

**Systematic Thinking:  
God, Identity, and the Moderns**  
*University of Notre Dame*  
Fall 2020

**Instructor:** Dr. Graham Clay

**Email:** gclay@nd.edu

**Office Location:** Zoom

**Office Hours:** W 2-4, and by appointment

**Class Location:** TBA

**Class Hours:** TBA

**Course Description:**

This class is dedicated to helping you begin to develop a systematic philosophical worldview. Ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind—you name the domain and we'll think about a major issue from it. And, crucially, we will think about how positions on these issues relate to one another. For instance, your position on what kind of thing we essentially are affects what you ought to believe about the permissibility of abortion and that of eating animals, as well as the possibility of you (yes, you!) making it into an afterlife. Every philosophical position has consequences.

Yet, as you might have noticed from the title, the so-called "modern" philosophers—roughly those writing in the period from Descartes to Kant—will also feature prominently in this class. Why? Like many fields, philosophy has undergone increasing specialization in recent years. One benefit of this trend is that philosophers are digging deeper into issues of all sorts. However, one cost is that often the big picture is forgotten, or at least shelved for the time being as narrower problems are addressed. An era where this sort of overspecialization did not occur was the modern period. Most moderns developed systematic worldviews that contained answers to many of the big questions. In fact, the worldviews that the moderns developed are among the main options that contemporary philosophers still investigate today. As a consequence, the moderns can provide us with guidance about how to go about developing a systematic philosophical worldview, and studying the moderns can help you better understand contemporary philosophy.

**Course Goals:**

By the end of this course, you should expect to have:

- Improved your ability to evaluate philosophical arguments and positions
- Begun to develop/refine your own philosophical worldview
- Improved your ability to read philosophical texts, and especially historical texts
- Improved your philosophical writing abilities
- Learned about the positions of some of the philosophers of the early modern period
- Learned some of the basic tools of logic

## Grading:

### 35% - Participation

#### 5% - Verbal Contributions During Lectures

Philosophy is a contact sport. This class is training for a life of doing philosophy, so you must engage with me and your classmates during class by asking questions, responding to others' claims, and taking activities seriously. If you are consistently engaged (raising your hand roughly once a week, staying on task, etc.), you will get a perfect score.

#### 15% - Tuesday Quizzes

Unless noted otherwise on the syllabus (there is one exception in early September and one in early November), there will be a 10 minute quiz due on Sakai before every Tuesday class session. These quizzes are designed to be checks of your reading comprehension. If you do the reading for the day, take notes on it, reflect on it, and thereby understand its main claims and its overall structure, you should get an A every time. Your two lowest scores will be dropped.

#### 15% - Debate Contributions

There will be a total of five Thursday debates in class. Debaters will be on Zoom (non-remote students will be in class as well, of course). In advance of each debate, I will divide the class into five groups, one for each side of the issue under discussion, one composed of judges, and two teams of analysts. Everyone will get an opportunity to play every role (debater, judge, analyst) but otherwise the assignments are random.

One member of each of debating team will be randomly assigned to deliver their side's opening statement, and two others will be assigned to deliver their side's rebuttal. Both teams must circulate their opening statements to the entire class by 5PM EDT on the Tuesday prior to the debate. After opening statements and rebuttals are delivered, there will be a short open debate period. Throughout the debate, the judges will be evaluating the teams' arguments and recording their evaluations. After the open debate period ends, the judges will ask questions of each team (and will have an opportunity to ask brief follow-up questions if time permits). Then the judges will vote to decide who won. Analysts will be assigned to analyze the effectiveness of specific debaters. Since the debates will be recorded by Zoom, analysts will have the chance to review the recording to give feedback to the debaters in the subsequent days.

These debates are opportunities for you to practice thinking about and defending philosophical positions, regardless of whether it is yours or not (and regardless of whether you are a debater, judge, or analyst). The quality and quantity of your contributions will be the source of your grade. If you do your assigned job well, you will get an A. More information about the debates will be provided prior to each of them.

### 30% - Mid-Term Essay

#### 10% - First Part - Due September 8<sup>th</sup> at 5PM EDT via email

The first part of your mid-term essay is due via email to me relatively early in the semester. Your essay must be 3 pages or less (double spaced, 12pt Times New Roman, 1 inch margins). In it, you must articulate, argue for, and defend a version of one of the three kinds of positions on personal identity we explore in class. This defense must involve the presentation of one serious objection to your view (many such objections will be discussed

in class), as well as your response to this objection. More information about this essay assignment will be provided in class.

**20% - Final Draft - Due October 1<sup>st</sup> at 5PM EDT via email**

At the end of the first unit, the complete version of your mid-term essay must be turned in via email to me. It must be 6 pages or less (double spaced, 12pt Times New Roman, 1 inch margins). In this essay, you must stick to the same position on personal identity that you defended before. You must modify your argumentation and clean up your writing in light of my feedback on the first part of your essay (*given on Zoom -- see schedule below*), but you cannot substantially alter your previously expressed view. Then, you must explore the consequences you face in virtue of taking this view on personal identity. More specifically, you must take compatible positions in one of the four domains we have discussed (abortion, moral responsibility, vegetarianism, and the afterlife), and you must defend yourself against one serious objection in each domain (some such objections will be discussed in class). The goal is to stake out a cluster of views that are consistent and defensible.

**35% - Final Essay**

**5% - Rough Draft Presentation - Due November 10<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> on Panopto**

Your final essay concerns the topics of the second unit. It must be 8 pages or less (double spaced, 12pt Times New Roman, 1 inch margins). In this essay, you must first articulate, argue for, and defend a position on belief in God *or* on the existence of God. As part of your defense, you must present a serious objection to this position and attempt to show why it does not undermine your view. Next, you must argue for a position on causation, miracles, evil, or free will that is consistent—and interestingly connected—with your position on the existence of God. Finally, you must defend this latter position against a serious objection.

You will be assigned one of the two dates listed above to turn in an informal presentation of the rough draft of your final essay at the end of the semester. You will record yourself with Zoom and upload your recording to Panopto. This is simply a low stakes opportunity for you to get useful feedback from your classmates on your final essay. All you need to do is tell the class—in general terms—what positions you will take, how you will argue for them, and what objections you will consider. Then your classmates will ask you questions and give you feedback on Panopto in order to help you improve your essay. More information about this essay assignment will be provided in class.

**5% - Rough Draft Feedback - Due November 11<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> on Panopto**

In addition to presenting your rough draft, you will be assigned four other students' presentations to view, comment on, and ask questions about. Your goal is to help and encourage your classmates to clarify their ideas and argue more effectively. Your feedback will be due the day after the presentation in question was posted.

**25% - Final Draft - Due November 20<sup>th</sup> at 12:30PM EDT via email**

You must send me your final draft on this day and time.

**Grading Scale:**

$g \geq 93$	A	$80 > g \geq 77$	C+
$93 > g \geq 90$	A-	$77 > g \geq 73$	C
$90 > g \geq 87$	B+	$73 > g \geq 70$	C-
$87 > g \geq 83$	B	$70 > g \geq 60$	D
$83 > g \geq 80$	B-	$g < 60$	F

**Attendance:**

Attendance is required, but everyone gets one unexcused absence. Each unexcused absence after the first results in the deduction of a third of one's overall letter grade (e.g. if you have two unexcused absences and your final grade would have been an A had you always been present, it would move to an A- because of your second unexcused absence).

**Technology Policy:**

You are not allowed to use any screened device during class, whether it's a phone, a laptop, or something else, *unless directed to do so for the purposes of a debate or an in-class activity*. The purpose of this class is to begin to develop a philosophical worldview, and doing so requires active engagement with me and your peers. Screened devices divide your attention and create unnecessary distractions.

**Texts:**

All texts will be provided via Sakai. They will be labeled with the dates by which they need to be read.

**Honor Code:**

You must comply with Notre Dame's honor code at all times. You can read more about your responsibilities under the honor code here: [honorcode.nd.edu/the-honor-code/](http://honorcode.nd.edu/the-honor-code/). Academic integrity is a serious matter, and I will report any violations of the honor code. Note that all essays will be analyzed using plagiarism-prevention software. Ask me if you have any questions about the honor code.

**Accessibility:**

Students who have a disability, or who have questions about disability, should come and talk to me. Students can also contact the Office of Disability Services for a confidential discussion in the Sara Bea Learning Center for Students with Disabilities, or by phone at 574-631-7157. All information given to Disability Services is confidential and is shared only with your consent. We recommend that students who believe they may need an accommodation for this course contact Disability Services at their earliest opportunity. This is to ensure there is time to complete the process before accommodations are actually needed. Additional information about Disability Services and the process for requesting accommodations can be found at [sarabeadisabilityservices.nd.edu](http://sarabeadisabilityservices.nd.edu).

## Class Schedule

(subject to change depending on pace, class interests, etc.)

Tuesday, August 11 -                      *Introductions, Course Details, Preliminaries*

Unit 1: Personal Identity - Abortion, Moral Responsibility, Vegetarianism, and the Afterlife

Thursday, August 13 -                      *Personal Identity Intro, The Lockean View*

**Reading #1:** - Excerpts from Locke, J., (1700), *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

Tuesday, August 18 -                      *The Lockean View*

**Reading #2:** - Excerpts from Locke, J., (1700), *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

- Excerpts from DeGrazia, D., (2005), "Human Persons," in *Human Identity and Bioethics*.

**Quiz #1**

Thursday, August 20 -                      *The Biological View*

**Reading #3:** - Excerpts from DeGrazia, D., (2005), "Human Persons," in *Human Identity and Bioethics*.

- Excerpts from Olson, E., (1999), "The Biological Approach," in *The Human Animal: Personal Identity Without Psychology*.

Tuesday, August 25 -                      *The Dualist View*

**Reading #4:** - Excerpts from Swinburne, R., (1984), "Personal Identity: The Dualist Theory," in S. Shoemaker & R. Swinburne (eds.): *Personal Identity*.

**Quiz #2**

Thursday, August 27 -                      *Debate*

**Debate #1:**    **The Lockean View vs. The Biological View**

Tuesday, September 1 -                      *Abortion*

**Reading #5:** - Excerpts from Thomson, J., (1971), "A Defense of Abortion," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1.

**Quiz #3**

Thursday, September 3 -                      *Abortion*

**Reading #6:** - Excerpts from Marquis, D., (1989), "Why Abortion is Immoral," *The Journal of Philosophy* 86.

Tuesday, September 8 -                      *Moral Responsibility*

**Reading #7:** - Excerpts from Glannon, W., (1998), "Moral Responsibility and Personal Identity," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 35.

**First Part of Mid-Term Essay due at 5PM EDT via email**

**Start of one-on-one Zoom tutorials (sign up on linked Google Sheet)**

Thursday, September 10 -      *Debate*

**Debate #2: Abortion is Permissible vs. Abortion is Impermissible**

Tuesday, September 15 -      *Vegetarianism*

- Reading #8:** - Excerpts from Descartes, R., (1637), *Discourse on Method, Principles*, letter to More from Feb. 5, 1649, letter to Plempius from Oct. 3, 1637.  
 - Excerpts from Malebranche, N., (1676), *Defense against the Accusation of Monsieur de la Ville*.  
 - Excerpts from Singer, P., (1975), *Animal Liberation*.

**Quiz #4**

Thursday, September 17 -      *Vegetarianism*

- Reading #9** - Excerpts from McMahan, J., (2002), *The Ethics of Killing: Problems at the Margins of Life*.

Tuesday, September 22 -      *Vegetarianism*

- Reading #10:** - Excerpts from Kant, I., (1785), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.  
 - Excerpts from Kant, I., (1784), *Lectures on Ethics*.  
 - Excerpts from Carruthers, P., (2011), "Animal Mentality: Its Character, Extent, and Moral Significance."

**Quiz #5**

Thursday, September 24 -      *Debate*

**Debate #3: Vegetarianism vs. Not End of one-on-one Zoom tutorials**

Tuesday, September 29 -      *The Afterlife*

- Reading #11:** - Excerpts from Hick, J., (1992), "The Recreation of the Psycho-Physical Person," in P. Edwards (ed.): *Immortality*.  
 - Excerpts from Van Inwagen, P., (1992), "The Possibility of Resurrection," in P. Edwards (ed.): *Immortality*.

**Quiz #6**

Thursday, October 1 -      *The Afterlife*

- Reading #12:** - Excerpts from Hume, D., (1777), "On the Immortality of the Soul", in *Two Essays*.

**Mid-Term Essay due at 5PM EDT via email**

Unit 2: God - Causation, Miracles, Evil, and Free Will

Tuesday, October 6 -      *Leibniz's System - Arguments for Theism*

- Reading #13:** - Excerpts from Leibniz, G.W., (1697), *On the Ultimate Origination of Things*, excerpts from Leibniz, G.W., (1710), *Theodicy*, and excerpts from Leibniz, G.W., (1714), *Monadology*.  
 - Excerpts from Leibniz, G.W., (1695), *A Specimen of Dynamics*, and excerpts from Hume, D., (1779), *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

- Excerpts from Pascal, B., (1670), *Pensées de M. Pascal sur la religion et sur quelques autres sujets*.

### Quiz #7

Thursday, October 8 - *Leibniz's System - Creation, Causation, and Miracles*

**Reading #14:** - Excerpts from Leibniz, G.W., (1686), *Discourse on Metaphysics*.

Tuesday, October 13 - *The Problem of Evil + Leibniz's Solution*

**Reading #15:** - Excerpts from Hume, D., (1779), *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

- Excerpts from Leibniz, G.W., (1710), *Theodicy*.

### Quiz #8

Thursday, October 15 - *A Different Solution to the Problem of Evil*

**Reading #16:** - Excerpts from Van Inwagen, P., (2008), *The Problem of Evil*, Oxford University Press.

Tuesday, October 20 - *Hume's System - Arguments for Agnosticism*

**Reading #17:** - Excerpts from Hume, D., (1739), *A Treatise of Human Nature*.

- Excerpts from Hume, D., (1748), *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*.

- Excerpts from Hume, D., (1779), *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

### Quiz #9

Thursday, October 22 - *Debate*

**Debate #4:** **Theism vs. Not**

Tuesday, October 27 - *Hume's System - Causation and Miracles*

**Reading #18:** - Excerpts from Hume, D., (1739), *A Treatise of Human Nature*.

- Excerpts from Hume, D., (1748), *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*.

### Quiz #10

Thursday, October 29 - *Compatibilism*

**Reading #19:** - Excerpts from Hume, D., (1748), *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*.

- Excerpts from Leibniz, G.W., (1686), *Discourse on Metaphysics*.

- Excerpts from Leibniz, G.W., (1710), *Theodicy*.

Tuesday, November 3 - *Incompatibilism*

**Reading #20:** - Excerpts from Van Inwagen, P., (1975), "The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism", *Philosophical Studies* 27.

- Excerpts from Ginet, C., (1989), "Reasons Explanation of Action: An Incompatibilist Account," *Philosophical Perspectives* 3.

### Quiz #11

Thursday, November 5 - *Debate*

**Debate #5:** **Compatibilism vs. Incompatibilism**

Tuesday, November 10 - *Rough Draft Presentations Due*  
**No class! (Essay Workshop on Panopto)**

Thursday, November 12 - *Rough Draft Presentations Due*  
**No class! (Essay Workshop on Panopto)**

Friday, November 20 - *Final Essays Due*  
**Final Essay due at 12:30 PM EDT via email**