

Time: M/W 5-6:20

Location: 109 Solis Hall

Office Hours: Tu/Th 4-5

Instructor: Charles T. Sebens

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will be divided into four units:

- I. Skepticism
- II. Time
- III. Morality
- IV. Language

In the first unit we will consider whether the possibility that things may not be as they appear undermines our knowledge of the external world. In this unit we will also learn how to properly formulate philosophical arguments. In the next unit we will explore the nature of time and questions of personal identity, using thought experiments involving teleportation and time travel. In the third unit we will look at ancient and modern approaches to morality, connecting issues of concern for others with the earlier discussion of personal identity. In the final unit we will attempt to shed light on morality by asking what we really mean when we make moral claims. Continuing our discussion of language, we will finish the course by examining a number of paradoxes.

In this course you will be exposed to many different areas of philosophy, including (in order of appearance): epistemology, logic, metaphysics, philosophy of science, philosophy of religion, ancient philosophy, ethics, philosophy of language, metaethics, and philosophy of mathematics. We will see that there are many important connections between these different parts of philosophy. This course will cover a lot of material. But, you don't need to master all of it. You will write one essay on each unit and for each essay you will be able to focus on the piece of that unit that interests you most. In the future, you can take focused courses in the specific areas of philosophy that you want to learn more about.

ASSIGNMENTS

Short Essays (96%, 24% each)

You will write one short essay on each of the four units. Each essay should be between 1,000 and 1,400 words. A hard copy must be submitted in class and an electronic copy submitted through the course website. You will receive further guidance on the essays in class on 10/9.

Peer Review (4%)

On 11/1 and 12/6 we will conduct peer reviews of your second and fourth essays. You must bring four printed drafts of your essay for each peer review. In class you will complete worksheets to provide feedback on your fellow students' essays. Of the 4% of your final grade that comes from the peer reviews, 2% will be for having four copies of a *complete* draft of your essay for both peer reviews (nothing left in outline form, within the word limits, etc.) and 2% will be for giving satisfactory feedback to your peers at each of the peer reviews.

READINGS

There is no textbook for this course. All readings are available on the course website.

It is important that you do the required readings in advance of the class for which they are listed. You will get more out of lecture if you come to class prepared.

Optional readings are provided so that you have a place to go if you want to delve deeper into a certain topic or to get a different perspective. You do not need to read them as we go, but they will be useful resources when you are working on your essays. Lectures will often include topics that are not discussed in the required reading. The optional readings are a good place to look for discussion of those topics.

Much of the time you spend learning philosophy will be spent reading and re-reading the texts. Reading philosophy is challenging. I recommend that you re-read confusing parts of the text and take notes, bringing prepared questions with you to class or office hours. Note that the readings will not all be of the same length or at the same level of difficulty. Some will require more time than others.

On some days I have noted works of fiction that are relevant to the day's topic (for entertainment and for a vivid illustration of the philosophical problem at hand). The short stories will be available on the course website. The video sources are not provided, but can easily be found.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

It will be very difficult to do well in this course if you do not attend class consistently. Writing strong essays requires understanding the material thoroughly and developing your own ideas and arguments. If you try to teach yourself from the readings, you will miss out on the opportunity to have any misunderstandings corrected and to practice thinking like a philosopher by discussing your ideas in class. Also, the different lectures are more closely connected than it might appear and missing one will make others more difficult to understand.

Engaged participation is important to your success in this course. Learning to raise questions and present your own ideas in a skilled, accurate, professional, and persuasive manner is an invaluable skill in life. By engaging in class discussion you will improve your ability to do this and come to understand the material covered in the course better.

During discussion you will often find yourself disagreeing with other students. When this happens, strive to be respectful. If you can't understand why someone would believe *that*, then you have something to learn from your interlocutor. The most compelling arguments are offered by those who see the appeal of the other side.

SCHEDULE

[Note page numbers, chapters, and sections! Sometimes you don't have to read the whole text.]

UNIT I: SKEPTICISM

10/2 **Skeptical Scenarios**

Reading: None

Optional: *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), Parts I and II, Descartes

Fiction: *The Matrix* (1999), the Wachowskis (136 min.)

The Truman Show (1998), Weir (103 min.)

Inception (2010), Nolan (148 min.)

“A Brain in a Vat” (1986), Pollock, from *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge*

“The Tunnel Under the World” (1955), Pohl; also available as a radio adaptation for *X Minus One* (1956)

10/4 **Formulating the Skeptical Argument**

Reading: *Epistemology* (2003), Feldman, pg. 1-7, 109-112, 114-122

“Logical Toolkit” (2013), Perry, Bratman, and Fischer, in *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, 6th ed, pg. 9-14

Optional: “Proof of an External World” (1939), G. E. Moore, pg. 165-170

10/9 **Fallibilism / How to Write a Philosophy Essay**

Reading: *Epistemology* (2003), Feldman, pg. 122-128

“A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper” (2008), Rippon

Optional: *Conjectures and Refutations* (1963), Popper, pg. 200-206

Writing Philosophy: A Student's Guide to Writing Philosophical Essays (2006), Chapter 3: Rules of Style and Content for Philosophical Writing, Vaughn

❖Unit I essay topics distributed.❖

10/11 **Inference to the Best Explanation**

Reading: *Epistemology* (2003), Feldman, pg. 141-142, 145-151

Optional: *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912), Chapter 2: The Existence of Matter, Russell

10/16 **Two Strategies for Dissolving the Skeptical Challenge**

Reading: “Elusive Knowledge” (1996), Lewis, pg. 549-554

“The Matrix as Metaphysics” (2003), Chalmers, Sections 1-5

Optional: *Epistemology* (2003), Feldman, pg. 152-155

Reason, Truth and History (1981), Chapter 1: Brains in a Vat, Putnam

UNIT II: TIME

10/18 **The Asymmetry of Past and Future**

Reading: “Time in Thermodynamics” (2011), North, Sections 1-6.1

Optional: *From Eternity to Here* (2010), Chapters 2, 7, and 8, Carroll

The Character of Physical Law (1965), Chapter 5: The Distinction of Past and Future, Feynman (pg. 108-116)

Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Science (2004), Chapters 11 & 12: Is there a Puzzle about the Low Entropy Past?, Price and Callender, edited by Hitchcock
On Interpretation (4th century BCE), Chapter 9, Aristotle (with commentary by Annas), in *Voices of Ancient Philosophy*, pg. 56-59

❖**Unit I essay due.**❖

10/23 **The Reality of Past and Future**

Reading: *Riddles of Existence* (2005), Chapter 3: Time, Sider

Optional: *Introducing Time* (2001), Callender, pg. 3, 32-39, 42-51, 68-88

Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics (2008), Chapter 5: Time, Zimmerman and Smart, edited by Sider, Hawthorne, and Zimmerman

“Time and Physical Geometry” (1967), Putnam

Fiction: “The Weed of Time” (1970), Spinrad

❖**Unit II essay topics distributed.**❖

10/25 **Personal Identity Over Time**

Reading: *Reasons and Persons* (1984), Parfit, pg. 199-209

Optional: “Survival and Identity” (1976), Lewis, pg. 17-29

Fiction: *The Outer Limits: Think Like a Dinosaur* (2001), season 7 episode 8 (44 min.)

10/30 **Time Travel**

Reading: “Paradoxes of Time Travel” (1976), Lewis

Optional: *Philosophy Through Science Fiction* (2009), Chapter 4: Spacetime and Time Travel, Nichols, Smith, and Miller, pg. 200-209

Fiction: *Timecrimes* (2007), Vigalondo (92 min.)

Doctor Who: Blink (2007), series 3 episode 11 (44 min.)

11/1 **Peer Review of Unit II Essay**

Reading: None [Bring handout on writing from 10/9 to class.]

❖**Four copies of unit II essay rough draft due.**❖

UNIT III: MORALITY

11/6 **The Euthyphro Dilemma / Reading a Text Closely**

Reading: *Euthyphro* (~400 BCE), Plato

Optional: “God and Objective Morality: A Debate” (2004), Craig and Sinnott-Armstrong, from *God? A Debate Between a Christian and an Atheist*

“God and Morality” (2008), Swinburne

The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy (1785), Book 2: Moral Obligation, Chapters 1-5, Paley

“Appendix: Reading Philosophy” (2013), Perry and Bratman, in *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, 3rd ed, pg. 841-843

❖**Unit II essay due.**❖

11/8 **Concern for Self and Others**

Reading: "Self-Love and Altruism" (1997), Brink, Sections 1-3

Optional: "The Immoralist's Challenge" (~380 BCE.), Plato, from *The Republic*

11/13 **Personal Identity and the Expansion of Concern**

Reading: "Self-Love and Altruism" (1997), Brink, Sections 7-11

Optional: *Reasons and Persons* (1984), Parfit, pg. 307-321

❖Unit III essay topics distributed.❖

11/15 **Utilitarianism**

Reading: *Utilitarianism* (1863), Chapters 1 and 2, Mill

Optional: *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (1993), Chapter 8: The Debate over Utilitarianism, Rachels

Fiction: "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (1973), Le Guin

11/20 **Well-Being: Hedonism, Desire Satisfaction, and Objective Lists**

Reading: *Normative Ethics* (1998), Chapter 2: The Good, Kagan, Sections 1-3

Optional: "Logic of Decision" (2011), Chapter 5: Utility, Weatherson

On Final Ends (45 BCE), Cicero (selections)

"The Experience Machine" (1974), Nozick, from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*

UNIT IV: LANGUAGE

11/22 **Morality and Meaning**

Reading: *Language, Truth, and Logic* (1936), Chapters 1 and 6, Ayer

Optional: *Theory and Reality* (2003), Chapter 2: Logic Plus Empiricism, Peter Godfrey-Smith
Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century, Volume 1, Chapter 13: The Rise and Fall of the Empiricist Criterion of Meaning, Soames

❖Unit III essay due.❖

11/27 **Moral Relativism as the Best Explanation of Moral Disagreement**

Reading: *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity* (1996), Chapter 1: Moral Relativism, Harman

Optional: "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism" (1986), Rachels, from *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*

❖Unit IV essay topics distributed.❖

11/29 **Vagueness and the Paradox of the Heap**

Reading: "Philosophy Bites: Timothy Williamson on Vagueness" (2007), Edmonds, Warburton, and Williamson (audio, 15 min.)

Optional: *Paradoxes*, 2nd ed. (1995), Sainsbury, pg. 23-39

12/4 **Set Theory, Russell's Paradox, and the Liar Paradox**

Reading: "Russell's Paradox: Here's Why Math Can't Have A Set Of Everything" (2013), Kiersz

Paradoxes, 2nd ed. (1995), Sainsbury, pg. 1-3, 107-113, 121-122

12/6 **Peer Review of Unit IV Essay**

Reading: None

❖Four copies of unit IV essay draft due.❖

12/14 Final Essay Deadline

Assigned final exam time [though there is no exam]: 7-10 pm.

❖Unit IV essay due.❖

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Late assignments should be placed in my mailbox on the 7th floor of the HSS building. Also, please email me to let me know the assignment has been turned in.

Late essays will receive a one letter-grade deduction if they are submitted within 48 hours of the original deadline. After that, they will not be accepted. An extension may be granted if requested in advance of the due date for the assignment. In general, extensions will only be granted for reasons of religious observance, illness, or personal or family emergency.

EMAIL

You can reach me at: csebens@gmail.com. Please only email me about logistical concerns: requesting extensions, scheduling additional office hours, etc. I find it is more effective to discuss course content face-to-face. I am happy to meet with you in office hours to discuss any philosophical questions and to schedule additional meetings as needed. Please do not hesitate to setup a meeting with me outside of office hours, especially if you'd like to discuss your plans for writing an essay.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you require any special arrangements for completing the course assignments or participating fully in class meetings, please let me know at the beginning of the course.

PLAGIARISM

You are encouraged to discuss your work with other students and even to share drafts with each other to get feedback. However, the work you submit should be your own. If you incorporate the ideas of others, cite those sources. Do not copy language too closely. Even when summarizing and paraphrasing cited sources, you must use your own language and present the ideas in an original way. Please ask me if you have any questions about what counts as plagiarism. We will discuss plagiarism and academic integrity in more detail on 10/9 (see also academicintegrity.ucsd.edu).

If I have reason to believe that you have engaged in academic misconduct, I will report the case to the Academic Integrity Office for review. If they determine that it is indeed a case of academic dishonesty, you will receive a zero on the assignment.