Knowledge, Explanation and the Cosmos
Philosophy 285Lg – Spring 2009

Time: Tuesdays and Thursday, 2:00 – 3:15
Location: THH 301
Instructor: Jake Ross
Email: jacobmro@usc.edu
Office: STO 115
Office Hours: I’ll be available to meet with students immediately after class every Thursday. Meetings can extend until 5:15. If that time is not convenient, email me and we can set up an appointment for another time.

1 Requirements

- Weekly Assignments: 20%
- 1st Paper (4-6 pages, due February 24th): 22.5%
- 2nd Paper (4-6 pages, due April 14th): 22.5%
- Midterm Exam: 12.5%
- Final Exam: 12.5%
- Class Participation: 10%

2 Weekly Assignments

Every week, students must submit an assignment on the reading for that week. Each assignment should consist of the following two clearly labeled sections:

A. A brief summary of the readings for the week. The total length for this section should be around one page, double-spaced. If there are several readings for a given week, write one paragraph on each reading.

B. Questions/comments OR Supplementary exercise: Unless you hear otherwise from your TA, section B should consist in your questions and/or comments on the readings for the week. If there are several readings, you may give questions/comments on more than one if you like, or you can focus on just one of the readings. The total length for this section should be around half a page, double-spaced. However, one some weeks, your TA will ask for you to do an exercise related to the readings for the week. In such cases, this exercise will replace the questions/comments section of the weekly assignment.
You will be required to submit each weekly assignment twice. First, it must be sent as an e-mail attachment to your TA. This is due on the week for which the reading is assigned, either before the lecture on Tuesday or before the meeting of your discussion section, whichever is first. On March 3rd, you will be required to submit a bundle consisting of the six weekly assignments written up to that point. And again on April 28th, you will be required to submit a bundle consisting in the six assignments written since the submission of the first bundle. The bundles must include only assignments that you submitted on time electronically, and they must be identical with the ones submitted electronically.

Many of the readings for the course are very difficult, so when you are writing the weekly assignments, don’t be worried if you don’t fully understand the readings. All that matters is that you demonstrate that you have read them and thought about them.

3 Lateness Policy

Late papers will receive a penalty of 1/3 of a grade point the first day after they are due, and 1/6 of a grade point every subsequent day. Late weekly assignments will not be accepted.

4 Texts

All readings will be available online at http://www-rcf.usc.edu/~jacobmro/phil285.html. A password is required to access the readings. It will be provided in class.

5 Statements for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.
6 Readings

6.1 Forms of Reasoning

January 13th: THE NATURE OF ARGUMENTS

- Brian Skyrms: “The Basics of Logic”
- No weekly assignment.

January 20th: THE PROBLEM OF INDUCTION

- Peter Lipton: “Induction”

January 27th: REASONING WITH PROBABILITIES

- Brian Skyrms: “The Probability Calculus”

February 3rd: EXPLANATION AND SIMPLICITY

- Gilbert Harman: “Inference to the Best Explanation”
- Alan Baker: “Simplicity”

6.2 Theological Explanations

February 10th: THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

- Peter van Inwagen: “Necessary Being: The Cosmological Argument”
- Alexander Pruss: “Ex Nihilo Nihil Fit”

February 17th: THE ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN

- Richard Swinburne: “Argument from the Fine-Tuning of the Universe”
- Elliott Sober: “The Design Argument”

February 24th: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

- Tim Hold: “The Argument from Evil”
- Klaas Kraay: “Theism, Possible Worlds, and the Multiverse”
- First paper due; no weekly assignment due.

6.3 Multiverse Explanations

March 3rd: INTRODUCING THE MULTIVERSE

- Robert Nozick: selections from Philosophical Explanations
- Bernard Carr and George Ellis: “Universe or Multiverse”
- First bundle due.
March 10th: Possible Worlds

- David Lewis: “Possible Worlds”
- David Lewis: selections from On the Plurality of Worlds

March 24th: Self-Locating Belief

- Adam Elga: “Self-Locating Belief and the Sleeping Beauty Problem”
- Nick Bostrom: “Self-Location and Observation Selection Theory”

March 31st: The Many Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Physics

- David Alpert: “Superpositions”
- David Deutsch: “Shadows”

6.4 Philosophical Implications

April 7th: The Nature of Time

- Michael Lockwood: selections from The Labyrinth of Time

April 14th: Freedom and Responsibility

- Galen Strawson: “The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility”
- Susan Wolf: “Freedom within Reason”
- Second Paper due; no weekly assignment due.

April 21st: Personal Identity

- Derek Parfit: selections from Reasons and Persons
- David Lewis: “Survival and Identity”

April 28th: The Meaning of Life

- Robert Nozick: “Philosophy and the Meaning of Life”
- Second Bundle due.