

SCIENCE, PHILOSOPHY, AND THE BIG QUESTIONS

Spring 2019

Instructor:	Dr. Kerry McKenzie	kmckenzie@ucsd.edu
Class:	Tu Th 11-12.20, Solis 110	
Office hour:	Th 2-3pm in HSS 8088, or by appointment.	

Objectives. This course will introduce some fundamental questions of philosophy and reflect on the capacity of science to supply answers to them. In particular, we will reflect on the questions as whether we are justified in believing in God; on how the mind relates to the body; on whether moral properties, such as an act of killing's being 'right' or 'wrong', really exist outside of our minds, and if so which acts may be said to bear such properties; whether reality is fundamentally physical – indeed whether there is anything fundamental at all. It will rapidly become clear that none of these questions have obvious or even widely agreed-upon answers. As such, the objective of this course is not so much that you succeed in *answering* these questions: rather, it is that you really *understand* what they are asking and why they are such tough nuts to crack. Another objective is that you develop the skill of close reading, and of following complex arguments.

As I will try to convince you at the outset, philosophy is a rather unique subject – indeed, a rather strange subject – in that it does not have its own distinguished subject matter: we can ask philosophical questions about pretty much anything at all. One thing this means is that all of you, no matter what your major or evolving area of expertise, have a unique and valuable perspective to bring on the issues we talk about. It also means however that you should be prepared to get out a bit out of your comfort zone, and here trying to be open-minded will serve you better than your existing expertise. Please use the online forum and the discussion time both to offer your insights to the rest of the class and to flag up anything that you don't understand in the lectures or readings (be it the terms used, the claims made, the arguments for them, why we are even bothering with the issues – whatever would help you to inhabit the topic.)

Prerequisites. There are no prerequisites for this course. This has certain implications – the most important of which is that you all feel absolutely free, at all times, to ask clarificatory questions (as I will no doubt inadvertantly slide into unfamiliar philosophical jargon). Another is that initially there will likely be some overlap with other intro to philosophy courses, in that we will have to acquaint ourselves with a few basical logical terms and concepts before getting stuck in. But a couple of weeks in and both newcomers and seasoned practitioners should all be on the same page.

Readings. It is **imperative** that you read through the required readings before coming into class. Note that it is likely that there will be some tweaks to the reading / the dates you are due to read them by. All such changes will be outlined in class and via email: please try to stay on track.

Assessment:

- 3 essays of 1,000 \pm 10% words: 2 midterms, 1 final (20%, 24%, 24% each)
- 1 final reflection paper of 600-1,000 \pm 10% words (16%)
- 4 online reading quizzes (on papers underlined below), completed prior to class (4% each)
- Participation: +/- on grade of final submission (= final essay + reflection paper)

Important Dates:

Midterm paper #1 Tues April 30th
Midterm paper #2 Tues May 28th
Final Submission (no sit-down exam) ... Tues June 11th

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

• WEEK 1 INTRODUCTION

Tues April 2nd What is Philosophy?

– William James (1911), *Philosophy and Its Critics*

Thurs April 4th What is Science?

– Micheal Ruse (1982), *Creation Science Is Not Science*

– Larry Laudan (1982), *Science at the Bar: Causes for Concern*

• WEEK 2 LOGICAL CONCEPTS AND THE PROBLEM OF INDUCTION / THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Tues April 9th The Problem of Induction

Optional: Internet Encyclopedia, Deductive and Inductive Arguments

Peter Lipton (1991), Induction, especially first two sections ('Underdetermination' and 'Justification').

Thurs April 11th The Teleological Argument

William Paley (1800), *Natural Theology* Chapters 1 and 2 + highlighted sections of 3

Optional: Elliot Sober (2004), 'The Design Argument'

Optional: Stephen Jay Gould (1990), 'Darwin and Paley Meet the Invisible Hand'.

• WEEK 3 THE EXISTENCE OF GOD (CONT'D)

Tues April 16th Pragmatic approaches

William James 1896, *The Will to Believe*

Thurs April 18th Review and how to write a philosophy essay.

• WEEK 4 THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM I

Tues April 30th 📎 📎 📎 **Paper 1 due** 📎 📎 📎

David Chalmers 2016, *The Hard Problem of Consciousness* (video):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5DfnIjZPGw>

John Horgan (2017), *David Chalmers Thinks the Hard Problem Is Really Hard*

Optional: Chalmers 1996, Chapter 3, sections (see also glossary on TED)

Thurs May 2nd

Thomas Nagel (1974), *What is it like to be a bat?*

• WEEK 5 THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM II

Tues 7th May

Colin McGinn (1989), *Can we solve the mind-body problem?*

Thurs 9th May

Patricia Churchland (1996), *The Hornswoggle Problem*

• WEEK 6 MORALITY I: NORMATIVE ETHICS AND REFLECTIVE EQUILIBRIUM

Tues 7th May

J.S. Mill (1863), *Utilitarianism*, Chapters 2 and 3

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

Thurs 9th May

Immanuel Kant (1785), *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Preface and Chapter 1 (Bennett translation, 2017).

Optional: John Rawls (1951), *Outline of Decision Theory for Ethics*.

• WEEK 7 MORALITY II: METAETHICS

Tues 14th May

Richard Joyce (2006), *The Evolution of Morality* Chapter 1: The Natural Section of Helping.

Thurs 16th May

Sharon Street (2006), 'A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value'.

• WEEK 8 TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

Tues 21st May

L.A. Paul, What you can't expect when you're expecting

Thurs 23rd May

Reading TBC, plus peer review of essay drafts (bring 2 draft essays to class)

• WEEK 9 MATERIALISM AND FUNDAMENTALITY

– **Tues 28th May**    **Paper 2 due**   

Jonathan Schaffer (2003), 'Is there a fundamental level?', Sections 1-5 (remainder optional)

Thurs 30th May

Alyssa Ney (2008): Physicalism as an Attitude

• WEEK 10 STUDENT CHOICE

Tues 4th June

– **Thurs 6th June**

• Week 11    **Paper 3 and Reflection paper due**  

NB: No final sit-down exam

Grading scale. I will be assigning letter grades for papers corresponding to these marks:

$97 - 100 = A^+$	$87 - 89 = B^+$	$77 - 79 = C^+$	$67 - 69 = D^+$
$93 - 96 = A$	$83 - 86 = B$	$73 - 76 = C$	$60 - 66 = D$
$90 - 92 = A^-$	$80 - 82 = B^-$	$70 - 72 = C^-$	$< 60 = F$

The final letter grade you receive however will be ‘graded to the curve’, so that the top 20-30% of students will get a grade in the A range, the next 25-35% a grade in the B range, the next 25-30% a grade in the C range, and the remaining 5-25% a D or an F. This is the minimum I guarantee; if the class has worked well and no-one deserves a D or an F, the curve will be adjusted accordingly.

Late policy. Papers will lose 3 marks for every day they are late. No papers will be accepted more than a week after the due date. If you have a legitimate reason why you cannot complete your assignment by the due date, I will happily consider an extension. **But you must ask permission in advance.**

Class Policy / What I expect from you.

- Regular attendance is essential and expected.
- I expect you to carefully work through the readings corresponding to a class beforehand.
 - * Do not be put off by the fact that many of the readings are dense and will refer to philosophical and scientific concepts that you haven’t encountered before. The feeling of being out of your depth and not knowing enough is simply the predicament of scientifically-engaged philosophy. However, you do feel completely at sea in this course and are worried that you cannot complete your assignments, please let me know. You have some freedom in your choice of essay topics and together we should be able find a topic that both plays to your strengths and engages with the themes of the course.
- You are free to propose to write an essay different from those in the prompts. But you must request permission in advance (otherwise you risk receiving an F).
- Do not record lectures without my permission or use your cellphone in class.
- Submit paper copies of midterms essay in class and your final in the classroom for the scheduled exam period
- Please write your essays double-spaced and cite judiciously (see section on ‘Academic Integrity’ below).

My pact to you.

- **Contact time.** I will be available during office hours each week, and will announce any cancellations in advance to the best of my ability. I will generally also be available to speak to you for several minutes after class each week. If my office hours genuinely do not work for your schedule I will try to find another slot that does.
- **Email.** I generally will not answer substantive philosophical questions over email, but please feel free to at least email them to me so that I can better prepare to discuss them with you in office hour, after class or on Skype (which is a much more effective medium than email). Please however **do** email to remind me to do something I promised to do, such as post bonus readings, but that I have neglected, or to flag up symbolic terminology in the readings that you cannot understand. (Note however that if I have already discussed it in class I might not reply!) Please allow me 24 hours to respond to an email, and do not expect me to reply to emails over the weekend. Please also do not take for granted that I will reply to any email sent within 24 hours of a due date.
- **Grading.** I will return your midterm essays to you, with at least brief comments, within two weeks of the due date. If you do not want comments on your essay (and there are always some people who prefer this), please state this clearly at the top of your essay as this will save me a considerable chunk of time.
- **Personal consultations.** I reserve the right to ask you to come into the office to discuss your essay before assigning it a mark.

Class rep. If you would like to relay information to me confidentially, please do so via the class rep Yasmeen Ayoub: email [yayoub \[at\] ucsd.edu](mailto:yayoub@ucsd.edu).

Academic Integrity. UCSD is committed to academic integrity. According to their *Policy on Integrity of Scholarship*,*

“Integrity of scholarship is essential for an academic community. The University expects that both faculty and students will honor this principle and in so doing protect the validity of University intellectual work. For students, this means that all academic work will be done by the individual to whom it is assigned, without unauthorized aid of any kind.”

If you have any questions or concerns about what academic integrity requires of you, **do not hesitate to get in touch with me** before attempting your assignments. But in a nutshell: **(1) CITE EVERY SOURCE YOU USE**, excepting the lectures themselves; **(2) WRITE YOUR ESSAY YOURSELF**. An academic integrity violation could seriously harm your long-term prospects; for guidelines on how to excel with integrity, see <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/academic-integrity/policy.html>.

Disability accommodations. Students requesting accommodations for this course due to a disability must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) which is located in University Center 202 behind Center Hall. Students are required to present their AFA letters to Faculty (please make arrangements to contact me privately) and to the OSD Liaison in the department in advance so that accommodations may be arranged.

*For the full statement, go to <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/academic-integrity/policy.html>