Spring 2019
Syllabus for Philosophy 1113.29137: Introduction to Philosophy
M/W: 12:30-1:45, LSE 113
Professor: Shannon Spaulding

Contact Information
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Office Hours: By appointment
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Course Description
The goal of this course is to teach you how to think critically about fundamental issues. The issues we will discuss concern the justification for our claims to knowledge, the existence of God and the problem of evil, the distinction between believing something for a reason and believing something on faith, free will and moral responsibility, philosophy of mind, and, finally, topics in political and ethical theory, including justice, euthanasia, and abortion.

Thinking critically about these issues will be hard for many of you. This is because, first, they are of the sort that tend to draw strong opinions. Most of you probably believe in god, think that it is ok to accept claims on the basis of faith, are confident that knowledge is possible, take minds to be non-material entities, believe that you have free will, and have strong views about what makes a society just or whether euthanasia is permissible. If you are like most people, you have not thought critically about these things. In fact, I bet that most of you believe in the god that your parents believe in and for no other reason than that your parents raised you to accept their beliefs (and, in turn, they followed their parents). This would certainly explain why children of Christians tend to be Christian, and those of Jews and Muslims tend to be Jews and Muslims. Likewise, the strongest predictors of your views on justice and euthanasia are probably the views of your parents or peers. This brings us to a second reason why critical thought about fundamental issues is difficult: it requires that you suspend your belief in ideas that have probably seemed so natural to you for so long.

But, finally, critical thinking is hard just because it's hard -- regardless of the issue under analysis. Critical thought requires examining assumptions that you may not realize you have made, it requires imagining alternatives that may be far from obvious, and it requires an ability to assess the soundness of arguments.

Each of you is expected to come to your own conclusions and defend them as best you can. A primary goal of this course is to teach you how to analyze arguments – to dissect and evaluate them – and to learn the tools and methods of reasoning needed for such an analysis. Consequently, you are not graded on what your opinion is. You are graded on your ability to reason through, argue for, defend, and express your ideas clearly and cogently.

Required Texts (available at the Campus Bookstore)

Graded Assignments
• Five reaction papers: 40%
• Twenty quizzes: 20%
• Midterm exam: 20%
• Final exam: 20%

You will have to write five reaction papers. A reaction paper should be no longer than a page and a half, and preferably just a page. In this paper you should:

1. Interpret an argument from the text, being clear about its premises and conclusions
2. Defend or criticize the argument with an argument of your own.

These papers will be due every other week. You should submit your papers through D2L. Go to our course page on D2L and select “Dropbox.” Papers are due by the time class starts. The five papers are worth 8% each, totaling 40% of your final grade. **You must turn in all five reaction papers to get credit for any of them.**

We will have twenty reading quizzes throughout the semester. I will ask one open-ended question about the reading assigned for that day. Quizzes are worth 1% each, totaling 20% of your final grade. They are graded on a 0 – 1 scale: 1 for correct answers, .5 for partially correct answers, 0 for incorrect answers or missed quizzes. You cannot makeup quizzes.

There will be two in-class exams. The first exam will cover material from the first half of the course, and the second exam will cover material from the second half. Each exam is worth 20% of your final grade. The exams will consist of short essay questions.

**Late Work Policy**
Late work will be accepted with a penalty of 10 points per day. Extensions will be granted on a case-by-case basis and only for what I judge to be a sufficiently good reason.

**Disabilities**
I urge any student who has physical or learning disabilities that will affect class attendance or performance to speak with me during the first week of class. We will work with the Student Disabilities Services to accommodate your needs.

**Policy on Written Work**
All written work must be typed and double-spaced with one-inch margins on all sides using Times New Roman, 12-point font or a similar font and type size. Please number your pages.

Plagiarism consists of using the words or ideas of others and passing them off as your own. If you copy others’ words, you must put them in quotations marks and cite them. If you paraphrase others’ words or ideas, you must cite them. Plagiarism is a very serious offense and will not be tolerated. If I catch you plagiarizing, you will receive a zero on the assignment and an F in the course. Consult the Statement of Academic Integrity and the Office of Academic Affairs if you have any questions about what counts as plagiarism.