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office: 217B Skinner | office hours: by appointment, via Google calendar: <http://tiny.cc/wgdf9y>

About the course. This first year seminar is a critical thinking boot camp. Students will learn to charitably interpret, logically reconstruct, and critically evaluate arguments. The arguments come from classic and contemporary readings in philosophy about God, free will, and morality. We will focus on questions such as: Does God exist? Is it rational to believe in God? What should I do if I want to do the right thing? When is it ok to criticize other cultures? How much do I owe to others? Do we have free will? Can we ever be held responsible for anything? Students will come out of the class better thinkers, better writers, and better equipped to tackle difficult questions like these with rigor and care.

Learning goals.

1. *To hone your critical thinking skills.* You'll do this by questioning assumptions and analyzing, evaluating, and constructing arguments. You'll have to provide reasons and consider counterarguments for what you believe.
2. *To become close, careful readers of difficult and challenging texts.* You'll practice interpreting texts and using textual evidence to support your claims and arguments.
3. *To become familiar with some big questions and learn what important thinkers have said about them.*
4. *To learn to write in clear, accessible, and persuasive prose.* You'll do this by writing frequently, drafting and revising, and thinking reflectively about your own development as a writer.

Tentative Schedule. Please do the readings in the order in which they are listed. Readings are available on Moodle. Please print and bring hard copies to class.

Date		Reading
Th 9/5	Bullshit	Syllabus for this course. (Seriously. All of it. Don't skim.) Harry Frankfurt, "On Bullshit"
T 9/10	Writing	George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"
Th 9/12		
T 9/17	How to college	Ken Bain, "What makes an expert?" Hidden Brain episode, "Rebel With a Cause"
Th 9/19		<i>Academic Expectations, Resilience, and Resources Session</i> (in Chapin Auditorium).
Email Assignment due on Saturday 9/21, by 8 PM		
T 9/24	Yes God!	Samuel Clarke, The Cosmological Argument (selection)
Th 9/26		

Date		Reading
T 10/1		William Paley, The Argument from Design Paley and Dawkins (excerpts) Charles Darwin, Autobiography (selection)
Th 10/3		
T 10/8	Bet on God.	Pascal, "The Wager" (selection)
Th 10/10		
Attack Paper due on Saturday 10/19, by 8 PM		
T 10/15		No class. (October Break)
Th 10/17	No God.	J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence"
T 10/22		Mackie, continued.
Th 10/24		LITS session & SAW workshop ; no new readings.
T 10/29	Morality without God?	William Lane Craig, "God and Objective Morality: A Debate" Louise Antony, "Good Minus God"
Th 10/31		
T 11/5	Judging others	Mary Midgley, "Trying out one's new sword" Martha Nussbaum, "Judging Other Cultures: The Case of Genital Mutilation"
Th 11/7		
T 11/12	Helping others	Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"
Th 11/14		
Defense Paper due on Saturday 11/16, by 8 PM		
T 11/19	Moral saints.	Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints"
Th 11/21		No class. (Thanksgiving)
T 11/26	Determinism	No reading.
Th 11/29	Compatibilism	Harry Frankfurt, "Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility"
T 12/3	Sanity	Susan Wolf, "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility"
Th 12/5		
T 12/10	More sanity	Gary Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil..." (selection)
Final Exam due on Friday 12/13, by 8 PM		
Final Paper due on Tuesday 12/17, by noon		

Requirements.

- **Weekly Writing:** 10%
- **Email Assignment (EA):** 250 words. Email an argument. 10%
- **Attack Paper (AP):** 500-700 words. Summarize argument & raise objection. 13%
- **Defense Paper (OP):** 500-700 words. Raise objection to provided argument & consider reply. 17%
- **Final Paper (FP):** 1000-1200 words. Summarize argument, raise objection, consider reply. 30%
- **Final Exam (FE):** Short essay questions taken from Weekly Writing. 20%

Important:

1. All work submitted for this class should use standard formatting (12 pt font, 1” margins, double spaced) and be submitted as a PDF to Moodle.
2. Your target audience for all writing in this class is an intelligent tween who is unfamiliar with the material. Your writing needs to be clear to *her*, not me or to your classmates. Whenever you are wondering if you should include or explain something, ask yourself: will the tween understand what I’m saying? That is your best guide to good, clear writing.
3. Our rule of thumb is: *explain more than you think you need to using fewer words than you think you need to.*

Weekly Writing.

- **Why.** To guide you through the reading, help you prepare for class discussion, and practice writing and arguing.
- **What.** Typically, I’ll post a few questions to Moodle. Specific instructions about how many to answer will be available there. This is a brief assignment, so be direct— answer the question(s) and cite any sources. Clearly define any jargon either in your own words or with your own examples. Most people’s (not just students’) writing is too wordy—once you are sure you’ve answered the question completely and defined/explained anything technical, you should err on the side of fewer rather than more words. See note above about tween and rules of thumb.
- **When/how.** Submit your responses by noon on the day before the next class. Type up your answers, format them, double spaced, etc. Make sure you have proofread and that everything looks how it should. Then create a PDF for submission to Moodle. Double check the PDF to make sure it preserved all your fonts and formatting. (Don’t know how to convert to PDF? Ask Google or the LITS Help Desk.) Your aim is a clean, well-written, professionally prepared submission.
- **Feedback.** I’ll mark these pass/fail within a week. I won’t provide comments because we will discuss them in class.
- **Credit.** These are low-stakes assignments meant to help you learn. To pass these, all you need to do is write in clear, grammatical English, answer all parts of the question, don’t bullshit,¹ and don’t get it completely wrong. In other words, put in a good-faith effort, but don’t worry if you haven’t completely figured out the text. I don’t expect that at this stage.
- **Note:** You will often be assigned one of these to present on in class, and it may not be the one you’ve submitted an answer to. So it’s important to write down answers for all of them. Make sure you revisit and revise your answers after our discussions, since final exam questions will be taken from these.

¹ I mean ‘bullshit’ here in its ordinary sense, but especially in as Frankfurt defines it in “On Bullshit”.

Email assignment.

- **Why.** To practice writing at the right level of clarity and accessibility; to demonstrate understanding of material.
- **What.** Write a short (max 500 words) email to a friend or family member. Pick someone who has never taken philosophy before, but who you think will actually read and respond to your email. In the email, you'll explain an argument or idea that we've discussed in class. You'll actually send the email.
- **When/how.** Send as an email to your friend and bcc me.
- **Feedback.** I'll provide feedback using the Email Assignment Rubric.
- **Credit.** To succeed on this assignment you must be *accurate* and *clear*. Aim for a level of precision typical in a standard paper, but make it much more accessible. For example, avoid jargon; if you can't avoid it, explain it immediately. Your explanations and clarifications should always be backed by a simple, compelling, and clear examples (or a single example you tweak as necessary). Even though this is an email, not a traditional paper, you still need to give credit where credit is due, so find a way to cite your sources (accurately and fairly, if more casually).
 - **Remember our rules of thumb:** *write to an intelligent tween and (to do so) explain more than you think you need to using fewer words than you think you need to.*

Papers (AP, DP, and FP).

- **Why.** *Final paper* - to pull together and demonstrate the skills and understanding you've acquired. Mini papers: *AP and DP* - to practice the skills you'll need to complete the final paper and to demonstrate understanding of the material.
- **What.** In the final paper, you'll present and critically analyze an argument from the readings. You'll reconstruct it, explain it, and raise *one* objection to *one* premise. You'll consider a reply and then provide a verdict; i.e., you'll explain what the upshot is and what we should think, in the end. I'll provide further instructions as well as a sample essay closer to the due date. But by that point, you'll have done assignments which tackle the tasks necessary for critically analyzing an argument. Specifically, in AP, you'll have presented an argument and raised an objection. In DP, you'll raise an objection to an argument I'll provide, and respond to that objection.
- **When/how.** Submit papers to Moodle as a PDFs.
- **Feedback.** Feedback on AP and DP will be provided within two weeks using a relevant rubric; no comments provided for final papers.
- **Credit.** Papers are evaluated along two or more of these three dimensions (whichever are relevant): clarity, accuracy, and critical thought.

Final.

- **Why.** To demonstrate your understanding of the material we've covered in class; to motivate the right kind of engagement with the material throughout the semester (specifically with weekly writing questions and in-class discussions).
- **What.** A selection of questions from the weekly writing assignments.
- **When/how.** Open book, take home.
- **Feedback.** No comments provided.

- **Credit.** Answers evaluated along the usual dimensions: clarity, accuracy, and critical thought. To give complete, clear answers, don't forget our writing rules of thumb: *write to an intelligent tween and (to do so) explain more than you think you need to using fewer words than you think you need to.*

Participation. In this class, student voices dominate the discussion.

- **Why.** First, we learn best by doing: by asking questions, hazarding guesses, and testing out your ideas. Second, we learn from one another: when others question us, echo our contributions back to us, and challenge us. It's part of your responsibility, as a member of this college community, to contribute. Finally, communication is an important skill—for success in college and beyond. This is your chance to practice and master it.
- **Trouble?** Shy? Nervous? Me too! My heart still races sometimes when I raise my hand at a professional gathering or talk. (Or when I teach...) Participation is more difficult for some of us than others. But writing papers, understanding the readings—these too are more difficult for some of us than others. They are all skills we must work on. If you have trouble speaking in class, please see me and we will work on it together—just as we would on any other challenge.
- **How and how much?** You don't need to talk just for the sake of talking. But it is also very important to not wait for brilliance or insight to hit you before raising your hand. Much of both learning and contributing to discussion involve asking simple, clarifying questions. I'll expect you to do at least that much regularly. As a rule of thumb, try to ask at least one question per class.
- **Important.** Often, class will have the following structure. Groups will be randomly assigned one of the weekly reading questions to discuss and present to the class. Presentations should be aimed at our usual audience, the uninformed tween, and not your classmates or professor. These presentations are an opportunity to practice communicating complex ideas clearly and simply. The rules are the same as for our writing: use fewer words than you think you need to explain more than you think you need, and remember your target audience. Students in the non-presenting groups are expected to interrupt the presenting group with questions and clarifications. This is to everyone's benefit: the presenting group learns to do better, and the non-presenting groups make sure they've understood the material. (That last one is important for everyone, because, but not only because, the material will be on the final.) This is also the way that the presenting group is able to gauge whether they've clearly communicated the ideas, and whether their audience has understood. (If they don't get enough questions, or they aren't sure whether others understand, they will also ask questions—just as your professors sometimes do.)

How to approach the readings. Some of the readings we will look at are short, but all are tricky. Give yourself time to digest them. I recommend a three step approach.

First, skim the article. Note where the thesis and major argument(s) are. Don't worry too much about understanding while you're skimming. You're just trying to get the lay of the land. (Also, you will absorb more than you realize.)

Second, carefully read each piece *before* we discuss it in class. Use the reading questions to help focus your attention. Again, note where the action is: mark arguments, note their premises and

conclusions. Along the way, jot down questions and confusions so you can raise them during our discussion.

Third, skim the reading again after we've discussed it. It should be much easier to understand at this point. Edit your notes: correct any misunderstandings and jot down any new thoughts you have. (These notes will come in handy for later assignments.) If you're still unclear about something, get help: talk with classmates, come by my office hours, etc.

Attendance. I expect you to attend every class. That's where the action happens, and where I give away all the answers. (Seriously. You can't succeed in this class without showing up. It's never happened.) If you're sick and contagious or not well enough to come in, of course, stay home. You do not need to email me with an explanation. However, you do need to get caught up. How? First, get in touch with your classmates and gather all materials, handouts, etc. from Moodle. Study the material and notes you missed. After you've done all that, come see me in office hours with questions and comments on the readings.

Late policy. Three principles guide my late policy.

1. Work should be assessed on its quality and on whether it demonstrates learning.
2. Each assignment has a purpose; that purpose can only be fulfilled within a certain timeframe.
3. Deadlines allow us to organize our time and learning and to meet our goals.

What? Late Weekly Writing assignments will not be accepted for credit. Besides writing practice, these assignments fulfill three goals: (1) for you to practice working through and understanding the readings on your own, (2) to prepare you for class discussion, and (3) for you to show me where you're struggling before we begin discussions. These goals aren't met if you don't complete the assignment on time. (You will need to know the answers to these questions for the final, so even if it's too late to get credit, make sure you write up the answer for yourself.)

Late *papers* will be accepted up until the day that we discuss them together in class (this day won't be announced in advance, and will vary, but it will typically be within a week or two). Papers submitted after the due date, but before the cut off are not guaranteed comments. This is not about punishing you for being late. It's about enabling me to schedule my time.

Why? Getting your assignments in on time allows us to stay together as a class—to discuss assignments after everyone has finished and long before the next assignment is due (so you have time to reflect and improve). We all have so many demands on our time, and we need to be able to plan ahead. If people complete assignments late, they fall behind, cannot contribute to class discussions, and can hold us back during assignment based in class activities. Worse yet, they hurt their own learning.

Meeting deadlines is thus an opportunity to show respect: respect for yourself, your time, and your learning; respect for your classmates' time and learning; and respect for my time and my teaching. Of course, I won't be immediately offended or assume you're disrespectful if you are late with something. Things happen; we can't always do what is best. First and foremost, I'm here to help. So, don't hesitate to talk to me.

Secret assignment. Good job! You found the (a?) secret assignment! Your job, for next time, is to Google “m&m clause”. Then, briefly explain what the point of this secret assignment is. Tell me also whether you found it annoying, amusing, or what, and why. Finally, ask at least one question about the syllabus or the class, and share at least one thing you are concerned or excited about. Print this out bring it to the next class. Now keep reading. There might be more surprises.

Academic Integrity. You are welcome to talk to your classmates about the weekly readings and to try to understand them together. But *everything you submit must be your own work and in your own words*. I take academic honesty very seriously and will thoroughly pursue any suspicion of academic dishonesty.

Upon entering Mount Holyoke College, you each signed a pledge to uphold the honor code. I expect all of you to be familiar with “*A Guide to the Uses and Acknowledgment of Sources* and the Student Handbook, which define the standards adopted by the College; to observe the established procedures in preparing assignments and writing papers and examinations, and to submit as [your] own only that work that [you have] originated.”² I also expect you will all honor the pledge you signed. Of course, work is often built on the ideas or with the help of others. So, make sure you **give credit where credit is due**. If your discussions with classmates, friends, parents, etc., were helpful, cite them. Credit all sources appropriately, even (especially) Wikipedia and anything from your Googling bounty.

It is a requirement of this class that you take the plagiarism tutorial (please do it again even if you’ve already done it): <https://sites.google.com/a/mtholyoke.edu/proper-use-of-sources-mhc/home/>. Do it before our next class and email me to let me know you have completed it. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty and to avoid it. Accidental plagiarism should not be possible. If in doubt, cite, cite, cite. But you should be motivated by more than the fear of plagiarism. We cite sources to give credit where credit is due. It’s the right thing to do.

Outside sources. You *do not* need to read any additional material beyond the assigned reading—and I don’t encourage it. If you think it might be helpful to read one or two additional articles connected to your topic—especially if you’re having trouble understanding it, I am happy to give you additional reading suggestions. You may also find searching the following sources helpful: philpapers.org, plato.stanford.edu, and mtholyoke.edu/lits. Do not blindly rely on what you Google, however, and remember to *always* give credit.

Class conduct. Philosophy, someone once said, is thinking in slow motion. Transcribing we say in class is not engaged, slow thinking. It may be helpful for you to take notes during class. But your notes should be brief: perhaps a key definition, a question you want to think more about, or an argument we reconstructed. Your energy is better spent actively engaging with the material:

² https://www.mtholyoke.edu/deanofstudents/student_handbook

asking questions, participating in the conversation, sharing your thoughts, and, sometimes, making mistakes out loud. I will do the same.

Since we'll all be testing out ideas and making mistakes, it's crucial that we turn to one another with open minds and respond to each other's contributions with kindness. If you don't like what someone is saying, don't attack them, attack their idea—with logic, reasoning, and argument, not with malice or anger. This is especially important during discussions of sensitive topics.

Please silence all devices and store them in your bag during class. The empirical evidence is pretty clear that devices in the classroom impede learning—of those using them and of the rest of the class.

If you believe that your learning will suffer if you do not have access to certain technology, please let me know—whether or not you have an official accommodation. As always, be open and communicate with me about what you think you need in order to succeed in class. I'm here to help you learn.

Communication. Important announcements and assignments will be communicated to you via email or in class. It is your responsibility to make sure you are up to date with the latest news. So check your email daily and don't miss class. If you do miss class, check with your classmates. Gather some names and emails here, for convenience:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Of course, you are always welcome to email me with any questions. But please keep in mind that there are a lot more of you than there are of me and modern digital communication demands are crazy-making. To stay sane:

- I don't check my email constantly, and not at all in the evenings or on weekends.
- I respond as promptly as I can, but not always on the same day.
- I do not answer questions that are clearly answered in the syllabus or assignment instructions. (I delete those emails.) Of course, after you've carefully examined the assignment *and* checked with your classmates, you shouldn't hesitate to ask me to clarify anything. These rules are here so that I can manage my time and respond promptly to important and urgent questions.

Assistance. Besides myself, there are many resources to help you succeed in this class.

Office hours. Office hours are by appointment. You can sign up here, using Google calendar: <https://tinyurl.com/y76xp3cc> Please make an appointment sometime in the first three weeks of class to say hello, so that we can get to know each other a little bit better.

SAW. You should go to the *SAW center* for help on your assignments. Well-trained peers are there to look over your drafts, help you plan your arguments, etc. There are drop-in hours, and you may

go as many times as you want. This is a great resource.³ There may be a *SAW mentor* in this course. If there is, *go to them*. They are there to help you. Note: SAW mentors are not there to give answers or proofread for typos. They are there to help you organize your thoughts and to guide you through the assignments. Visiting the SAW center or mentor doesn't guarantee a good grade—only your own hard work does. Still, this is a great resource for students at all levels. *Every student should plan to use the SAW center (or SAW mentor) for every major assignment, and some of the minor ones, especially at the beginning.*

AccessAbility Services. If you would like to request accommodations for a disability, please contact AccessAbility Services, located in Wilder Hall B4, at (413) 538-2646 or accessability-services@mtholyoke.edu. If you are eligible, they will give you an accommodation letter which you should bring to me as soon as possible.

Title IX Reporting Policy: Responsible Reporters. Under College policy, and in accordance with Title IX, all faculty are considered responsible reporters. Responsible reporters must promptly report to the Title IX coordinator when they receive information that could reasonably raise a concern that gender-based or sexual misconduct may have occurred. The purpose of this disclosure is to ensure that students are made aware of their reporting options and resources for support. For more information about reporting options at Mount Holyoke, including confidential and anonymous reporting options, please visit: mtholyoke.edu/go/StudentHandbook.

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³ <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/saw/peer/center>