Capstone Seminar for Philosophy Majors:
Philosophical Method in Dialogue and Dialectic

spring semester 2015, MW 13:00–14:20
530 South Kedzie Hall (SKH)
https://loncapa.msu.edu

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office hours: M 13:00–15:00, & by appointment
353-9492 (during office hours)

Required texts and subscription:

i. If you aren’t taking notes or writing in the margins, you aren’t doing philosophy.
ii. Always bring your book to class.
iii. The first two books are also on reserve at MSU Libraries.

Russell, Bertrand 1912. The Problems of Philosophy (free: Google it)
a philosophy book of your choice related to your focus in the course
Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews <http://ndpr.nd.edu> subscribe

Course description and goals: Capstone courses are designed to appeal to a variety of interests and approaches to philosophy on the assumption that you have already taken enough courses to have both particular interests and a preferred methodological approach to philosophy. A capstone course should provide a venue for philosophical reflection and a venue for practicing philosophy; should enable you to identify, articulate, and defend your own coherent set of philosophical positions against rivals; and should prepare you for leading an examined life—regardless of your post-graduation plans. It should introduce the breadth and suggest the depth of philosophy so that, by the end of the course, you can say what philosophy has been, is, and ought to be. We will engage in philosophical dialectic through dialogue with the readings and one another. A goal of the course is for you to improve your ability to express yourself concisely and clearly, orally and in writing, about complex issues—which requires practice at (i) evaluating the arguments and positions of others, (ii) rationally supporting and opposing others’ views, and (iii) thoughtfully developing views of your own. Success in the course depends on your preparation for class time: you will need to read the texts as many times as it takes to understand them, discuss the readings with others before class, and always prepare reactions to the reading assignments. Class time is an opportunity to try out ideas and lines of argument, to get things clarified, and to hear constructive criticism; it should represent about one-fourth of the time you spend on the course. Like all philosophy courses, this one should improve your skills at thinking, writing, and oral expression.

Schedule of readings, assignments, and colloquia:

January
13 Introductions and inventories
15 discussion of books and interests
16 (Friday) 3 p.m., 109 SKH, Stephen Gardiner, University of Washington, “If a Climate Emergency is Possible, Is Everything Permitted? Reflections on Some Ethically Slippery Arguments for Geoengineering”
19 (Monday) 3 p.m., 107 SKH, Annual Martin Luther King Program, “King and Gandhi: Critical Reflections on the Philosophy of Nonviolence”
20 “interviews” about graduation requirements and plans, 501 SKH: Timm, Rafa, Diana, Kelly Su
February
2  “interviews” about graduation requirements and plans, 501 SKH: Dan, Michael, Michael

March
3 Becky Brewer, Career Consultant, will visit the class to discuss
10 Draft of writing assignment 1 due. Bring to class two copies of your draft, Weston 2009, RUBBER STAMPS, and three blank peer review forms.

April
2 …still in Vancouver. Wittgenstein Symposium: McCracken Distinguished Lectureship, time and venue
tba. Danielle Moyal-Sharrock, University of Hertfordshire, “The Impact of Wittgenstein’s Certainty”

Philosophical dialogue and dialectic 1–2 (see reading on LON-CAPA). What does it mean to “think philosophically”? Do philosophers bring anything unique to public fora?

Conference preparations, including moving the furniture.

10–11 (Friday–Saturday) MSU UNDERGRADUATE CONFERENCE, SKH 530, begins 3:00 p.m. Friday. Ian Gold, McGill University, “Strange Beliefs”

Philosophical dialogue and dialectic 3 (see reading on LON-CAPA). What does “philosophy is a way of life” mean?

research presentations and comments

17 (Friday) John Grey, “‘That Exceptional Order of Things’: Anne Conway’s Objection to Cartesian Ontology”

research presentations and comments

Due: seminar paper and two peer reviews from classmates. I need both a hard copy for grading, and a doc or docx version by email attachment for outcomes assessment. Note that, if you are comparing your early paper to a later paper other than the seminar paper for this course, you must also submit a copy of that later paper by email attachment.

May 4 Monday, 12:45–2:45 p.m. (final exam time), comparative essay due by email attachment (doc or docx).

Observations, advice, and policies:

1. Classroom etiquette. Turn off phones and similar noisy devices; give the class your undivided attention. Refrain from private conversations during class because they are distracting to others, disrupting the ebb and flow of dialogue. If you must arrive late or leave early, sit near the door. Robust constructive criticism is essential to dialectic; but it should be aimed carefully at evidence, arguments, and methods—not at the person making the claims.

2. I keep office hours from long practice, warning you in advance if I anticipate some unusual commitment that will keep me away; but I enjoy office hours when students visit, so don’t hesitate to drop in—no appointment necessary. If the door is open, please come in (i.e., don’t wait around for someone else to leave). If posted hours are inconvenient, please make an appointment by phone or email. I answer email promptly when I am in town.

3. Return of written work: I return your work one week from its submission (except if illness or travel interferes). You will receive an additional .5 on your assignment for each class period that I fail to return your work.

4. Do your own work cooperatively. Do not submit for credit in this course work completed for another course; and do not submit work that is not your own—ever. You are strongly encouraged to study, discuss, and dispute with others everything we do. The formation of study groups is a good idea, and you are not in competition.

5. Why there are no make-ups: It is your responsibility to find out whether ad hoc assignments have been made during classes you miss (study groups can help); in-class work cannot be made up because the circumstances cannot be reconfigured. If you are too ill to attend class, written work can be submitted by email attachment. If serious illness or an emergency prevents your turning something in by the time the class meets, you have 48 hours from the time of your recovery to submit the work. (I do not want to see documentation.)

6. Academic Freedom and Integrity. Article 2.3.3 of the Student Rights and Responsibilities states that “the student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and pro-
professional standards.” In addition, the Department of Philosophy adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in General Student Regulations 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades, and in the All-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades, which are included in Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide. Students who commit an act of academic dishonesty may receive a 0.0 on the assignment or in the course.

7. **Accommodation for Students with Disabilities.** Students with disabilities should contact the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities to establish reasonable accommodation.

**Oral presentations (25%):** Formal presentations to the class will include (i) a book review of 8–10 minutes, (ii) a brief research presentation, (iii) a research presentation of 17–20 minutes, and (iv) a comment of 8–10 minutes on someone else’s research presentation.

**Participation (25%):** Because this is a seminar, there will be no lecturing but much oral and written dialogue to advance the dialectic. For every class period, you are expected to have engaged the assigned reading in detail, and to be prepared to discuss it critically—to do philosophy. (i) You should be able to articulate at least one question or problem left hanging by the reading; or to explain some question or problem that was resolved for you as a result of the reading. Practice bringing your ideas forward, noting carefully what your classmates say, and chipping in when your own views of the reading are relevant to those of a classmate. (ii) You’ll write a minimum of three peer reviews, graded S/U. (iii) You’ll write several referee reports as well, also graded S/U. (iv) There will be a variety of ways to participate in the undergraduate conference but attendance is required. You can boost the participation part of your grade by attendance at departmental colloquia and the graduate conference.

**Writing (25%):** The course fulfills the university’s tier-two writing requirement, and there will be several types of graded writing assignments. (i) **Ad hoc writing assignments (≥6),** sprinkled through the semester, are aimed directly at the problems identified in the preliminary inventory and Assignment 1. I will grade them S/U, to be computed with your remaining writing grades. Short writing assignments will not be announced in advance so, if you miss one, it counts as a zero. (ii) Assignment 1: a solo or co-written argumentative paper of 1,180–1,200 words in formal English and correctly formatted, on a topic from the readings, closely following the principles of Weston 2009 and Guidelines for Philosophy Papers on LON-CAPA. If co-written, both authors are responsible for the intellectual content of the paper, and the grade will be the same for both. The first draft will be critiqued in class by your peers to assist you in strengthening it. Using your own assessment of the comments and suggestions you receive on the first draft, you will turn in both the final version of the paper and the peer reviews you received. You are expected to practice footnoteing your gratitude for the help you receive from others. Late argumentative papers drop in value by .5 per class period. (iii) Assignment 2: a book review of 800 words in formal English and correctly formatted in the style of Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews (the book you have chosen to read in connection with your term paper).

**Seminar paper (25%).** A co-written or solo term paper of 2,990–3,000 words. The seminar paper must address a course-related topic, and must identify and attempt to resolve an interesting, difficult, and important philosophical question or problem raised in the readings or the book you review. Seminar participants are encouraged to meet with me to explore possible topics and the structure of the paper—a topic for class discussion as well! Note on the schedule the paper milestones during the semester [dates by which to submit a title and abstract, and to submit a literature review]. I will comment on abstracts, titles, and reviews that are submitted in advance of the due date, time permitting. See LON-CAPA for more information.

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1 If another commitment will prevent you from attending, and you tell me in advance, you may substitute a second short paper.