

80-150/Fall 2003
Nature of Reason
Course Description (Buldt)

• **Lecturer information:**

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• **TA information:**

- Frederick D. Eberhardt (graduate student, philosophy)
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- **Goal.** The goal of this course is to provide you with a concise introduction to three core areas of philosophy – logic, philosophy of science, ethics – and to the formal methods that are employed at CMU’s philosophy department to study them. The conceptual foundation of these formal methods and its development through the history of Western thought is what will be put in focus.

The underlying idea is that it is not important to fill your head with dull and boring facts to be learned by heart, but to promote an understanding of what and why contemporary philosophy does what it does.

- **Format.** The format of the course is as follows. The above-stated goal will be achieved by reading and discussing selected chapters of our textbook (for which see below)—this will take place partly in your study, partly during recitations on Fridays—and by additional classroom work on selected topics, partly supplementary to the contents of the textbook. On Mondays and Wednesdays there will be a mixture of (short) lectures and (long) discussions on selected topics; on Fridays, during recitation, selected chapters of the textbook will be discussed.

Make sure that, in addition to lectures and recitations, you stop by at my or the TAs’ office whenever you feel the need or the wish to talk things over; usually, we will be happy to discuss with you whenever you drop by or to make an appointment whenever you cannot make it for the ‘official’ office hours or you meet us ‘unavailable.’

- **Literature.** The textbook for this class is:

Clark Glymour: *Thinking Things Through. An Introduction to Philosophical Issues and Achievements*, Cambridge: MIT, 1998.

The chapters of the textbook to be read and thoroughly prepared for the respective recitations are indicated in the syllabus.

- **Requirements.** As a course at the 100 level there are no formal requirements. One requirement, though, is the willingness to work hard. This attitude is necessary to successfully prepare chapters of the textbook for recitations on Friday. (A good idea is to form small groups which discuss the assigned reading before recitation on Friday.) If you feel lost make sure to stop by at one of our offices as soon as possible—this is what office hours are good for!

- **Assignments.** In order to successfully participate in the course and in addition to the assigned reading you have to submit four written essays and to take two written in-class examinations. Here are the details:
 - Three short essays (each approximately 600–800 words long, which roughly amounts to three typed pages) which are related to previous class work. There will be a written homework assignment one week in advance; the respective due dates are indicated in the syllabus. Please, do yourself a favor and point your browser to <http://www.pitt.edu/~rclifton/WritingPhilosophy.html> (a one page summary) or to <http://www.cofc.edu/~portmord/tips.htm> (a 10-page summary, incl. further URLs) for information on how to write a (philosophy) paper well.
 - Two written in-class examinations. Each exam consists of a couple of short questions, the answers to which should prove that you have arrived at an understanding of the basic issues in deductive reasoning (1st test) and probabilistic reasoning respectively (2nd test).
 - One final essay (approximately 2000 words long, i. e., seven to eight pages long) whose topic can be freely chosen, but which should bear at least some relation to the course. Before submitting the final essay, I strongly encourage you to submit for review a draft version of it at the date indicated in the syllabus.
- **Grades.** Grades for essays will be assigned according to content and style; a few quick remarks on both, since both are of equal importance, are enclosed (entitled “On writing”). The final grade (= 100%) will be calculated as follows: The best two out of the three essays make each 20% of the final grade (i.e., $2 \cdot 20 = 40\%$). The in-class exams contribute 15% each (i.e., $2 \cdot 15 = 30\%$) and the final essay 30% to the final grade. This final grade can be raised in case of and according to a good or excellent oral participation in class. (On the other hand, a lateness penalty of one-third grade per date late applies to the submission of the essays.)