Introduction to Philosophy

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Course Description
This course will offer a problem-based introduction to philosophy. We will consider the following philosophical questions: What can we know about the world external to our senses? What can we know about the thoughts and feelings of others? What is the relationship between our minds and our brains? What makes certain sounds and inscriptions meaningful, while most other sounds and inscriptions are not? Can we have free will in a causally determined world governed by natural laws? What makes an action right or wrong? What does justice require of us? What is the evil of death? What is the meaning of life? The course aims to motivate these questions and introduce students to the methods of contemporary analytic philosophy.

Readings
Please buy What Does It All Mean? by Thomas Nagel. Other readings will be available through LATTE.

Requirements
- First Paper (3-4 pages) 20% (DUE: June 7)
- Second Paper (3-4 pages) 20% (DUE: June 25)
- Midterm Exam 20% (June 17)
- Take-home Final Exam 20% (July 1-July 3)
- Participation 20%

Laptop Policy
Please do not use laptops or other screens in class! They distract other students, you and me.

Four-Credit Course
Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students should expect to complete three hours of work for every class contact hour (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

Academic Integrity
You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policies on academic integrity (see http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai). Faculty will refer any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions including but not limited to failure in the course, failure on the assignment in question, suspension from the University and/or educational programs.
Learning Goals
The course aims to help students develop the skills to identify arguments and their parts (premises, conclusions and assumptions), to structure, defend and criticize arguments, to use conceptual tools to assess arguments, and to use and evaluate arguments by thought experiment. The course also aims to provide students with a general overview of the main fields of contemporary analytic philosophy: epistemology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, metaethics, ethics, political philosophy, metaphysics and philosophical methodology. Students will learn the views and arguments of at least one important approach to each of these fields. Finally, the course aims to provide students with a basic understanding of two important approaches to the theory of justice (utilitarianism and Rawls’s theory) and it aims to provide students with an opportunity to reflect on the requirements of social justice that we are subject to.

For more information, see the Philosophy Department’s learning goals at: http://www.brandeis.edu/departments/philosophy/undergrad/learninggoals.html

Disability
Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, please talk with me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as you can. I want to support you. In order to provide test accommodations, I need the letter more than 48 hours in advance. I want to provide your accommodations, but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS) at 781.736.3470 or access@brandeis.edu.

Course Plan

6/3 – Introduction and Skepticism
   Nagel, *What Does It All Mean?* Ch.1-2
   Descartes, *Meditation* I

6/4 – Putnam on Skepticism
   Putnam, “Brains in a Vat”

6/6 – Other Minds
   Nagel, *What Does It All Mean?* Ch.3
   Ryle. “Descartes’s Myth,” *The Concept of Mind*, ch. 1

6/10 – The Mind-Body Problem
   Nagel, *What Does It All Mean?* Ch.4
   Nagel. “What is it like to be a bat?”

6/11 – The Meaning of Words
   Nagel, *What Does It All Mean?* Ch.5
   Grice, “Meaning”
6/13 – Language in Conversation
Grice, “Logic and Conversation”

6/17 – (MIDTERM) Free Will
Nagel, What Does It All Mean? Ch.6
Frankfurt. “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person”

6/18 – Right and Wrong
Nagel, What Does It All Mean? Ch.7
Peter Singer. “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”

6/20 – cont’d
Onora O’Neill. “Kantian Approaches to Some Famine Problems.”
Susan Wolf. “Moral Saints.”

6/24 – Justice
Nagel, What Does It All Mean? Ch.8
Rawls. A Theory of Justice, selections

6/25 – Death
Nagel, What Does It All Mean? Ch.9
Yourgrau, “The Dead”

6/27 – Ideology Critique
Sally Haslanger, “‘But Mom, Crop-Tops are Cute!’ Social Knowledge, Social Structure and Ideology Critique”

7/1 – The Meaning of Life
Nagel, What Does It All Mean? Ch.9-10
Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus”