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Teaching Statement

Those who are new to philosophy often enter the subject with some degree of skepticism as to the importance of the issues that philosophers are so fond of discussing. When first exposed to philosophy, I myself was somewhat doubtful of the significance of many of the subject’s perennial problems, and often found myself wondering if it really mattered which of the parties involved in various philosophical disputes was actually correct. As I began teaching, I found that many of my students had similar reactions to some of the issues discussed in class. When presented, e.g., with the topic of external world skepticism, or the debate between nominalists and realists over the existence of abstract universals, students frequently seemed to be asking themselves what the point of investigating these issues was supposed to be. One of my first challenges as a teacher was thus to find ways of convincing students of the value of examining such issues even if the stance they ended up taking on them had no real bearing on their day-to-day lives. Eventually I came to the realization that the best way of doing this was to get students to see that the primary purpose of engaging in philosophical inquiry may not be to obtain definitive answers to age-old philosophical questions, but rather to scrutinize our unexamined presuppositions and ensure that we have good reasons for our beliefs. Even if certain philosophical disputes ultimately prove irresolvable, and the outcome of such disputes is, moreover, of little practical concern, philosophy remains important in helping us to make our beliefs about such issues as well-reasoned and free of dogmatism as we can. In addition, therefore, to providing basic knowledge of the positions, concepts, and arguments that are central to the topics of the courses I teach, one of my primary goals as a teacher is to give my students a strong sense of the value of doing philosophy in the first place.

One of the ways in which I try to do this when teaching is to conclude a discussion of the practical relevance of a given philosophical issue (e.g. the relevance of the problem of induction to scientific inquiry, or the legal repercussions of different theories of personal identity) by asking students whether this issue would still be worth pondering even if it lacked any such connections to real-world affairs. On a number of occasions, at least one student in the class has answered no: that there would in fact be no value in our discussion of this issue if the stance one took on it was of no practical consequence. Such occasions provide a unique opportunity to expose students to the idea that the value of philosophy lies just as much in its practice as in its results. In these situations, I thus point out that the answer these students have given is itself a philosophical thesis, which we ought, as good philosophers, to accept or reject only after determining whether the reasons in its favor are stronger than those against it. This leads the class into a discussion of the value of knowledge, the relation between value and practical utility, and the views of certain philosophers (e.g. Wittgenstein, the logical positivists, and members of the pragmatist tradition) who might sympathize with the position that these students have proposed. As the discussion draws to a close, I emphasize that even if we end up accepting the idea that the value of philosophical inquiry depends on the practical relevance of the questions it investigates, the assessment of this idea cannot be carried out without raising various substantive philosophical issues, and, moreover, that regardless of the results of this assessment, the process of evaluating reasons for and against a given thesis and ensuring that our beliefs about it are
based on the strongest evidence available may itself have a certain intrinsic value that all philosophical inquiry partakes in.

The four years of teaching experience that I have gained while studying as a graduate student at Temple University have given me the opportunity to work with students from a variety of different backgrounds at a number of different colleges in the Philadelphia area (viz. Temple, Rowan University, and the University of Pennsylvania). This experience has enabled me to more effectively assist students who come into the class with different strengths, weaknesses, and needs, and different levels of interest and prior training in philosophy. One particularly important skill that this experience has helped me to develop is the ability to explain an idea in ways that are tailored to the varying degrees of familiarity that different students have with the topic under discussion. For instance, when introducing students to the functionalist theory of mind, I often begin by noting that, as conceived by the functionalist, the relation between the mind and the brain is akin to the relation that a computer program bears to the hardware on which it is run, or that a Turing machine bears to any one of its potential physical “realizations.” As many students often find these metaphors opaque, I then go on to explain how functionalism can alternatively be understood as the view that the nature of any given mental state is fully defined by the relations that it bears to certain sensory input, behavioral output, and other mental states, or as the position that anything whose internal states cause it to behave like a normal human when subjected to various stimuli thereby qualifies as having a mind more or less like ours, regardless of what its internal states happen to be made of. For those students with a background in psychology, I also stress the similarities and differences between functionalism and behaviorism. This ability to convey the same idea in multiple ways has been especially useful to me when teaching classes composed of both philosophy majors that had already taken courses in related areas and non-majors that were completely new to the subject.

To create a classroom environment in which students feel comfortable asking questions, I make a special effort to cultivate an open and congenial relationship with my students by making use of humor and anecdote in my lectures, and by frequently asking students their own opinions on the issues discussed in class. As I have developed as a teacher, my method of teaching has also become more Socratic. Rather than simply pointing out a noteworthy connection between two positions, or an unstated assumption in a particular argument, I instead try whenever possible to present my students with questions that will lead them to grasp the pertinent point on their own. Encouraging students to arrive at such insights through their own efforts helps them to form their own opinions on issues that they may never have considered before, and to see themselves as active participants in, rather than passive observers of, an ongoing discussion to which they might themselves make an important contribution. This aspect of my teaching strategy has been particularly effective in engaging those who are new to philosophy, and is, I think, the main reason why a number of my students (one of whom later became an editor, in 2015, of the Greater Philadelphia Philosophy Consortium’s undergraduate journal) have gone on to major or minor in philosophy after having taken their first philosophy course with me.
Student Evaluations

Since I began teaching in the fall of 2012, I have taught 20 classes as primary instructor (13 at Temple University and 7 at Rowan University) and 2 classes as a teaching assistant (both at the University of Pennsylvania).

The following is a comparison of the average of my student evaluations at Temple University to the university wide averages during the semesters that I have been teaching there. For those questions pertaining directly to instructor performance, my evaluations have consistently met or exceeded those of the average Temple University instructor. (Evaluations are scored on a scale of 1–5, with 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The instructor clearly explained the educational objectives of this course.</th>
<th>My Averages</th>
<th>Average Instructor at Temple University</th>
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| The instructor was well organized and prepared for class. | 4.4 | 4.4 |

| The instructor was conscientious in meeting class and office hour responsibilities. | 4.5 | 4.4 |

| The instructor promoted a classroom atmosphere in which I felt free to ask questions. | 4.5 | 4.4 |

| The instructor provided useful feedback about exams, projects, and assignments. | 4.3 | 4.2 |

| So far, the instructor has applied grading policies fairly. | 4.5 | 4.3 |

| The instructor taught this course well. | 4.3 | 4.2 |

Included below are a set of complete, unedited student evaluations (both positive and negative) of instructor performance that I have received while teaching at Rowan University and Temple University. These evaluations cover all of the different courses in philosophy that I have taught as primary instructor (viz. Philosophy of Science, Informal Logic, Early Modern Philosophy, and Philosophy of the Human).

These evaluations are followed by outlines of syllabi that I have made for courses in Introduction to Philosophy, Early Modern Philosophy, Philosophy of Science, and Philosophy of Mind. These outlines are followed by a complete copy of the syllabus that I developed and used for a course in Philosophy of the Human that I taught at Temple in the spring of 2014.
# Early Modern Philosophy: Summer 2013

## Temple University Student Feedback Form - Summer I 2013

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**ENROLLMENT:** 12  
**COMPLETED EVALUATIONS:** 5

### 1. I came well prepared for class.

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### 2. The instructor clearly explained the educational objectives of this course.

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### 3. The instructor was well organized and prepared for class.

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### 4. The instructor was conscientious in meeting class and office hour responsibilities.

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### 5. The instructor promoted a classroom atmosphere in which I felt free to ask questions.

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### 6. The instructor provided useful feedback about exams, projects, and assignments.

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### 7. So far, the instructor has applied grading policies fairly.

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### 8. The instructor taught this course well.

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### Temple University Student Feedback Form - Summer I 2013

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**INSTR. NAME:** WHITE, BENJAMIN G.  
**DEPARTMENT:** LA-PHIL  
**INSTR. TUID:** 912994950  
**COURSE s:** 2172  
**FORMS USED:** S1 (Single Instructor)  
**SECT. #:** 011  
**CAMPUS:** MAIN  
**COLLEGE:** LIBERAL ARTS

| ENROLLMENT: | 12  |
| COMPLETED EVALUATIONS: | 5  |

#### 9. The course content was consistent with the educational objectives of this course:

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#### 10. The course increased my ability to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view:

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#### 11. I learned a great deal in this course:

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Page 4169
1. What aspects of the course or the instructor’s approach contributed most to your learning?

- Interactive, conversational approach.
- Professor White is really excellent at teaching, it makes all the more impressive that he is only a PhD student yet teach at a high standard. He's articulate, clear with class format from the get go, reasonable and fair. His detailed notes are also extremely helpful in learning the material (this cannot be overstated in a subject like philosophy!) Usage of the breaks were invaluable. Providing objections that some later philosophers had with the philosopher currently studied provides a nice perspective to whatever we are learning.
- He was very well organized, providing lengthy notes on the readings, in addition to his lectures.

2. What aspects of the course or the instructor’s approach would you change to improve the learning that takes place in the course?

- None.
- Not a big issue or one that is strictly his fault, but the class being 3 hours long was really bothersome. While, as said, the breaks were invaluable, the class can feel too long at times due to being 3 hours; and being scheduled at the evening probably does not help as well.
- I would have preferred fewer reading questions, as their primary function seemed to offer evidence for having done the assigned reading. I would have also preferred more challenging paper assignments.

3. Please comment on the instructor’s sensitivity to the diversity (for example, political viewpoint, race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual identity, and disability) of the students in the class.

- Sensitive and diverse
- There was no problems.
- It didn’t really come up, but he was certainly willing to receive all opinions and thoughts in a positive manner.
# Philosophy of the Human: Spring 2014

## Temple University Student Feedback Form - Spring 2014

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| ENROLLMENT:   | 28                     | COMPLETED EVALUATIONS: | 14               |

### 1. I came well prepared for class.

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### 2. The instructor clearly explained the educational objectives of this course.

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### 3. The instructor was well organized and prepared for class.

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### 4. The instructor was conscientious in meeting class and office hour responsibilities.

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### 5. The instructor promoted a classroom atmosphere in which I felt free to ask questions.

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### 6. The instructor provided useful feedback about exams, projects, and assignments.

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### 7. So far, the instructor has applied grading policies fairly.

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### 8. The instructor taught this course well.

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### Temple University Student Feedback Form - Spring 2014

**CRN:** 20098  
**INSTR. NAME:** WHITE, BENJAMIN G.  
**DEPARTMENT:** LA-PHI  
**COURSE #:** 0839  
**SECT. #:** 009  
**CAMPUSS:** MAIN  
**COLLEGE:** LIBERAL ARTS

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#### 9. The course content was consistent with the educational objectives of this course.

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Performance: M

#### 10. The course increased my ability to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.

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Performance: U

#### 11. I learned a great deal in this course.

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Performance: U
1. What aspects of the course or the instructor's approach contributed most to your learning?

- Easy to understand summary and lecture of the readings.
- Excellent interpretation of complex philosophical problems.
- Review sessions were particularly helpful. It also helped that the professor was clearly passionate and knowledgable in the subject, but taught in a way that demonstrated his understanding that we were not experts.
- The type of lecturing made the material easier to digest.
- Professor White laid out a thorough outline of what we were being tested on. That helped a lot.
- Talked clearly and precisely. Was entertaining and easy to listen to.
- The way that he would review last class's topic during a class.
- I only found a few things, like Nietzsche interesting.
- Ben is extremely affable and explains difficult concepts conversationally and without the pretense of absolute knowing. He also fields questions to the best of his ability and encourages dialogue even when it seems that no one cares enough to respond.
- The instructor's office hour availability contributed most to my learning in the course throughout the semester.
- The instructor did a phenomenal job interpreting difficult philosophical texts.
- He went into detail about the readings.

2. What aspects of the course or the instructor's approach would you change to improve the learning that takes place in the course?

- Nothing, this course was well done.
- A power point or review accessible on blackboard would have been helpful to review the material.
- I would do more to motivate the class. It's possible the class was full of shy individuals, but regardless the class was a little awkward. Part of me feels like there was nothing the professor could have done
- None
- Probably change the way the tests were formatted.
- He's too monotone. Not hard for me to day dream for more than half a class. Very nice and intelligent guy, but he needs some more pizzazz and enthusiasm when teaching.
- Not too many come to mind, however, Ben needs to have more confidence in his own abilities as an academic. He is extremely mild mannered which is refreshing, but he could stand to temper that with slightly more authority in his lectures. With that improvement, (a minor one, to be sure) Ben would be close to perfect.
- At this time, I do not have any recommendations for changes towards the instructors approach in the course.
- Maybe less essays.
- Nothing really.

3. Please comment on the instructor's sensitivity to the diversity (for example, political viewpoint, race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual identity, and disability) of the students in the class.

- Not a problem.
- Neutral and relates equally with everyone.
- He was sensitive to the beliefs and diversity of all students in the class.
- He was fantastic.
- Great.
- No topics came up about race but I'm sure if they did, he would have handled them in a professional manner.
- Saw no issues.
- We don't stray too far from the tasks at hand, so these issues weren't especially highlighted throughout the course of the semester. Ben seems a nice enough guy that he would show extreme care and tact when dealing with these usually unavoidable issues, however.
- The instructor was non-discriminatory towards the students in the class.
- The instructor was very sensitive to diversity.
- Very Considerate.
ROWAN UNIVERSITY
STUDENT EVALUATION OF TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS REPORT

PHIL 09.369.2 (White, Benjamin G) PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE-W1
Evaluation Administered: Spring 2015 (201520)
Number of students enrolled: 22
Number of evaluations completed: 15
Comparative overall statistics:

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</tbody>
</table>

STATISTICAL PRESENTATION OF EVALUATION RESULTS

Question 1: The instructor taught the subject in a way that helped students learn.

Responses: 15  Mean: 4.20
5 Always       6
4 Very often   6
3 Sometimes    3
2 Rarely       0
1 Not Observed 0

Department-wide statistics: Responses: 651  Mean: 4.28  Median: 5  StDev: 0.879
College-wide statistics: Responses: 3,133  Mean: 4.42  Median: 5  StDev: 0.840
University-wide statistics: Responses: 10,097  Mean: 4.30  Median: 5  StDev: 0.877

Question 2: The instructor gave clear explanations.

Responses: 15  Mean: 4.20
5 Always       7
4 Very often   4
3 Sometimes    4
2 Rarely       0
1 Not Observed 0

Department-wide statistics: Responses: 651  Mean: 4.31  Median: 4  StDev: 0.871
College-wide statistics: Responses: 3,133  Mean: 4.40  Median: 5  StDev: 0.816
University-wide statistics: Responses: 10,097  Mean: 4.31  Median: 5  StDev: 0.877

Question 3: The instructor asked questions that promoted thinking.

Responses: 15  Mean: 4.33
5 Always       8
4 Very often   4
3 Sometimes    3
2 Rarely       0
1 Not Observed 0

Department-wide statistics: Responses: 649  Mean: 4.46  Median: 5  StDev: 0.839
College-wide statistics: Responses: 3,111  Mean: 4.42  Median: 5  StDev: 0.851
University-wide statistics: Responses: 10,066  Mean: 4.34  Median: 5  StDev: 0.888
**Question 4**: The instructor addressed student questions and comments.

- Responses: 15
- Mean: 4.73
- Always: 12
- Very often: 2
- Sometimes: 1
- Rarely: 0
- Not Observed: 0

**Department-wide statistics**: Responses: 646, Mean: 4.61, Median: 5, StDev: 0.725

**College-wide statistics**: Responses: 3,110, Mean: 4.68, Median: 5, StDev: 0.663

**University-wide statistics**: Responses: 10,052, Mean: 4.61, Median: 5, StDev: 0.732

**Question 5**: The instructor provided useful feedback on student work.

- Responses: 15
- Mean: 4.20
- Always: 8
- Very often: 2
- Sometimes: 5
- Rarely: 0
- Not Observed: 0

**Department-wide statistics**: Responses: 646, Mean: 4.17, Median: 4, StDev: 1.006

**College-wide statistics**: Responses: 3,110, Mean: 4.29, Median: 5, StDev: 0.977

**University-wide statistics**: Responses: 10,051, Mean: 4.28, Median: 5, StDev: 0.983

**Question 6**: The instructor treated students with fairness and respect appropriate for a professional relationship.

- Responses: 15
- Mean: 5.00
- Always: 15
- Very often: 0
- Sometimes: 0
- Rarely: 0
- Not Observed: 0

**Department-wide statistics**: Responses: 645, Mean: 4.69, Median: 5, StDev: 0.666

**College-wide statistics**: Responses: 3,100, Mean: 4.78, Median: 5, StDev: 0.554

**University-wide statistics**: Responses: 10,037, Mean: 4.72, Median: 5, StDev: 0.631

**Question 7**: The instructor actively engaged students.

- Responses: 15
- Mean: 4.07
- Always: 7
- Very often: 3
- Sometimes: 4
- Rarely: 1
- Not Observed: 0

**Department-wide statistics**: Responses: 647, Mean: 4.34, Median: 5, StDev: 0.943

**College-wide statistics**: Responses: 3,103, Mean: 4.42, Median: 5, StDev: 0.890

**University-wide statistics**: Responses: 10,036, Mean: 4.41, Median: 5, StDev: 0.877
Question 8: The instructor encouraged students to express ideas or opinions.
Responses: 15  Mean: 4.53
5  Always 11
4  Very often 2
3  Sometimes 1
2  Rarely 1
1  Not Observed 0

Department-wide statistics: Responses: 645  Mean: 4.54  Median: 5  StDev: 0.828
College-wide statistics: Responses: 3,097  Mean: 4.52  Median: 5  StDev: 0.818
University-wide statistics: Responses: 10,016  Mean: 4.45  Median: 5  StDev: 0.861

Question 9: The instructor was prepared for class.
Responses: 14  Mean: 4.93
5  Always 13
4  Very often 1
3  Sometimes 0
2  Rarely 0
1  Not Observed 0

Department-wide statistics: Responses: 645  Mean: 4.70  Median: 5  StDev: 0.606
College-wide statistics: Responses: 3,100  Mean: 4.77  Median: 5  StDev: 0.543
University-wide statistics: Responses: 10,027  Mean: 4.72  Median: 5  StDev: 0.595

Question 10: The instructor communicated course and lesson goals.
Responses: 15  Mean: 4.53
5  Always 11
4  Very often 1
3  Sometimes 3
2  Rarely 0
1  Not Observed 0

Department-wide statistics: Responses: 644  Mean: 4.46  Median: 5  StDev: 0.798
College-wide statistics: Responses: 3,096  Mean: 4.55  Median: 5  StDev: 0.748
University-wide statistics: Responses: 10,012  Mean: 4.50  Median: 5  StDev: 0.799

Question 11: The instructor taught class in a way that helped students make connections to their personal or professional lives.
Responses: 15  Mean: 4.00
5  Always 5
4  Very often 7
3  Sometimes 1
2  Rarely 2
1  Not Observed 0

Department-wide statistics: Responses: 642  Mean: 4.13  Median: 4  StDev: 1.040
College-wide statistics: Responses: 3,088  Mean: 4.27  Median: 5  StDev: 0.994
University-wide statistics: Responses: 9,996  Mean: 4.23  Median: 5  StDev: 1.013
**Question 12:** The instructor was open to student feedback about the course and instructional methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
<th>5 Always</th>
<th>4 Very often</th>
<th>3 Sometimes</th>
<th>2 Rarely</th>
<th>1 Not Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DEPARTMENT-WIDE STATISTICS:**
- RESPONSES: 639
- MEAN: 4.20
- MEDIAN: 5
- STDEV: 1.127

**COLLEGE-WIDE STATISTICS:**
- RESPONSES: 3,090
- MEAN: 4.33
- MEDIAN: 5
- STDEV: 1.073

**UNIVERSITY-WIDE STATISTICS:**
- RESPONSES: 9,981
- MEAN: 4.30
- MEDIAN: 5
- STDEV: 1.064

**Question 13:** Tell a future student about this instructor and course.

*See EVALUATION COMMENTS below*

**EVALUATION COMMENTS**

Only questions for which comments were provided appear below.

**Question 1:** The instructor taught the subject in a way that helped students learn.
1. Could benefit from more structured discussions. Otherwise was suer engaging. Maybe like... give different students different sets of questions and make them present an answer and open up discussion—idk im a physics major
2. Always makes sure everybody has grasped the concepts that were taught before continuing.
3. If i didn't understand it it was my fault.
4. he did a good job conveying ideas but I think the class should have been more conversational

**Question 2:** The instructor gave clear explanations.
1. Sometimes would be a little rushed but I guess that's also the nature of the material
2. Concepts were difficult but did a good job at putting them into terms that were easily understandable.
3. It's hard to make these topics clear.

**Question 3:** The instructor asked questions that promoted thinking.
1. Lots of questions, some came at the end of long explanations and seemed to leave most feeling a bit jumbled

**Question 4:** The instructor addressed student questions and comments.
1. yes
2. Always addressed questions and made sure there was no further questions before continuing any lesson.
Question 5: The instructor provided useful feedback on student work.
1. he littered our papers with feedback
2. Always hands back papers with tons of comments on them.
3. He wrote a lot on our papers which usually means it was a bad paper but he was just clearing things up.

Question 6: The instructor treated students with fairness and respect appropriate for a professional relationship.
1. I would have rather watched just the gay scenes from game of thrones than listen to half of those kids spit out what little knowledge they had in the form of asinine commentary and ma’ boy B.white was just nice as could be to everybody.

Question 7: The instructor actively engaged students.
1. Crackin’ jokes, writing important citations on the board and changing from lecture to questions. once again, a structured dialogue would have helped
2. He tried to, I don’t think many of us are interested in the subject matter.

Question 8: The instructor encouraged students to express ideas or opinions.
1. there sure a lot of redundant questions here. YES HE ASKED US LOTS OF QUESTIONS AND GAVE LOTS OF GOOD ANSWERD
2. Always asked our opinions and provided a good enviroment that promoted us the express our ideas.

Question 9: The instructor was prepared for class.
1. University property had technical difficulties at times. Not his fault but definitely something that should be fixed by Rowan.
2. ... ive got finals to study for. no he never came in to class without pants on having not read the reading.

Question 10: The instructor communicated course and lesson goals.
1. He gave us everything upfront which was nice.
2. FFS. he gave us a syllabus on day one. ya, we got it

Question 11: The instructor taught class in a way that helped students make connections to their personal or professional lives.
1. he tried his best. some of this shit was dry enough to make al gore’s movie seem funny.

Question 12: The instructor was open to student feedback about the course and instructional methods.
1. Yes asked for our opinions often and asked what could be changed to make our experience better.
2. Actually asks us what we liked/disliked and if there was anything he could do/change in order to help us learn better.
3. he moved dates if we needed and went back to material students didn't get... are there teachers just yeling klingon jibberish for whole class periods?
Question 13: Tell a future student about this instructor and course.

1. This professor is very laid back. This class is very different than all of the other classes I have taken in college and he makes it very easy to understand.

2. Great professor! Very clear on expectations, went above and beyond to make sure the material was understood, and very fair.

3. Professor White makes the course very demanding, requiring writing assignments due before class every week. But these assignments are necessary towards the understanding of the material, and he does a very good job in explaining them.

4. Do the reading to understand the course. The professor doesn't do a good job explaining the concepts. The reading is where you will get all your information, even though it is very challenging material. The professor doesn't hand homework back so you never know if you are right or not. This course was very challenging for me. The concepts were very abstract. It didn't help that the professor didn't put much effort in explaining. He sat in a chair and talked the entire class, every class. It was very hard to learn that way because I am a visual learner.

5. He is very nice and easy to listen to. The readings he assigns are very dense but he guides the class through them with reading questions and goes over everything the day that homework is due. If you have any problems with the readings feel free to contact him because he is always there and willing to help to the best of his abilities.

6. Yes I would recommend a future student to take the professor I had.

7. This class was a lot better than other philosophy classes I have taken. The professor is very nice and explains the material very well which is very helpful. The reading material can be really boring and you have to answer 3-4 questions for almost every reading assignment which may seem annoying at first but it is helpful in knowing what to focus on and for actually understanding the material. Similarly the 4 papers you write in this class really help with understanding the material which makes the tests easier. Also we get study guides for every test (only 3) which he will answer any questions you have on them. If you are taking this class I highly recommend professor Ben White.

8. a lot of work, but instructor is willing to help and try to make the course better based off feedback. recommended

9. the course is boring, it's called 'philosophy' but its mostly western european white men from the 1750's-2000's talking about grammar. but if i had anyone else teaching it i may have tried to eat my desk.
Informal Logic: Spring 2015

ROWAN UNIVERSITY
STUDENT EVALUATION OF TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS REPORT

PHIL 09.110.1 (White, Benjamin G)  LOGIC OF EVERYDAY REASONING
Evaluation Administered: Spring 2015 (201526)
Number of students enrolled: 29
Number of evaluations completed: 23
Comparative overall statistics:

<table>
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<th>This Evaluation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>StdDev</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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STATISTICAL PRESENTATION OF EVALUATION RESULTS

Question 1: The instructor taught the subject in a way that helped students learn.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Always</td>
<td>4.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Very often</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Sometimes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>2 Rarely</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Not Observed</td>
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Department-wide statistics:

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<tr>
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Question 2: The instructor gave clear explanations.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Mean</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Always</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Very often</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>3 Sometimes</td>
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<td>0</td>
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Department-wide statistics:

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<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
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<td>StdDev</td>
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<tr>
<td>10,089</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.877</td>
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</table>

Question 3: The instructor asked questions that promoted thinking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Always</td>
<td>4.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Very often</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Sometimes</td>
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<td>2 Rarely</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Not Observed</td>
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Department-wide statistics:

<table>
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<td>3,103</td>
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<tr>
<td>10,038</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.888</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 4: The instructor addressed student questions and comments.

Responses: 23  Mean: 4.70
Always: 18
Very often: 3
Sometimes: 2
Rarely: 0
Not Observed: 0

Department-wide statistics: Responses: 638  Mean: 4.61  Median: 5  StDev: 0.725
College-wide statistics: Responses: 3,102  Mean: 4.68  Median: 5  StDev: 0.663
University-wide statistics: Responses: 10,044  Mean: 4.61  Median: 5  StDev: 0.732

Question 5: The instructor provided useful feedback on student work.

Responses: 23  Mean: 4.26
Always: 14
Very often: 3
Sometimes: 4
Rarely: 2
Not Observed: 0

Department-wide statistics: Responses: 638  Mean: 4.16  Median: 4  StDev: 1.002
College-wide statistics: Responses: 3,102  Mean: 4.29  Median: 5  StDev: 0.976
University-wide statistics: Responses: 10,043  Mean: 4.28  Median: 5  StDev: 0.983

Question 6: The instructor treated students with fairness and respect appropriate for a professional relationship.

Responses: 23  Mean: 4.83
Always: 20
Very often: 2
Sometimes: 1
Rarely: 0
Not Observed: 0

Department-wide statistics: Responses: 637  Mean: 4.69  Median: 5  StDev: 0.665
College-wide statistics: Responses: 3,092  Mean: 4.78  Median: 5  StDev: 0.553
University-wide statistics: Responses: 10,029  Mean: 4.72  Median: 5  StDev: 0.631

Question 7: The instructor actively engaged students.

Responses: 23  Mean: 4.30
Always: 12
Very often: 8
Sometimes: 1
Rarely: 2
Not Observed: 0

Department-wide statistics: Responses: 639  Mean: 4.33  Median: 5  StDev: 0.946
College-wide statistics: Responses: 3,095  Mean: 4.42  Median: 5  StDev: 0.891
University-wide statistics: Responses: 10,028  Mean: 4.41  Median: 5  StDev: 0.877
Question 8: The instructor encouraged students to express ideas or opinions.
Responses: 23  Mean: 4.30
5 Always 10
4 Very often 11
3 Sometimes 1
2 Rarely 1
1 Not Observed 0
Department-wide statistics: Responses: 617  Mean: 4.54  Median: 5  StDev: 0.811
College-wide statistics: Responses: 3,089  Mean: 4.52  Median: 5  StDev: 0.819
University-wide statistics: Responses: 10,008  Mean: 4.45  Median: 5  StDev: 0.861

Question 9: The instructor was prepared for class.
Responses: 23  Mean: 4.65
5 Always 16
4 Very often 6
3 Sometimes 1
2 Rarely 0
1 Not Observed 0
Department-wide statistics: Responses: 636  Mean: 4.71  Median: 5  StDev: 0.603
College-wide statistics: Responses: 3,091  Mean: 4.77  Median: 5  StDev: 0.542
University-wide statistics: Responses: 10,018  Mean: 4.72  Median: 5  StDev: 0.595

Question 10: The instructor communicated course and lesson goals.
Responses: 23  Mean: 4.35
5 Always 13
4 Very often 7
3 Sometimes 2
2 Rarely 0
1 Not Observed 1
Department-wide statistics: Responses: 636  Mean: 4.47  Median: 5  StDev: 0.791
College-wide statistics: Responses: 3,088  Mean: 4.55  Median: 5  StDev: 0.746
University-wide statistics: Responses: 10,004  Mean: 4.50  Median: 5  StDev: 0.799

Question 11: The instructor taught class in a way that helped students make connections to their personal or professional lives.
Responses: 22  Mean: 4.18
5 Always 11
4 Very often 6
3 Sometimes 4
2 Rarely 0
1 Not Observed 1
Department-wide statistics: Responses: 635  Mean: 4.13  Median: 4  StDev: 1.039
College-wide statistics: Responses: 3,081  Mean: 4.27  Median: 5  StDev: 0.993
University-wide statistics: Responses: 9,989  Mean: 4.23  Median: 5  StDev: 1.013
**Question 12:** The instructor was open to student feedback about the course and instructional methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Always</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4 Very often</td>
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<td>3 Sometimes</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<td>2 Rarely</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not Observed</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Department-wide statistics:**
- RESPONSES: 631
- MEAN: 4.21
- Median: 5
- StDev: 1.113

**College-wide statistics:**
- RESPONSES: 3,082
- MEAN: 4.34
- Median: 5
- StDev: 1.070

**University-wide statistics:**
- RESPONSES: 9,973
- MEAN: 4.30
- Median: 5
- StDev: 1.063

**Question 13:** Tell a future student about this instructor and course.

See **EVALUATION COMMENTS** below.

**EVALUATION COMMENTS**

Only questions for which comments were provided appear below.

**Question 1:** The instructor taught the subject in a way that helped students learn.

1. Mr. White was able to make us understand the chapter during lectures and gave examples as well. He answered the best he can when students asked him questions.

**Question 2:** The instructor gave clear explanations.

1. Especially for a class with confusing material

**Question 5:** The instructor provided useful feedback on student work.

1. Never

**Question 6:** The instructor treated students with fairness and respect appropriate for a professional relationship.

1. If he sees a student struggling and putting in the effort he does not address it and is very hard on grading no matter what, giving students low grades on homework’s and tests if the answers are not exactly 100% what he is looking for not even necessarily what the book says.

**Question 7:** The instructor actively engaged students.

1. He would engage, the students did not appear to want to engage back

2. Never.

**Question 8:** The instructor encouraged students to express ideas or opinions.

1. Never.

**Question 11:** The instructor taught class in a way that helped students make connections to their personal or professional lives.

1. Made some life scenario connections.
Question 13: Tell a future student about this instructor and course.

1. He is very monoton and lectures everyday by writing on the board. If you are someone who cannot engage yourself in a classroom even when boring, do not take this class. Also, he grades homework for correctness, not completion which makes it a lot harder.

2. I would definitely take his class again.

3. Very interesting class. Good instructor, would recommend him to anyone. Younger professor so he knows how to relate to many different topics

4. Good professor, very knowledgeable in his field, class can be a little dry but overall is well explained

5. Great instructor. Easy class if you really pay attention in class and do the homework.

6. Professor White is great teacher he is extremely knowledgeable in his field. You have to pay attention in class the subject isn’t simply but the professor white is very patient and won’t move on unless everyone understands the subject. He also responds to emails in a timely manner.

7. If you are taking Logic of Everyday Reasoning, this is the Professor you want to take. He teaches the material extremely well and makes sure that everyone in the class is on the same page and understands what is going on. The material is sometimes confusing and can be boring but he makes it very clear and interesting with the use of realistic examples. Stay on top of the homework and use the study guides for exams and you should be fine. Sometimes seems like a lot of work but he gives just enough so that when we see it on an exam we are familiar with the concepts and understand how to identify in everyday examples. Great teacher. Really recommend. Also knows the material extremely well. Never seemed confused and always had even additional info that we may have found interesting just for our own good.

8. I’m about to fail this course, which should literally be impossible. Very kind, easy to understand, and understanding professor. Doesn’t ask much from you, homework is not hard and grading is lenient. 100% recommend this guy.

9. Make sure you buy the textbook, pay attention in class and do the homework.

10. The instructor is very laid back and the course is fairly easy but it comes with a lot of memorization. You will do well if you listen to the lectures, study the exam sheet, and do the homework assignments.

11. The material was difficult and involved a lot of memorization. Not very easy to follow concepts but the instructor was patient when teaching it.

12. Professor White is a pretty easy going guy. He understands that going to a logic class at 8 am can be difficult so he tries to make light of it. His exams are pretty self-explanatory but he does grade them harshly, so study thoroughly for his exams. Also, he is more than happy to help you during class if you don’t understand something that he’s teaching. Overall he’s a pretty good professor

13. Very nice professor who is always willing to help students when they need it.

14. It is in your best interest if you avoid taking this professor for this course. If you do unfortunately take this professor, know that even if you do homework completely and reciprocate what the book says on topics, you will more than likely get a bad grade on the homework. Exams do not reciprocate your knowledge and understanding of the class. Very unfair grading. Perfect answers on the study guide do not get good grades on the exams.

15. Pay attention and you’ll do fine.
16. I would highly recommend this professor to another student. He was very knowledgable on this course, explained everything thoroughly, and clearly. He was very helpful and always explained what the goals of the class were going to be. He is a great professor.

17. Yes i would tell a student!

18. This instructor is excellent. Professor White did a great job to explain and teach a subject that is in most cases very complicated. He provided just the right amount of work so that most students understood the material but students weren't required to do busy work. Professor White was very understanding when it came to personal difficulties in completing assignments but he wasn't at all a push over. Considering all the complaints I had been informed of by other students who have taken the course with different professors, I find that I am very lucky to have taken this course with professor White. On top of all of that professor White actually cares about what he is teaching and thereby provides a great class environment for his students.
Introduction to Philosophy
Course Outline

Course Description: Philosophy holds a unique place among the academic disciplines in that there is no form of human activity or aspect of the world in general about which philosophical questions cannot be raised. The subject matter of philosophy is thus in a sense universal, inasmuch as all areas of human inquiry deal with topics that invite philosophical reflection. This impressive breadth of scope makes it difficult, however, to state precisely what philosophy is, for unlike other disciplines, its particular domain of inquiry is not clearly defined. If there is any distinguishing characteristic of philosophical thought, it would thus seem to lie not in the specific topics it touches on, but rather in the kinds of questions it raises about these topics and the methodology that it makes use of in investigating them. Viewed in this way, philosophy can be distinguished from other disciplines by its persistent interest in questions that have a certain fundamental status, and in its use of a methodology that relies heavily on conceptual analysis and logical reasoning. This course will provide an introduction to this unique form of thought by training students in its basic methods and surveying some of the questions that have most occupied philosophers over the years. These questions will include, without being limited to, the following: What is knowledge? How do words acquire meaning? What is the best way to live one’s life? How can we tell right from wrong? What distinguishes the beautiful from the non-beautiful? What is the nature of the mind? What is the basic structure of reality? Our discussions of these issues will focus on the contributions of both contemporary and historical thinkers, and will be topically organized around the themes of knowledge, language, morality, beauty, mind, and reality.

Course texts: All readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Reading Schedule:
Day 1: Introduction

Day 2: Crash Course in Logic
John Perry, Michael Bratman, and John Fischer, 2016, Introduction to Philosophy, pp.8-13.

Day 3: Knowledge

Day 4: Knowledge – The Problem of Skepticism and Foundationalism vs. Coherentism
René Descartes, 1641, Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditations I and II.

Day 5: Knowledge – Empiricism vs. Rationalism

Day 6: Knowledge – The Gettier Problem
(Quiz 1)

Day 7: Language
(First short paper due)

Day 8: Language – Descriptivism vs. Direct Reference

Day 9: Language – Meaning as Use

Day 10: Language – Speech Act Theory

Day 11: Language – Inscrutability of Reference and Indeterminacy of Translation

Day 12: Language – Externalism
(Quiz 2)

Day 13: Morality

Day 14: Morality – Virtue Ethics

Day 15: Morality – Deontological Ethics
Immanuel Kant, 1785, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, I.

Day 16: Morality – Consequentialism

Day 17: Morality – Emotivism and Moral Sense Theory

Day 18: Morality – Nietzsche on Morality
Friedrich Nietzsche, 1887, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, I.
(Midterm paper due)
Day 19: Morality – Fictionalism  

Day 20: Morality – Free Will  
David Hume, 1748, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, VIII.  
(Quiz 3)

Day 21: Aesthetics  

(Quiz 4)

Day 23: Mind  

Day 24: Mind – Cartesian Dualism  
René Descartes, 1641, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, VI.

Day 25: Mind – Physicalism  

Day 26: Mind - Functionalism  

Day 27: Mind – Consciousness  
Thomas Nagel, 1974, “What is it Like to Be a Bat?” *Philosophical Review*.  
(Second short paper due)

Day 28: Mind – Personal Identity  
(Quiz 5)

Day 29: Reality  

Day 30: Reality – Realism vs. Nominalism  
Day 31: Reality – Idealism vs. Materialism

Day 32: Reality – Time
J. Ellis McTaggart, 1908, “The Unreality of Time,” *Mind*.

Day 33: Reality – Causation
David Hume, 1748, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, IV, V i.

Day 34: Reality – Eliminativism
Peter Unger, 1979, “There Are No Ordinary Things,” *Synthese*.
(Quiz 6)
(Final paper due)
Early Modern Philosophy
Course Outline

Course Description: This course will be devoted to the study of the philosophical work of six major figures of that period in the Western philosophical canon running from the early 17th – mid 18th century: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. While many of the central claims of their respective philosophical systems differ significantly, these thinkers are nevertheless often viewed as sharing a general approach to the practice of philosophy which separates them from their ancient and medieval predecessors. Throughout the course of the semester, we will attempt to understand the position of each of these philosophers on its own terms, while also trying to get a better sense of what these thinkers have in common (besides temporal proximity) that warrants their being grouped together as Moderns. In the process of doing so, we will be discussing a variety of topics that figure prominently in the philosophical debates of the time period, including the source of knowledge, the relation between mind and body, the doctrine of innate ideas, idealism and skepticism, personal identity, the existence of God, and the nature of causation.


All other readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Reading Schedule:
Day 1
Introduction

Day 2: Descartes’ method of doubt and the Cogito argument
Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy (Synopsis, Meditations I-II), pp.39-47.

Day 3: Descartes on innate ideas, God, judgment, and free will
Descartes, Meditations (Meditations III-IV), pp.47-58.

Day 4: Descartes’ mind-body dualism
Descartes, Meditations (Meditations V-VI), pp.58-68.

Day 5: Discussion day
(Reading questions 1 due)

Day 6: Spinoza’s monistic metaphysics
Spinoza, Ethics (Part I), pp.144-52.

Day 7: Spinoza’s monistic metaphysics (cont.)
Spinoza, Ethics (Part I), pp.152-60.

Day 8: Spinoza’s rejection of teleology

Day 9: Spinoza’s parallelism and theory of mind

Day 10: Discussion day
(Reading questions 2 due)

Day 11
(Exam 1)

Day 12: Leibniz’s metaphysics and concept-containment theory of truth

Day 13: Leibniz on free will
Leibniz, *Discourse*, pp.238-47.

Day 14: Leibniz’s theory of monads

Day 15: Leibniz’s rejection of absolute space
Leibniz, Letters to Samuel Clarke, pp.294-303.

Day 16: Discussion day
(Reading questions 3 due)

Day 17: Locke’s rejection of innate ideas

Day 18: Leibniz’s defense of innate ideas
Leibniz, Preface to the *New Essays*, pp.422-33.

Day 19: Discussion Day
(Reading questions 4 due)

Day 20: Locke on perception, substance and primary vs. secondary qualities

Day 21: Locke’s theory of language, abstract ideas, and real vs. nominal essence

Day 22: Locke’s theory of personal identity

Day 23: Discussion day
(Reading questions 5 due)
(Midterm paper due)

Day 24
(Exam 2)

Day 25: Berkeley’s rejection of abstract ideas

Day 26: Berkeley’s attack on materialism

Day 27: Berkeley’s defense of idealism and distinction between ideas and “spirits”

Day 28: Discussion day
(Reading questions 6 due)

Day 29: Hume on causation and induction

Day 30: Hume on free will

Day 31: Hume’s theory of self

Day 32: Hume on morality

Day 33: Discussion day
(Reading questions 7 due)

Day 34
(Exam 3)
(Final paper due)
Philosophy of Science
Course Outline

Course Description: Over the past hundred years, the relationship between science and philosophy has undergone a significant change, as the position that philosophy once assumed for itself as the discipline best able to provide insight into the nature of reality has been increasingly usurped by modern science. Whereas philosophers once occupied themselves with establishing boundaries and foundations for future science, philosophical speculation and theorizing is today largely carried out under the constraints imposed by our most current scientific knowledge. This shift in the relation between the two disciplines has been in large part due to the striking contrast between the astounding success of modern science and the inability of philosophers to find lasting solutions to traditional philosophical problems. In response to this contrast, philosophers have increasingly given up on previous attempts to impose limits on what science may discover, and instead devoted greater effort to understanding the nature, methods, aims, and history of scientific inquiry. This class will provide a survey of the immense body of work that has been produced on this topic. The questions we will be investigating include: What distinguishes science from non-science? How are scientific theories confirmed by evidence? Is there such a thing as scientific progress, and if so, what is it? Does science provide us with knowledge of the way the world really is? What is the nature of scientific explanation? Under what conditions is one scientific theory reducible to another? In what ways are scientific theories and practices shaped by social and psychological factors?


All other readings posted on Blackboard.

Reading Schedule:
Day 1
Peter Godfrey-Smith, Theory and Reality, chap.1.

Day 2: Logical Positivism
Peter Godfrey-Smith, Theory and Reality, chap.2.

Day 3: Critiques of Logical Positivism

Day 4: Critiques of Logical Positivism (cont.)

Day 5: The Problem of Induction
David Hume, 1748, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, IV, V i.
Day 6: The Problem of Induction (cont.)
Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality*, chap.3.

Day 7: The Theory-Ladenness of Observation
(First short paper due)

Day 8
(Exam 1)

Day 9: Karl Popper

Day 10: Karl Popper (cont.)

Day 11: Thomas Kuhn

Day 12: Thomas Kuhn (cont.)

Day 13: Thomas Kuhn (cont.)
Thomas Kuhn, 1969, “Postscript to *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,*” in McGrew, Alspector-Kelly, and Allhoff (eds.) *The Philosophy of Science: An Historical Anthology.*

Day 14: Reactions to Kuhn

Day 15: Reactions to Kuhn (cont.)

Day 16: Reactions to Kuhn (cont.)

Day 17: Reactions to Kuhn (cont.)
Day 18: Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science
(Midterm paper due)

Day 19: Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science (cont.)

Day 20
(Exam 2)

Day 21: Scientific Realism

Day 22: Scientific Realism (cont.)

Day 23: Scientific Realism (cont.)

Day 24: Scientific Realism (cont.)
(Second short paper due)

Day 25: Laws of Nature

Day 26: Laws of Nature (cont.)

Day 27: Laws of Nature (cont.)

Day 28: Scientific Explanation

Day 29: Scientific Explanation (cont.)
Day 30: Scientific Explanation (cont.)

Day 31: Intertheoretic Reduction

Day 32: Intertheoretic Reduction (cont.)

Day 33
(Exam 3)
(Final paper due)
Philosophy of Mind
Course Outline

Course Description: If you’re reading these words, then chances are that you have a mind. But what exactly is a mind? This course will pursue an answer to this question by exploring various characteristics and capacities that have been identified as distinctive of mentality, including but not limited to: consciousness, rationality, memory, the ability to perceive or have thoughts about the world, the disposition to exhibit certain forms of behavior, and the possession of a sufficiently complex brain. Along the way we will also consider a number of questions that have been the subject of sustained interest and debate among those engaged in philosophical and scientific studies of the mind. These will include such questions as the following: What is the relationship between the mind and the brain? Can non-living entities, e.g. computers, have minds? How do mental states, e.g. beliefs, desires, and sensations, cause physical effects, e.g. bodily motions? Is consciousness essential to mentality? Can mental states and processes be fully explained in non-mental, physical terms? How do thoughts and perceptions come to represent various objects in and features of our environment? What determines the content of our thoughts and perceptions? Our investigation of these questions and the features of mentality they shed light on will set us on the path towards an improved understanding of the mind and its place in the natural order.

Course texts:

All other readings posted on Blackboard.

Reading Schedule:
Day 1: Introduction

Day 2: Mind-Body Dualism

Day 3: Objections to Substance Dualism
Jaegwon Kim, *Philosophy of Mind*, chap.2, pp.31-60.

Day 4: Behaviorism

Day 5: Objections to Behaviorism

Day 6: Type-Identity Theory

Day 7: Objections to Type-Identity Theory
Jaegwon Kim, *Philosophy of Mind*, chap.4, pp.91-127.

Day 8: The Modal Argument

Day 9: Functionalism

Day 10: Functionalism (cont.)

Day 11: The Multiple Realization Argument

Day 12: Responses to the Multiple Realization Argument

Day 13: Responses to the Multiple Realization Argument (cont.)

Day 14: Objections to Functionalism – The Absent Qualia Argument
(First short paper due)

Day 15: Objections to Functionalism – The Chinese Room Argument

Day 16: Mental Causation – Anomalous Monism

Day 17: Mental Causation – The Exclusion Argument

Day 18: Consciousness
(Midterm Paper due)

Day 19: Consciousness and the Mind-Body Problem – The Knowledge Argument

Day 20: Consciousness and the Mind-Body Problem – The Conceivability Argument

Day 21: Consciousness and the Mind-Body Problem – The Argument from Subjectivity

Day 22: The Ability Hypothesis

Day 23: The Phenomenal Concept Strategy

Day 24: Qualia Eliminativism

Day 25: Intentionality
Franz Brentano, “The Distinction between Mental and Physical Phenomena,” in Chalmers (ed.) *Philosophy of Mind*, pp.479-84
(Second short paper due)

Day 26: Mental Content

Day 27: Content Externalism

Day 28: Causal Theories of Content

Day 29: Teleological Theories of Content

Day 30: Conceptual Role Semantics

Day 31: Consciousness and Intentionality – Representationalism

Day 32: Consciousness and Intentionality – Phenomenal Intentionality

Day 33: Instrumentalism and Eliminativist Materialism

Day 34: Classical vs. Connectionist Models of Cognition

Day 35: The Extended Mind Hypothesis
(Final paper due)
Course Description: What distinguishes a human being from other animals? In this course, we will pursue an answer to this question by considering a range of potential solutions that have been proposed by various thinkers throughout the Western philosophical tradition. Among the different traits and powers we will be discussing are the human faculties of cognition and reason, the capacities for moral action and artistic creation and appreciation, the ability to master a language and form societies and political institutions, as well as diverse aspects of the human mind. In attending to these and other features of the human being, we will attempt first to define each trait in turn, before determining whether or to what degree the trait so defined might be deemed unique to humans. We will also consider how the human being is shaped and influenced by various aspects of its external social and physical environment, as well as the relation between such a being and its physical body.

Course Objectives: Ideally, students will come away from the course with a better understanding of what constitutes a human being. They will also acquire a general familiarity with certain prominent topics and thinkers in the Western philosophical tradition, as well as an improved ability to construct and evaluate arguments, formulate precise definitions, and accurately judge relations between concepts.

Papers: There will be four papers assigned throughout the course of the semester; a midterm, a final, and two short papers. The first of the short papers will be due on Feb 19, the second on Apr 7. These papers should be around 2-3 pages long. The midterm paper will be due on Mar 19, and should be around 5 pages long. The final paper will be due on the last day of class (May 5), and should be around 5 pages long. All papers should be double spaced, 12pt. Times New Roman font. Topics will be assigned in advance. Late papers will be penalized a third of a letter grade for each day they are late.

Exams: There will be three exams throughout the course of the semester, one on Feb 21, one on Mar 21, and one on Apr 25.

Homework: Students should bring a notecard with them to each class on which they’ve written what they take to be the (or a) central thesis of the assigned reading for that day’s class. These will count towards the attendance/participation grade.

Attendance Policy: Students will be allowed to miss up to 3 classes without consequence. Each additional absence will result in a reduction of their final grade by a third of a letter grade.
Grading: Papers, exams, and attendance/participation will be weighted as follows:
Attendance/participation: 20%
Exams: 10% (each)
Short papers: 10% (each)
Midterm: 10%
Final: 20%

Readings: All readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Week 1 (Jan 20)
F
Introduction

Week 2 (Jan 27)
M
Plato, c.380 B.C.E., Republic, IV (434d-444a).
W
Aristotle, c.350 B.C.E., Nicomachean Ethics, I vii-viii, xiii, II i-iii, v-vi, VI i-ii, X vii.
F
René Descartes, 1641, Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditations I and II.

Week 3 (Feb 3)
M
René Descartes, 1641, Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation VI.
W
F
Jaegwon Kim, 2011, “Mind as the Brain,” in Philosophy of Mind.

Week 4 (Feb 10)
M
W
F

Week 5 (Feb 17)
M
W
[Short paper 1 due]
Recap
F
[Exam 1]

Week 6 (Feb 24)
M
Plato, c.380 B.C.E., Republic, I (336b-354b), II (357a-367e).
W
F
Immanuel Kant, 1785, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, I.

Week 7 (Mar 3)
Spring Break

Week 8 (Mar 10)
M
(no class)
W
F
John Stuart Mill, 1863, Utilitarianism, II, III.

Week 9 (Mar 17)
M
Friedrich Nietzsche, 1882, The Gay Science, 21, 335.
Friedrich Nietzsche, 1874, On the Genealogy of Morals, I.
W
[Midterm paper due]
Recap
F

[Exam 2]

Week 10 (Mar 24)
M
Friedrich Nietzsche, 1874, On the Uses and Disadvantages of History, I-IV.
W
F
Leslie Stevenson, David Haberman, and Peter Wright, 2013, “Marx” in 12 Theories of Human Nature.

Week 11 (Mar 31)
M
Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1953, Philosophical Investigations 1-43, 65-75
W
F

**Week 12** (Apr 7)
M
[Short paper 2 due]
W
F

**Week 13** (Apr 14)
M
W
F
David Hume, 1748, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, VIII.

**Week 14** (Apr 21)
M
W
Recap
F
[Exam 3]

**Week 15** (Apr 28)
M
*The Human Spark* I
W
*The Human Spark* II
F
*The Human Spark* III

**Week 16** (May 5)
M
[Final paper due]
Disability Statement: This course is open to all students who met the academic requirements for participation. Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss the specific situation as soon as possible. Contact Disability Resources and Services at 215-204-1280 to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Statement on Academic Freedom: Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. The University has adopted a policy on Student and Faculty Academic Rights and Responsibilities (Policy # 03.70.02) which can be accessed through the following link: http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_no=03.70.02.

Plagiarism statement: University policy defines plagiarism as “the unacknowledged use of another person's labor, another person's ideas, another person's words, another person's assistance.” All work containing plagiarized material will receive a failing grade.