

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2015-16

Philosophy 4035: Occasionalism

Fall Term 2015
T 11:30-2:30
STVH 3101

Instructor: Benjamin Hill
StvH 3142: Tu 10:30-11:30, W 12:30-1:30
519-661-2111 x80143
Email: Please use OWL
bhill28@uwo.ca

DESCRIPTION

Occasionalism is principally a doctrine about efficient causation — the only efficient cause is God. Historically, it became prominent in among Cartesians in the seventeenth century. But conceptually, it provided a crucial background to Hume’s critiques of necessary connection and his reductive account of causation. The Humeanism that has long dominated analytic philosophy has recently been challenged by the revival of causal powers within the philosophy of science.

This course will be a historically informed account of how the traditional arguments for occasionalism can be brought to bear on the contemporary revival of causal powers within the philosophy of science. The course focus first on occasionalism as background to Hume’s thinking about causality. Then it will consider the relevance and significance of the occasionalists’ arguments and insights within the context of the revival of causal powers by Cartwright, Sankey, Ellis, and Mumford (among others).

TEXTS

Texts and assignments will be posted directly onto the class’ OWL site.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this course include:

1. Being able to describe and articulate the doctrine of Occasionalism;
2. Being able to describe and articulate the primary argument(s) presented for and against Occasionalism throughout history;
3. Being able to critically evaluate the primary arguments for and against Occasionalism;
4. Understanding the significance of Occasionalism and the arguments for it for the contemporary revival of Powers within the philosophy of science;
5. Being able to describe and articulate the issues surrounding the contemporary revival of Powers within the philosophy of science;
6. Understanding the consequences of the contemporary revival of Powers with the philosophy of science for the issues of: (a) the ontology of properties; (b) the transference of properties between things; and (c) instrumentalism vs realism.

REQUIREMENTS

Final Examination (0 %) There will be no final examination administered in this course.

Short Paper Assignment (15 % each; 30% total) There will be two short paper assignments (1000-1250 words). The first short paper will be due at midnight on Oct 13. The second will be due at midnight on Nov. 3. The purpose of the short paper assignments is to explore a particular argument for or against occasionalism, to develop a philosophically interesting and significant thesis regarding the argument, and to provide a sketch to an argument in defense of that thesis. Each paper must address a distinct argument from the primary literature. It is permissible for students to use one of their short papers as a basis for their final term paper.

Oral Presentation (20%) Students are required to orally present drafts of their final term papers. Each presentation will last for 30 minutes. Students should allow for 5 minutes of questions. The presentations should be considered an opportunity to get valuable, critical feedback regarding the thesis and argument of their term papers from their peers. They should aim to present complete and detailed versions of their arguments. **Peer Assessments: All students will be required to provide written assessments of each oral presentation. (Failure to provide an author with peer feedback will result in a 3% reduction of the student's own grade for his/her oral presentation.)** Feedback forms will be provided to the students and students will have 7-10 minutes after each presentation to complete and submit their feedback forms to the instructor. The peer feedback should be professional and respectful in tone but also provide critical perspective to the presenter.

Final Term Paper (40 %) All students are required to submit a 2000-2500 word term paper. **Students are required to meet with the instructor to discuss his/her term paper and to receive approval for their project. The deadline for the meeting and approval of the term paper is Tuesday Nov. 10. The penalty for failing to meet and gain approval of the term paper topic is a 10% reduction of the student's grade for the term paper.** The paper is due at midnight December 8. It is the student's responsibility to make sure that the paper is uploaded or emailed *before* midnight according to the upload/email timestamp. Take steps to ensure that your paper is not refused or counted late because of a slight error in timing. Late papers are assessed a 5% deduction per day until Thursday December 10. No papers can be accepted after midnight on Thursday December 10 per departmental and Senate policy. As of midnight December 10, all students who have failed to submit a paper will be awarded a score of 0. Papers failing to fall within the required word count will not be accepted and will not be considered submissions; they will be awarded a score of 0 for the assignment.

Each paper should *defend* a philosophically important and interesting *thesis*. What this means is that your papers should not be simply expository, but must be analytic papers in that they will present an argument in defense of a substantive philosophical claim. There are a variety of types of acceptable papers ranging from *analyzing* an argument or doctrine, philosophically *assessing* an argument or doctrine, *interpreting* the doctrine or argument of a certain figure, *critiquing an interpretation* that another has offered of a figure's doctrine or argument, or *defending an interpretation* against the critique of another. Authors should clearly state their thesis, construct a clear, coherent, and plausible argument in support of their thesis, and

anticipate and respond to one or two potential objections to their thesis or argument. Papers will be graded on the following grounds: the historical and philosophical significance of the thesis; the power and adequacy of the argument marshalled in defense of the thesis; the use of the primary texts; the nature of the secondary sources selected and how they are used in the argument; the significance, interest, and power of the potential objection(s) raised; and the clarity, coherence, and plausibility with which the authors dispatch the objection(s) raised. The foci should be on the thesis and the argument developed in defense of it, but in so far as clarity, grammatical and semantical ability, and style are necessary preconditions for the power or impact of the thesis and its defense, they will be taken into account in the grading of each paper. Because thesis selection and development are part of the philosophical process and will be graded here, topics and paper questions are not provided to the students. Students who have questions about this are strongly encouraged to ask for assistance or advice at the earliest possible time. Students are strongly encouraged to seek out and use only reliable, scholarly vetted and peer-reviewed sources. For example, wikipedia and self-published web or blog postings are prima facie frowned upon and should be used with extreme caution. Students choosing to use such material rather than peer-reviewed articles and books or webposting recommended by the instructor should be prepared to justify his or her selection and use of such material.

Attendance (05 %) All students are required to attend every class. A sign-in sheet will be distributed. Attendance does not connote mere physical presence in the classroom. It requires paying attention and not engaging in rude, disruptive, or disrespectful behavior during the class. Examples of such behavior include, but are not limited to: texting, checking email, reading the newspaper, reading material for another class, chatting or joking during class, surfing the internet, internet shopping, etc.. The instructor reserves the right to strike any person's name from the attendance roll for engaging in the above, or any other such disruptive or disrespectful behavior. Students are awarded 2.70 points per hour of class attended.

Class Participation (05 %) Students are required to participate in the classroom discussions of the course material whenever appropriate. At the end of the term the instructor will make a determination of the student's participation based on his perception of the quantity and the quality of the student's contributions to class discussion throughout the term. Students should note that it is difficult to justify assigning a greater value for class participation than the value assigned for attendance. This is because of the principle that one cannot contribute to a discussion when one is not present at or attending to the discussion. There are numerous ways for a student to contribute to the conversation about the material. These ways are not limited to raising questions or objection in class or answering questions or objections in class. For instance, one may contribute to the bulletin boards or forums on OWL or one may meet with me to discuss the material during office hours. The aim is for a broad and inclusive conception of what constitutes class participation, but whatever form it takes, it must clearly display a deep, active, and sustained engagement with the readings and course material as well as further the class's comprehension of the material.

AUDIT

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for

student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://www.uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html>. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.