COURSE OUTLINE

PHIL 301 PHILOSOPHICAL FUNDAMENTALS

Prof. Eric Lewis
Office: Leacock 908
Office Hours: 1:00-3:00 Monday

This course is required of, and open only to, students who have begun an undergraduate honours degree in philosophy, and who have completed Philosophy 210 or the equivalent.

Philosophical Fundamentals is intended to help you develop skills translatable across philosophical topics, eras and approaches. In particular we will focus on extracting arguments from texts, reading texts critically and carefully, and engaging in collective philosophical analysis and debate focusing on methods of making arguments and positions clearer, discovering background assumptions, and moving philosophical positions forward. In other words, we will collectively think about ways of strengthening arguments, as much as criticising them, and develop skills for creating inclusive and productive philosophical dialogue.

This is not a lecture course. Students should be aware that they will be responsible in every class for much of the discussion.

REQUIRED READING: required readings will be posted on the MyCourses page for the course. Students should come to class prepared to discuss the reading assigned for each week.

Course Requirements: Each student will be tasked with motivating the class discussion for one week. This will involve introducing/summarizing the readings, suggesting questions for discussion and guiding the discussion. (20%). A week after the session you lead you will turn in a write up of the presentation, incorporating the main points of the discussion (15%). Every student will submit a discussion question every week (of approximately ½ a page), and be prepared, if asked to address their question, and the others. This will be submitted via MyCourses the Monday before the class (15%) General class participation/discussion (10%). A term paper, precise topic approved/discussed with instructor in advance (40%)

We will focus on topics in the philosophy of music, in particular improvised music, using these topics as motivations for explorations of more general philosophical problems. Central themes will be:

1. What is music? Does it have any essential features, what is its ontological status, and the ontological status of assorted entities that music seems to involve?
2. Improvising with Machines. What might improvising machine systems tell us about human intentionality and subjectivity?
3. Music, identity and politics. How might improvised music discharge political/social functions, particularly functions related to acts of individual and collective identity formation?
4. Representation and Music. Is, or can, music be a representational art?
5. Expression and Music. What does it mean for music to be happy or sad?
6. Improvisation, Empathy and Theory of Mind. What does improvisation tell us about others, and how are we able while improvising to respond in musically appropriate ways in real time seemingly with no planning?
The more general topics each theme will explore include:

1. ontology—what do we think exists and why?
2. Intentionality and agency—what do we think is distinctive of human behaviour?
3. Identity and its Expression—how are identities created, performed and contested?
4. What are representations? Why might this matter to art?
5. What are emotions and the conditions for their presence?
6. What is the correct Theory of Mind, and how is it related to intersubjectivity?

In particular, we will see how these themes are often interrelated in ways often not obviously apparent, and how and why a consideration of improvisatory practices is a fertile site for examining these questions.