

## Philosophical argumentation and writing

Colorado College  
Ben Bayer  
Spring 2009, Block 5

### Course description

Philosophers not only study the logic of arguments, but use it in their studies of fundamental questions about the nature of reality, knowledge, and the good life—the subject matter of philosophy. This course surveys some of the central topics of both formal and informal logic, and illustrates them with a series of case studies drawn from classic works of philosophy. The biggest philosophical questions inquire into the nature of central philosophical concepts, such as virtue, knowledge, art, and freedom of the will, and we will spend the greatest single portion of our time studying the methods philosophers and logicians have developed for evaluating definitions of these (and other concepts).

Throughout the course, in addition to examining how logical methods are applied to philosophical questions, we'll also discuss how logical methods can be applied to the writing process. Most every day we will reserve at least 15-30 minutes to discussing techniques to assist you in completing your paper (outlining, drafting, editing). You will also use these skills not only in your papers but in small (5 minute) presentations I will have each student perform throughout the block. In many cases I may use (anonymous) examples from early stages of the paper writing process to illustrate points about writing to the entire class. And before each stage of the paper is due, there will be a full class session devoted to peer reviews of papers.

This is a writing intensive course. Fully half of your grade will derive from a multi-stage writing project, culminating with a final paper at the end of the block. Because it is a topic that intersects with a plethora of the philosophical methods we'll examine, the topic of the paper will be the relationship between religion and morality: do we need divine authority to sanction our moral code? Or are there secular, naturalistic sources of meaning and value? Do we even *need* codes of values to begin with? The first stage of your paper will examine opposing views directly on this question. Your second will examine competing views about the nature of the good and the right as they bear on your first paper. In the final stage, you will use the methods we've learned for evaluating definitions to evaluate the dispute between competing definitions of the good.

### Course goals

By the end of the semester, I hope that you will

1. Be aware of the distinctive questions philosophers try to answer, and the distinctive methods they use to answer them.
2. Learn new techniques for improving the clarity and organization of your writing.
3. Using these methods and technique, articulate your own views on a central topic in philosophy (the relationship between morality and religion).

### Texts

2 course packs (one available at the beginning of the block, the second, about two weeks in)

### Lecture and reading schedule

#### Introduction

Monday, January 19, 2009

#### **Introduction: Argumentation in philosophy and everyday life**

##### *Philosophy*

- Bertrand Russell, "The Value of Philosophy"
- Ayn Rand, "Philosophy: Who Needs It"

##### *Logic*

- Hy Ruchlis, "The importance of clear thinking," "The reasoning process"

**Writing:** *Basic requirements of good reasoning*

Tuesday, January 20, 2009

#### **Reasons and the burden of proof**

##### *Philosophy*

- Michael Scriven, "The Concept of God," "God and Reason," "The Consequences if the Arguments Fail" from *Primary Philosophy*
- K.D. Ellis, "Why I am an Agnostic"

- Rene Descartes, selection from *Meditations*
- *Optional*: J.L. Austin, selection from “Other Minds”
- Leonard Peikoff, “Maybe You’re Wrong”

*Logic*

- Lionel Ruby, “Argument and assertion,” “The law of rationality,” “Argumentum ad Ignorantium”
- *Munson and Black, Chapter 2: “Analyzing arguments”*

**Writing:** *Reverse outlining*

Wednesday, January 21, 2009

**Hypothetical syllogisms**

*Philosophy*

- Fyodor Dostoevsky, selection from *The Brothers Karamazov*
- Jean-Paul Sartre, selection from “Existentialism is a Humanism”
- William Lane Craig, selection from “Theistic Critiques of Atheism”
- Erik Wielenberg, selection from *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe*
- G.E. Moore, selection from “Proof of an External World”
- Michael Huemer, “The G.E. Moore Shift” and “Stroud’s Defense” from *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*

*Logic*

- Munson and Black, “Evaluating Arguments,” “Valid argument forms”
- Lionel Ruby, “Negative Experiments and the *Reductio ad absurdum*”

**Writing:** *Premises and conclusions; avoiding question-begging and subjectivism*

Thursday, January 22, 2009

**Alternative syllogisms**

*Philosophy*

- Plato, selection from the *Euthyphro*
- Blaise Pascal, selection from *Thoughts*
- Craig Biddle, “Religion vs. Subjectivism: Why Neither Will Do”

*Logic*

- Lionel Ruby, “The Alternative Syllogism,” “The Dilemma”
- *Lionel Ruby, “The Traditional Laws of Thought”*

**Writing:** *Preparing an outline*

Friday, January 23, 2009

WRITING WORKSHOP DAY

**FIRST PAPER DUE, 7PM**

Monday, January 26, 2009

**Socratic induction**

*Philosophy*

- Plato, selection from *Euthyphro*
- Plato, selection from the *Republic*
- Aristotle, selection from *Nicomachean Ethics*
- Tara Smith, “The Argument for the Morality’s Basis in Life” from *Viable Values*

*Logic*

- David Kelley, “Inductive generalizations”
- *Optional*: Lionel Ruby, “The Meaning of Generalizations,” “The Truth or Probability of Generalizations”
- John McCaskey, “The Pilot, the Doctor and the Cowherd”

**Writing:** *The use of examples and quotations in your writing*

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

**Thought experiments**

*Philosophy*

- Plato, selection from *Republic*
- Plato and Aristotle, selections from *Protagoras*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Philebus*
  
- Robert Nozick, “The Experience Machine” from *Anarchy, State and Utopia*
- John Rawls, selection from *A Theory of Justice*
  
- Tara Smith, “Imagining Immortality” from *Viable Values*

**Writing:** *Drafting*

Wednesday, January 28, 2009

**Analogies**

*Philosophy*

- Plato, selection from the *Republic*
- John Stuart Mill, selection from “The Psychological Theory of the Belief in Matter, How Far Applicable to Mind”
- *Optional:* Bertrand Russell, “Analogy”
- William Paley, selection from *Natural Theology*

*Logic*

- Munson and Black, “Argument by Analogy and Models”

**Writing:** *Editing*

Thursday, January 29, 2009

**Hypothetico-deductive confirmation**

*Philosophy*

- Plato, selection from *Phaedo*,
- Bertrand Russell, selection from *The Problems of Philosophy*
- W.V.O. Quine, “Mental Entities” from *The Ways of Paradox*

*Logic*

- Lionel Ruby, from “Hypotheses and Scientific Method”

**Writing:** *Q&A about your upcoming paper.*

Friday, January 30, 2009

WRITING WORKSHOP DAY

SECOND PAPER DUE, 7PM

Monday, February 2, 2009

**Definitions: basic rules**

*Philosophy*

- Plato, selection from the *Meno*
- Plato, selection from the *Theaetetus*

*Logic*

- Lionel Ruby, “Definitions “

**Writing:** *Structuring paragraphs for clarity and logic*

Tuesday, February 3, 2009

**Definitional disputes: Platonism vs. Aristotelianism**

*Philosophy and logic*

- Plato, selection from the *Meno*
- Aristotle, selections from *Metaphysics* and *Posterior Analytics*
- *Optional*: Roderick Chisholm, "The Problem of the Criterion" from *Theory of Knowledge*

**Writing:** Structuring sentences for clarity and logic.

Wednesday, February 4, 2009

**Definitional disputes: paradigm case arguments**

*Philosophy*

- *Optional*: Norman Malcolm, "Moore and Ordinary Language"
- Harry Binswanger, "The Possible Dream"

*Logic*

- John Passmore, "Excluded Opposites and Paradigm Cases" from *Philosophical Reasoning*

**Writing:** Choosing words for clarity and logic

Thursday, February 5, 2009

**Definitions: the rule of fundamentality**

*Philosophy and logic*

- Aristotle, selection from *Topics*
- John Locke, selection from *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
- Irving Copi, selection from "Essence and Accident"
- Ayn Rand, "Definitions," "Extremism, or the Art of Smearing" from *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* and *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*

**Writing:** Q&A about your upcoming paper

Friday, February 6, 2009

**Definitional disputes: nominalism vs. essentialism**

*Philosophy*

- Moris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics"
- Maurice Mandelbaum, "Family Resemblances and Generalization Concerning the Arts"

*Logic*

- Ludwig Wittgenstein, selection from *Philosophical Investigations*
- David Kelley, selection from *The Art of Reasoning*

Monday, February 9, 2009

WRITING WORKSHOP DAY

Tuesday, February 10, 2009

**Definitional disputes: clashes over philosophical fundamentals**

- Arthur Schopenhauer, selections from "Essay on the Freedom of the Will"
- W.T. Stace, "The Problem of Free Will"
- Richard Taylor, "Freedom and Determinism"

Wednesday, February 11, 2009

**FINAL PAPER DUE, 7PM**