for you to take your first step as a philosopher. In our daily lives, it is okay to be like the poets: accepting things on testimony or tradition. But when we enter the philosophy classroom, we want to think hard about our assumptions and why we accept the views that we accept. We want to approach the world like ancient philosophers did.

Learning Goals:

- Be able to clearly and concisely exposit arguments in premise-conclusion form.
- Be able to critically assess arguments by either objecting directly or indirectly to a specific premise(s), or by showing that the argument is fallacious.
- Be able to understand, state, and describe the main historical problems and positions discussed in the reading and in lecture.
- Be able to write a well-developed philosophy paper that explains the key moves in a given argument and critically evaluate it.
- Be able to articulate and provide reasons for one's own position or lack thereof.

Required Text:

Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle, 4th Edition. S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, C. D. C. Reeve (Eds.)

Course Requirements:

- Section Grade 10% – Section attendance and participation is mandatory. Come to sections (and class) having done all the assigned reading.
- Two Papers 20% each – These papers will typically be on a specific part of the reading. The prompt will ask you to expound an argument or a view and to critically evaluate it. Each paper will be about 3 double-spaced pages, with 12pt font and regular margins.
- Précis 15% – A précis is a concise and clear summary of the main claims and arguments of a given text. Being able to identify the main moves and arguments in a difficult text and putting them in your own words is an important skill to have. *The précis should not be shorter than 500 words and no longer than 600 words* double-spaced. The word limit range is important because it will force you to make difficult choices about what to include or exclude in the précis. It will also force you to write concisely and to avoid being verbose.
- Final Paper 35% - The final paper will function as your final for the class. It will ask you to compare and contrast the views or arguments for two or more of the readings. The paper will be about 5-6 double-spaced pages, and it will be due the day your final exam is scheduled.

*LATE ASSIGNMENTS: There is a 1/3 letter grade penalty for every *class*-day a paper is late (e.g. suppose a paper is due on Friday and you turn it in the following Wednesday and the paper receives a B+, then because it is late it will receive a 2/3 letter grade deduction, which means that the paper will receive a B-).

Tentative Schedule:

* = hangout

Week	Readings and Assignments due
1	<u>Cosmogony according to the poets</u> Hesiod's Theogony, (selections)* Homer's Illiad, (selections)* <u>The birth of philosophy and the Milesians</u> Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes (10-17) <u>Change</u> Heraclitus (29-39) Parmenides (40-46). Zeno (47-51). <u>Atomism</u> Leucippus and Democritus (80-92). <u>The Sophists</u> Protagoras and Gorgias (104-107) <u>What is piety?</u> Euthyphro (135-152)
2	<u>Socrates' trail</u> Apology (153-178). <u>Should Socrates escape?</u> Crito (179-191) <u>Paradox of learning</u> Meno (241-266)

	<p><u>Immortality of the soul</u> Phaedo (267-319)</p>
3	<p>Précis is due <u>Justice is the advantage of the stronger</u> Republic I (369-397) <u>Why be moral?</u> Republic II (398-423) <u>Building the good city and the parts of the soul</u> Republic III-IV (424-482).</p>
4	<p>First Paper is due <u>The philosopher kings and the cave</u> Republic V, and selections from VII (483-514, 542-550) <u>Kinds of being</u> Categories 1-5 (694-700) <u>Knowledge of demonstration</u> Posterior Analytics (714-731) <u>Causes and Explanation</u> Physics II (745-754) <u>The principle of life</u> De Anima I 1, 4, and II 1-3 (847-856)</p>
5	<p>Second Paper is due <u>The human good</u> Nicomachean Ethics I and X (870-878, 919-929) <u>Virtue</u> Nicomachean Ethics II (881-890) <u>Moral responsibility</u> Nicomachean Ethics III (890-901) <u>Actions and intellectual virtue</u> Nicomachean Ethics VI (905-913)</p>
6	<p>Final Paper is due <u>Incontinence</u> Nicomachean Ethics VII (913-919) <u>The definition and structure of the state</u> Politics I (930-933) <u>Criticism of the ideal societies</u> Politics II (933-937) <u>Classification of constitutions</u> Politics III (937-951) <u>The best state</u> Politics VII (951-960)</p>

Modern Philosophy

Course Description:

This is an introductory course in modern philosophy. History will be an important component of this class, but this class is a *philosophy* class first and foremost. It is designed to introduce students to philosophy through primary texts written by influential modern philosophers from the western tradition. There are no required prerequisites.

We will begin the course by looking at the fall of the scholastic-Aristotelian system. The rejection of substantial forms and teleology lead to a rebirth of atomistic conceptions of reality, or as it was called in the early modern period, *corpuscularianism*. This atomistic conception was meant to overthrow the old conception and be the new foundation for the new science that we see developing around this time. Descartes, often understood to be the father of modern philosophy, is a paradigmatic example of someone trying to build a rock-solid foundation for the new science. However, the search for a foundation for the new science and the overthrow of the old scholastic-Aristotelian system came with its own problems. One of the most pressing and reoccurring problems is the problem of skepticism: how do we find a hook from our mind to the external, mind-independent, world. In this class, we will consider important modern thinkers who struggled to rebuild a new system or foundation for the new science and respond adequately to the problem of skepticism.

The aim of this class is twofold. The first is for you to learn modern philosophy. The second is for you to take your first step as a philosopher. In our daily lives, it is okay to accept things because that's how things happen to be. But when we enter the philosophy classroom, we want to think hard about our assumptions and why we accept the views that we accept. Like Descartes and the other modern philosophers, we want to question our assumptions and see whether our views and commitments are built on a rock-solid foundation.

Learning Goals:

- Be able to clearly and concisely exposit arguments in premise-conclusion form.
- Be able to critically assess arguments by either objecting directly or indirectly to a specific premise(s), or by showing that the argument is fallacious.
- Be able to understand, state, and describe the main historical problems and positions discussed in the reading and in lecture.
- Be able to write a well-developed philosophy paper that explains the key moves in a given argument and critically evaluate it.
- Be able to articulate and provide reasons for one's own position or lack thereof.

Required Text:

Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources (2nd edition), eds. Arieuw and Watkins.

Course Requirements:

- Section Grade 10% – Section attendance and participation is mandatory. Come to sections (and class) having done all the assigned reading.

- Two Papers 20% each – These papers will typically be on a specific part of the reading. The prompt will ask you to exposit an argument or a view and to critically evaluate it. Each paper will be about 3 double-spaced pages, with 12pt font and regular margins.
- Précis 15% – A précis is a concise and clear summary of the main claims and arguments of a given text. Being able to identify the main moves and arguments in a difficult text and putting them in your own words is an important skill to have. *The précis should not be shorter than 500 words and no longer than 600 words* double-spaced. The word limit range is important because it will force you to make difficult choices about what to include or exclude in the précis. It will also force you to write concisely and to avoid being verbose.
- Final Paper 35% - The final paper will function as your final for the class. It will ask you to compare and contrast the views or arguments for two or more of the readings. The paper will be about 5-6 double-spaced pages, and it will be due the day your final exam is scheduled.

*LATE ASSIGNMENTS: There is a 1/3 letter grade penalty for every *class*-day a paper is late (e.g. suppose a paper is due on Friday and you turn it in the following Wednesday and the paper receives a B+, then because it is late it will receive a 2/3 letter grade deduction, which means that the paper will receive a B-).

Tentative Schedule:

* = hangout

Week	Readings and Assignments due
1	The fall of the scholastic-Aristotelian system Deely, <i>Medieval Philosophy Redefined</i> , ch. 11* The new science: the experimenters Galileo, <i>Dialogue on the Two World Systems</i> (selections), “Corpuscularianism” Bacon, <i>The New Organon</i> , book 1 The rationalists: Foundation for the new science Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> I-III
2	Foundation (continue) Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> IV-VI Elizabeth correspondence (selections) Necessitarianism Spinoza, <i>Ethics</i> I-II Occasionalism Malebranche, <i>Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion</i> , 1-7
3	Précis is due Windowless monads Leibniz, <i>Monadology</i> , <i>Discourse on Metaphysics</i> (selections) The best possible world Leibniz’s summary of <i>Theodicy</i> The empiricists: Locke’s epistemology and metaphysics Locke, <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> , selections from books 1 and 2
4	First Paper is due

	<p>Locke's epistemology and metaphysics (continue) Locke, <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i>, selections from book 4 Immaterialism as response to skepticism Berkeley, <i>A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge</i> (selections) Berkeley, <i>Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous</i> (selections)</p>
5	<p>Second Paper is due Space-time Newton, <i>Mathematical Principles</i> (selections)* Leibniz-Clarke correspondence Skepticism: human understanding Hume, <i>Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i>, parts 2-7 Skepticism: morals Hume, <i>Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i>, parts 8 and 10 Skepticism: religion Hume, <i>Dialogues on Natural Religion</i>, parts 2-5, 10-13</p>
6	<p>Final Paper is due Moral sentiments Shaftesbury, <i>An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit</i> (selections) Response to Hume: Reid on skepticism and morality Reid, <i>Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man</i> (selections from Essays 1-3) Kant on pure reason Kant, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>, Preface and Introduction</p>

Introduction to Logic

Course Description:

This is an introductory course in logic. The course will cover propositional and predicate logic. Although logic is mathematical in nature, there are no prerequisites. In this class, we will begin by learning the syntax and semantics of propositional logic, and then we will learn natural deductions for propositional logic. Along the way we will learn about the basic theory of propositional logic. After, we will build on what we've learned but introduce more syntax and semantics for predicate logic, and then learn about proofs for predicate logic. We will conclude the class by looking at a few applications of predicate logic.

Learning Goals:

- Be able to clearly and concisely exposit arguments in premise-conclusion form.
- Be able to critically assess arguments by either objecting directly or indirectly to a specific premise(s), or by showing that the argument is fallacious.
- Be able to understand, state, and describe the main historical problems and positions discussed in the reading and in lecture.
- Be able to write a well-developed philosophy paper that explains the key moves in a given argument and critically evaluate it.
- Be able to articulate and provide reasons for one's own position or lack thereof.

Required Text:

Deductive Logic, Warren D. Goldfarb.

Course Requirements:

- Section and Class Attendance 10% – Section and class attendance and participation is mandatory. Come to sections (and class) having done all the assigned reading.
- Homework 45% – You'll have five homework assignments. These will consist of questions that will help you to exercise the things you've learned in class and in the reading. You'll get the assignment before the weekend, and it'll be due the first day of class after the weekend.
- Final 45% - The final exam will be cumulative. It will test you on all the material that we've covered in class. The exam will be held on the final day of class.

*LATE ASSIGNMENTS: There is a 1/3 letter grade penalty for every *class*-day a paper is late (e.g. suppose an assignment is due on Friday and you turn it in the following Wednesday and the assignment receives a B+, then because it is late it will receive a 2/3 letter grade deduction, which means that the paper will receive a B-).

Tentative Schedule:

* = handout

DD = *Deductive Logic*

Week	Readings and Assignments due
1 Propositional	General Introduction <i>Logic in Action</i> , 1-11*

	<p>Conjunction, negation, disjunction, and grouping DD, 6-15</p> <p>Truth-functions, conditional, logical paraphrase DD, 19-36</p>
2 Propositional	<p>HW #1 due</p> <p>Validity, Satisfiability, implication DD, 37-52</p> <p>Use and Mention, Equivalences DD, 53-60</p> <p>Disjunctive normal form, expressive adequacy, formal systems DD, 61-81</p>
3 Monadic Quantification	<p>HW #2 due</p> <p>Existential and Universal Quantifier DD, 89-112</p> <p>Paraphrasing, Universe of Discourse DD, 113-122</p> <p>Validity, implication, and equivalence DD, 123-138</p> <p>General Laws DD, 139-146</p>
4 Polyadic Quantification	<p>HW #3 is due</p> <p>Paraphrasing polyadic quantification DD, 147-166</p> <p>Validity, implication, and equivalence DD, 167-180</p> <p>Natural deduction DD, 181-187</p>
5 Polyadic Quantification	<p>HW #4 is due</p> <p>Natural deduction (continued) DD, 188-198</p> <p>Other Laws DD, 199-215</p> <p>Completeness DD, 216-224</p>
6 Application	<p>HW #5 is due</p> <p>Decidability DD, 225-230</p> <p>Arithmetic Logic in Action, sections 4.10 and 9.3*</p> <p>Set Theory Sections 6.1 and 6.2 of “The Philosophy of Set Theory” by Mary Tiles</p> <p>REVIEW Review guide will be handed out</p> <p>FINAL EXAM</p>

Introduction to Ethics

Lower division

Course Description

This is an introductory course in ethics. We will read both historical and contemporary texts that focus on questions that are largely influenced by the Western philosophical tradition. The material will not be arranged chronologically, but topically. Here is a sample of some of the topics we will discuss: Is morality relative? Should I prefer my interests over the interests of others? Does moral disagreement undermine our moral knowledge? What constitutes a good life? how should we live? Is it always morally wrong to kill an innocent human? Do animals have rights?

In this class, we begin by considering important questions that might hinder even attempting to answer some of the questions in the above paragraph. These include issues about moral relativism, psychological and ethical egoism, and skepticism about moral knowledge. Then we will look at moral theories that have had important influence on our moral thinking such as utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, divine command theory, and natural law theory. We will examine arguments for and against these theories. After that, we'll engage in important ethical questions outside of the domain of general moral theorizing, such as the nature of moral responsibility and determinism. Lastly, we will turn to applied ethics. We will look at important moral questions about helping the poor, abortion, animal rights, among others. The overall aim of this course is to introduce students to important philosophical questions, and to help students cultivate critical reasoning skills so that they can start to develop their own answers to these questions. This class is a survey class in which we discuss many different topics in hopes that some of these topics will grip your interests, and perhaps even persuade you to take other philosophy courses.

Course Requirements:

- Attendance and Participation Grade 10% – Section and class attendance and participation is mandatory. Come to sections and class having done all the assigned reading.
- Two Papers 20% each – These are shorter papers. The prompt will ask you to expound an argument or a view and to critically evaluate it. Each paper will be about 3 double-spaced pages, with 12pt font and regular margins.
- Précis 15% – A précis is a concise and clear summary of the main claims and arguments of a given text. Being able to identify the main moves and arguments in a difficult text and putting them in your own words is an important skill to have. *The précis should not be shorter than 500 words and no longer than 600 words* double-spaced. The word limit range is important because it will force you to make difficult choices about what to include or exclude in the précis. It will also force you to write concisely and to avoid being verbose.
- Final Paper 35% - This is a longer paper. The final paper will function as your final for the class. It will ask you to deal with the views or arguments of two or more of the readings. The paper will be about 5-6 double-spaced pages, and it will be due the day your final exam is scheduled.

Required Text:

Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues, 6th edition. Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie.

I will supplement this book with other readings. I will post them online.

Course Schedule

E= Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues, 6th Edition

*= handout (check becources)

Part 1: Meta-Ethics

Week 1: Ethical Relativism

Ruth Benedict: A Defense of Ethical Relativism*

Louis Pojman: A Critique of Ethical Relativism*

Week 2: Moral Disagreement

George Sher: But I Could be Wrong*

Renford Bambrough: Proof*

Part 2: Moral Theory

Week 3: Egoism

Ayn Rand: The Virtue of Selfishness*

James Rachels: Egoism and Moral Skepticism (E: 802-808)

Week 4: Utilitarianism

Mill: Utilitarianism (E: 363-397)

Week 5: Deontology

Kant: Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals (E: 314-353)

Week 6: Virtue Ethics

Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics (E: 130-168)

Week 7: Divine command and natural law

Plato: Euthyphro (E: 5-15)

Robert Adams: A New Divine Command Theory*

Russ Shafer-Landau: Natural Law*

Week 8: Critique of utilitarianism and deontology

Robert Nozick: The Experience Machine*

Bernard Williams: A Critique of Utilitarianism (E: 544-560)

Philippa Foot: Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives (E: 647-653)

Week 9: Other critiques

Susan Wolf: Moral Saints*

Margaret Walker: Feminist Skepticism, Authority, and Transparency*

Part 3: Applied Ethics

Week 10: Famine

Peter Singer: Famine, Affluence, and Morality (E: 870-877)

John Arthur: Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code (E: 878-889)

Week 11: Abortion

Judith Thomson: A Defense of Abortion (E: 813-823)

Don Marquis: An Argument that Abortion Is Wrong (E: 834-845)

Week 12: Animal Rights

Tom Regan: Empty Cages: Animal Rights and Vivisection*

R. G. Frey: Animals and Their Medical Use*

Week 13: Immigration

David Miller: Immigration: The Case for Limits*

Chandran Kukathas: The Case for Open Immigration*

Week 14: Pornography

Andrew Altman: The Right to Get Turned On*

Susan Brison: The Price We Pay? Pornography and Harm*

Philosophy of Science Upper division

Course Description

This is an upper division course that contains three parts: general philosophy of science, philosophy of physics, and philosophy of biology. The first part of this course will cover general questions that apply to science more generally. Examples: Are all scientific theories underdetermined by competing rival theories? Is inductive reasoning (i.e. the primary method used by science) reliable? How should we understand the laws of nature? How should we understand causation? The second part of this course covers philosophy of physics. We will focus on issues about space and time in classical physics and relativistic physics. We will also look at two different interpretations of quantum physics: the GRW and Bohmian interpretations. The last part of this class is philosophy of biology. Here are some example questions from this section: Is there design in nature? If so, what explains it? Are there natural kinds, such as species? If so, is this compatible with evolutionary theory?

Course Requirements:

- Biweekly Assignments 40% – These are short reaction papers between 400-500 words. You are expected to summarize an important part of the reading and then critically evaluate it.

Pick only **one** of the following requirements (note: for those interested in applying to graduate programs in philosophy, I highly recommend doing the latter option):

- Three Papers 20% each – These are shorter papers, about 5-7 double-spaced pages. Prompts will be handed out a week before the paper is due.

Or

- Long Paper 60% - This is a substantial paper, about 15 double-spaced pages. You will be required to get your paper topic approved by me first. Ideally, you should aim to do this at least a month before the paper is due. This paper will engage with a big bulk of the assigned readings and perhaps some outside sources as well. If you decide to write this paper instead of the three short papers, please let me know as soon as you make this decision. I will provide extensive comments on this paper, and I would be happy to read future drafts of it, even after the class is over.

Required Text:

There are no required texts. The readings will be handed out.

Course Schedule

Part: General

Week 1: Verificationism

A. J. Ayer: Language, Truth, and Logic, ch. 1

Lawrence Sklar: Space, Time, and Spacetime, ch. 2

Week 2: The problem of underdetermination

Pierre Duhem: Physical Theory and Experiment
Andre Kukla: Does Every Theory Have Empirically Equivalent Rivals?

Week 3: Responses to underdetermination

Laudan & Leplin: Empirical Equivalence and Underdetermination
Kristen Intemann: Feminism, Underdetermination, and Values in Science

Week 4: The problem of induction

Hume: Skeptical Doubts Concerning the Operations of the Understanding
Nelson Goodman: The New Riddle of Induction

Week 5: Responses to induction

Hans Reichenbach: The Pragmatic Justification of Induction
Wesley Salmon: Rationality and Objectivity in Science

Week 6: Humeanism vs anti-humeanism about laws

Helen Beebe: The Non-Governing Conception of Laws of Nature
Barry Loewer: Humean Supervenience

Week 7: Causation

Nancy Cartwright: Causal Laws and Effective Strategies
Mills & Beatty: The Propensity Interpretation of Fitness

Part 2: Physics

Week 8: Space and time in classical physics

Lawrence Sklar: Space, Time, and Spacetime, ch. 3
Shamik Dasgupta: Substantivalism vs Relationalism about Space in Classical Physics

Week 9: Space and time in relativistic physics

Tim Maudlin: Philosophy of Physics: Space and Time, ch. 4
Tim Maudlin: Philosophy of Physics: Space and Time, ch. 6

Week 10: Interpretations of Quantum Physics

David Albert: Quantum Mechanics and Experience, ch. 5
David Albert: Quantum Mechanics and Experience, ch. 7

Part 4: Biology

Week 11: Demarcation

Elliott Sober: Philosophy of Biology, ch. 2
Thomas Nagel: Public Education and Intelligent Design

Week 12: Design Argument

Elliott Sober: The Design Argument*
Robin Collins: God, Design, and Fine-Tuning

Week 13: Species

Ian Hacking: A Tradition of Natural Kinds

Philip Kitcher: Some Puzzles about Species

Week 14: Extra Time

Metaphysics

An upper-division topical introduction to contemporary metaphysics

Course Description

This is a topical course designed to introduce undergraduate students to contemporary metaphysics. The material we will cover assumes some background in philosophy, so if you have not taken any philosophy courses please come see me.

Metaphysics primarily investigates questions about the nature of the world. There are general features of the world such as existence, identity, modality, time, among others. There are also special features of the world that we, as rational beings, care about. Examples: personal identity, free will, death, among others. In this class we will begin with the general, and more abstract, features of the world, and then move into the special, and less abstract, features of the world. The overall aim of this course is to introduce students to a few interesting topics found in contemporary metaphysics, and to help students to cultivate critical reasoning skills so that they can develop their own answers to these questions.

Course Requirements:

- Biweekly Assignments 40% – These are short reaction papers between 400-500 words. You are expected to summarize an important part of the reading and then critically evaluate it.

Pick only **one** of the following requirements (note: for those interested in applying to graduate programs in philosophy, I highly recommend doing the latter option):

- Three Papers 20% each – These are shorter papers, about 5-7 double-spaced pages. Prompts will be handed out a week before the paper is due.

Or

- Long Paper 60% - This is a substantial paper, about 15 double-spaced pages. You will be required to get your paper topic approved by me first. Ideally, you should aim to do this at least a month before the paper is due. This paper will engage with a big bulk of the assigned readings and perhaps some outside sources as well. If you decide to write this paper instead of the three short papers, please let me know as soon as you make this decision. I will provide extensive comments on this paper, and I would be happy to read future drafts of it, even after the class is done.

Required Text:

Metaphysics: An Anthology, 2nd edition. Eds. Jaegwon Kim, Daniel Korman, and Ernest Sosa.

I will supplement this book with other readings. I will post them online.

Course Schedule

(* = handout)

Week 1: Existence

Quine: On What There Is?
Schaffer: On What Grounds What

Week 2: Identity

Kripke: Identity and Necessity
Stalnaker: Value Identity

Week 3: Modality

Plantinga: Modalities: Basic Concepts and Distinctions
Fine: Essence and Modality

Week 4: Time

McTaggart: The Unreality of Time
Sider: Against Presentism
Lewis: The Paradoxes of Time Travel (optional)*

Week 4: Properties

Armstrong: Universals as Attributes
Lewis: New Work for a Theory of Universals

Week 5: Causation

Anscombe: Causality and Determination
Lewis: Causation

Week 6: Persistence

Thomson: Parthood and Identity Across Time
Haslanger: Endurance and Temporary Intrinsic

Week 7: Persons

Parfit: Personal Identity
Baker: The Ontological Status of Persons
Olson: An Argument for Animalism

Week 8: Objects

Van Inwagen: When are Objects Parts?
Sider: The Argument from Vagueness

Week 9: Free Will

Churchland: Is Determinism Self-refuting?*

Chisholm: Human Freedom and the Self*

Week 10: Death

Nagel: Death*
Brueckner and Fischer: Why is Death Bad?*

Week 11: Sex and gender

Haslanger: Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?*

Sveinsdóttir: The Metaphysics of Sex and Gender*

Week 12: Existence of a necessary being

Pruss: The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument*

Rasmussen: A New Argument for a Necessary Being*

Week 13: Omniscience and grounding

Whitcomb: Grounding and Omniscience*

Snyder, Rasmussen, & Cullison: On Whitcomb's Grounding Argument for Atheism*

Week 14: Extra time

Epistemology

An upper-division survey of topics in contemporary epistemology

Course Description

Epistemology investigates questions about knowledge, understanding, justification, and rationality. This is a survey course in contemporary epistemology. We will read contemporary texts that focus on three main branches of epistemology: traditional epistemology, social epistemology, and formal epistemology. Here is a sample of some of the questions that we will discuss: What is knowledge? What is the structure of justification? What are degrees of belief? How should we update our beliefs? Is testimony a good source of knowledge or justification? How should we respond to disagreement, especially disagreements among epistemic equals? The overall aim of this course is to introduce students to a wide range of topics found in contemporary epistemology, and to help students cultivate critical reasoning skills so that they can develop their own answers to these questions.

Course Requirements:

- Biweekly Assignments 40% – These are either short reaction papers between 400-500 words or solving exercises. The former will be applicable during the first and last parts of this course, and the latter will be applicable during the middle part of the course, the formal part. For the reaction papers, you are expected to summarize an important part of the reading and then critically evaluate it. For the exercises, you will be assigned 2-3 exercise questions to help you better understand the formal material.

Pick only **one** of the following requirements (note: for those interested in applying to graduate programs in philosophy, I highly recommend doing the latter option):

- Three Papers 20% each – These are shorter papers, about 5-7 double-spaced pages. Prompts will be handed out a week before the paper is due.

Or

- Long Paper 60% - This is a substantial paper, about 15 double-spaced pages. You will be required to get your paper topic approved by me first. Ideally, you should aim to do this at least a month before the paper is due. This paper will engage with a big bulk of the assigned readings and perhaps some outside sources as well. If you decide to write this paper instead of the three short papers, please let me know as soon as you make this decision. I will provide extensive comments on this paper, and I would be happy to read future drafts of it, even after the class is done.

Required Text:

There is no required text for this course. All the readings will be uploaded to the course website by the instructor.

Course Schedule

(* = optional reading)

Part 1: Traditional

Week 1: Skepticism

Jonathan Vogel: Cartesian Skepticism and Inference to the Best Explanation
Sherrilyn Roush: Closure on Skepticism
Roderick Chisholm: The Problem of the Criterion
*Descartes: Meditations I and II
*Moore: Proof of an External World
*Stroud: Skepticism and the Possibility of Knowledge

Week 2: The structure of justification

Laurence Bonjour: The Elements of Coherentism
Ernest Sosa: The Raft and the Pyramid
Susan Haack: Foundherentism Articulated
*Klein: Infinitism
*Chisholm: The Myth of the Given
*Gadamer: The Hermeneutic Circle

Week 3: Internalism vs Externalism

Alvin Goldman: What is Justified Belief
Laurence Bonjour: Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge
Feldman and Conee: Evidentialism
*Comesana: Evidentialist Reliabilism
*Berker: Epistemic Teleology and the Separateness of Propositions

Week 4: The analysis of “knowledge”

Alvin Goldman: A Causal Theory of Knowing
Catherine Elgin: Epistemology’s End
Linda Zagzebski: The Inescapability of Gettier Problems
*Gettier: Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?
*Lehrer and Paxson: Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief
*Plantinga: Proper Functionalism

Week 5: Knowledge first

Williamson: Knowledge and Its Limits, ch. 2
Elizabeth Fricker: Is Knowing a State of Mind? The Case Against
Mikkel Gerken: Against Knowledge-First Epistemology
*Yablo: Causal Relevance

Part 2: Formal

Week 6: Degrees of belief

Michael Titelbaum: Fundamentals of Bayesian Epistemology, ch. 1
David Christensen: Putting Logic in its Place, ch. 2
*Makinson: The Paradox of the Preface
*Hajek and Eriksson: What are Degrees of Belief?
*Buchak: Belief, Credence, and Norms

Week 7: Probability Distribution

Michael Titelbaum: Fundamentals of Bayesian Epistemology, ch. 2
Ian Hacking: An Introduction to Probability and Inductive Logic, ch. 4
* Robert Williams: Probability and Non-Classical Logic

Week 8: Conditional Credences

Michael Titelbaum: Fundamentals of Bayesian Epistemology, ch. 3
Stephenson: An Introduction to Bayesian Net-work Theory and Usage, sections 6-7
*Lewis: Probabilities of Conditionals and Conditional Probabilities

Week 9: Updating by Conditionalization

Michael Titelbaum: Fundamentals of Bayesian Epistemology, ch. 4
Ian Hacking: An Introduction to Probability and Inductive Logic, ch. 15
*Teller: Conditionalization and Observation
*Carnap: Logical Foundations of Probability, sections 43-45

Part 3: Social

Week 10: Testimony

Elizabeth Fricker: Against Gullibility
Jennifer Lackey: Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission
*Fricker: Epistemic Injustice, ch. 1-2
* Richard Foley: Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others, ch. 4

Week 11: Experts

Alvin Goldman: Experts: Which ones Should You Trust?
John Hardwig: Epistemic Dependence
*Dreyfus: How Far is Distance Learning from Education?
*Plato: Charmides, 164c-176d

Week 12: Disagreement

Thomas Kelly: The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement
Adam Elga: Reflection and Disagreement
*Christensen: Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News
* Kelly: Disagreement and the Burdens of Judgment
* Lackey: A Justificationist View of Disagreement's Epistemic Significance

Week 13: Permissivism and Uniqueness

Roger White: Epistemic Permissiveness
Thomas Kelly: Evidence Can Be Permissive
*Kopec & Titelbaum: The Uniqueness Thesis
* Ballantyne & Coffman: Conciliationism and Uniqueness

Week 14: Group Knowledge

Christian List: Group Knowledge and Group Rationality
Jennifer Lackey: What is Justified Group Belief?
*Pettit: Groups with Minds of Their Own
* Schmitt: The Justification of Group Beliefs

Moral Epistemology Seminar

An advanced seminar on moral disagreement and debunking arguments

Course Description

This course is designed for graduate students or advanced undergraduates who have substantial background in philosophy. The seminar has two main parts. The first part is on the problem of moral disagreement. There are three types of problems of moral disagreement: metaphysical, semantic, and epistemic. We will focus only on the epistemic problem of moral disagreement. According to this problem, certain types of moral disagreement undermine our justification for moral knowledge. We will then consider different replies to this problem. The second part of the seminar is on evolutionary debunking arguments against moral realism. If moral facts are mind-independent, as moral realism claims, then can realists explain the reliability of our moral beliefs? Debunkers argue that our current knowledge of evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology suggests that the answer to the question is “no” because evolutionary considerations undermine the reliability of our moral beliefs by calling their genealogical history into question. We will then consider a host of objections to these types of arguments. Lastly, we will conclude the seminar by asking whether there is a connection between arguments from moral disagreement and debunking arguments.

Course Requirements:

- Presentation 20% – At the beginning of the semester, each of you will sign up to present on one of the assigned readings for that week. You should prepare a handout that clearly outlines the general structure of the paper, and the main arguments and objections. You are expected to spend 10-15 minutes summarizing the main claims made by the author, and then raise a few critical discussion questions.
- Seminar Paper 80% - This is a substantial paper of about 15-20 double-spaced pages. You will be required to get your paper topic approved by me first. Ideally, you should aim to do this at least a month before the paper is due. I will be happy, and even encourage students, to send me drafts of their papers before the due date. I will read drafts if and only if they are sent at least three weeks before the due date.

Required Text:

There is no required text for this course. All the readings will be uploaded to the course website by the instructor.

Course Schedule

(* = optional reading)

Background reading:

Richard Rowland: The Epistemology of Moral Disagreement
Richmond Campbell: Moral Epistemology (SEP article), section 4

Part 1: Moral Disagreement

Unit 1: Moral skepticism

Sarah McGrath: Moral Disagreement and Moral Expertise
Decker & Groll: On the (In)Significance of Moral Disagreement for Moral Knowledge
Eric Sampson: The Self-Undermining Arguments from Disagreement
* King: McGrath on Moral Knowledge
*McGrath: Reply to King
*King: Rejoinder to McGrath

Unit 2: Moral spinelessness

Kieran Setiya: Knowing Right from Wrong, ch. 1
Robert Simpson: Epistemic Peerhood and the Epistemology of Disagreement
James Fritz: Conciliationism and Moral Spinelessness
Katia Vavova: Moral Disagreement and Moral Skepticism
*Elga: Reflection and Disagreement, sec. 12
*Christensen: Disagreement, Question-Begging and Epistemic Self-Criticism, sec. 6

Part 2: Debunking Arguments

Unit 3: Evolutionary debunking argument

Gilbert Harman: The Nature of Morality, ch. 1
Richard Joyce: The Evolution of Morality, ch. 6
Sharron Street: A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value
Sharron Street: Constructivism about Reasons
* Bedke: No Coincidence?
*Street: Mind-Independence without the Mystery: Why Quasi-Realists Can't Have It Both Ways

Unit 4: Not all moral beliefs are influenced by evolution

William FitzPatrick: Why There Is No Darwinian Dilemma for Ethical Realism
Derek Parfit: On What Matters, vol 2, ch. 33.
Shafer-Landau: Evolutionary Debunking, Moral Realism and Moral Knowledge

Unit 5: Third-factor responses

David Copp: Darwinian Skepticism about Moral Realism
Kieran Setiya: Knowing Right from Wrong, ch. 2
David Enoch: The Epistemological Challenge to Metanormative Realism
Eric Wielenber: On the Evolutionary Debunking of Morality
*Street: Reply to Copp: Naturalism, Normativity, and the Varieties of Realism Worth Worrying About

Unit 6: Debunking leads to general skepticism

Katia Vavova: Debunking Evolutionary Debunking
Selim Berker: Does Evolutionary Psychology Show That Normativity Is Mind-Dependent?

Unit 7: Is there a connection?

Folke Tersman: Debunking and Disagreement

Other Sample Syllabi

For other sample Syllabi—such as philosophy of science, epistemology, metaphysics, ancient, early modern, and logic—please visit my personal website: <https://omarfakhri.com/teaching/>

Sample Paper Prompts

Short Paper

This *paper should be about 3 pages double-spaced with regular margins*. This paper requires you to explain a view concisely and clearly, and then critically evaluate it. Both parts are equally important because it would be difficult to properly evaluate a view if one gets the view wrong. The critical part will likely be the most difficult part because it asks you to contribute your own thoughts to the matter. It is important to reflect carefully on the types of criticism we discussed in lecture. Take those as examples of what a critical evaluation might look like.

The following three things are important: First, everything in your paper should assume that the reader or grader of your paper has zero background in philosophy. Do not use a technical philosophical concept, word, or phrase without explaining it by using simpler concepts and examples. Act as if you are teaching a competent friend who has no background in philosophy. Second, try your best not to quote from the text unless you find no other way of explaining it. I want you to put things in your own words. Third, do not use extra sources on this paper; only use the assigned reading in the syllabus.

PROMPT:

This prompt is on Mill's Utilitarianism. First, explain Utilitarianism by answering the following two questions: (1) what things count as good according to Mill's Utilitarianism? And (2) How should those goods be distributed according to Mill's Utilitarianism? Make sure to provide a developed answer. Part of your answer to these questions should refer to consequentialism and hedonism, as we discussed in lecture. Once you have explained the view adequately, you must consider the following objection: The Principle of Utility seems to require moral agents to go through life constantly calculating the pleasures and pains of virtually every action. This seems to be practically impossible. If you're spending all your time calculating, you'll never have time to live your life. What's Mill's response to this objection? You can find Mill's response in the assigned reading on Mill. Explain his response and then critically evaluate it. Do you agree with his response? If so, give a possible objection to it, and respond to this possible objection on Mill's behalf. If you disagree with Mill's response, then why? Explain where and why Mill goes wrong in his response if you disagree with him.

Précis

This *précis* should not be shorter than 590 words or longer than 610 words. You are required to include a word count at the end of your paper. The paper should be font 12, double-spaced, with regular margins.

A *précis* is a summary of a text. I purposely chose a text that makes many side points. It is important that you only summarize the main structure of the argument and if space permits, some of the important responses and rejoinders to the argument. If you go over or under the word limit, you will receive a 1/3 letter-grade deduction.

The following three things are extremely important: First, everything in your paper should assume that the reader or grader of your paper has zero background in philosophy. Do not use a technical philosophical concept, word, or phrase without explaining it by using simpler concepts and examples. Write as if you are teaching a competent college student who has no background in philosophy. Second, for this specific assignment, you are not allowed to directly quote from the text. Try your best to put things in your own words. You are, of course, allowed to paraphrase a particular passage, but make sure to cite properly. Third, do not use outside sources on this paper; only use the assigned reading in the syllabus.

PROMPT:

Reread George Sher's paper, "But I could be Wrong." Then write a concise *précis* of the paper. A good *précis* is not verbose. Read your sentences carefully and ask yourself: what words can I cut out of this sentence without changing the main substance of the sentence? If there are words like that, then cut them out. Most of these words will likely be adjectives or filler words/phrases (for more on writing concisely, see *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk). A good *précis* also incorporates all the important moves made by the author's argument. Identifying these moves is the main challenge of this assignment. Putting these moves in your own words while staying under the word limit is the second main challenge. You must proofread your paper. Check for spelling and grammar errors. The best way to do this is to print a hardcopy of the paper and read it out loud to yourself. Then mark down awkward sounding sentences and other mistakes. Unlike future papers, writing a *précis* does not require you to contribute anything critical. You merely need to summarize the text in your own words. In that sense, this assignment, if done properly, should help you to start to develop skills that will aid you in writing your future papers.