

Welcome! ☺ Read the entire syllabus: all that's worth knowing is here and all that's here is worth knowing.
You may not claim ignorance of anything in this syllabus, so read it well and ask if you have questions!

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course surveys some philosophical problems of knowledge (epistemology) and reality (metaphysics). We will discuss the following questions, among others: What is the nature of existence? Is there a god? Do we know anything, and if so, how do we know that we know it? Is it possible that we are dreaming or a part of a computer simulation? What do the terms 'mind' and 'person' really mean? Are faith and reason friends, enemies, or peaceful co-existents?

Your goal in this class is to acquire a clearer understanding of these issues and of yourself as an analytical thinker. Knowledge of particular facts and names may be fleeting, but the skills you gain by analyzing them will stick. For that reason, this course is both an indispensable basis for all other philosophy classes *and* will also make a significant critical contribution to any field of study.

HOW TO DO PHILOSOPHY

The goal of philosophy is to seek wisdom and truth, not harmony. "Agree to disagree" is a commendable attitude in everyday life, but it is mighty poor scholarship. Here's a recipe for good philosophizing:

1. **Judge all ideas** and arguments that you encounter, including your own, as thoroughly and impartially as you possibly can. Ideas have no feelings that you can hurt, so don't hold back.
2. **Respect all people:** ideas may not deserve respect, but people do. Be kind, inclusive, and give fair hearing to all sides. This is especially true of the philosophers whose arguments we will read: they are professionals and you have a lot to learn from them.

"I don't like this argument because of these reasons..." = GOOD!

"Only an idiot could possibly like this argument" = BAD!

This balance between an open mind and a critical mind is very difficult to achieve, so try your hardest!

REQUIRED TEXTS

S. Cahn. *Exploring Philosophy: An Introductory Anthology, 4th Ed.* Oxford UP, 2011. ISBN 0199797277
R. Descartes. *Meditations, Objections, Replies.* Transl. by Ariew/Cress. Hackett, 2006. ISBN 0872207986

EXAMS

You will take a **midterm** and a **final**. The final is comprehensive of all course material. You may bring one letter-sized "cheat sheet" with whatever you want on it, so long as it is printed on one side and leaves the other blank. All electronic devices (of any kind) must remain in your bag or pocket for the whole exam. You may not make up a missed exam without prior arrangements.

QUIZZES

Four, take-home, online on Scholar. See schedule below. Each quiz is worth up to 15 points and concerns the readings for that week.

GRADING

The maximum possible points is **300**, thus distributed:

Midterm = **100** Final = **100** Quizzes = **60** Participation = **40**

A 140 A- 135 B+ 131 B 124 B- 120 C+ 116 C 110 C- 105 D+ 101 D 96 D- 90

This course is not an easy A. Recent averages have attested around B-. However, I do not curve grades.

GRADE CONTESTATION

If you think you have received an unfair grade on an assignment, please e-mail me a written appeal within 3 days of receiving the graded assignment. In your appeal, explain the specific parts of your assignment that you think I have graded unfairly. Include what you think the proper assessment should be and why. I will then review your appeal and return the re-graded assignment to you within 3 days. If I find that I had been correct the first time, your grade will stay the same. If I find that I had been too strict, I will raise it. And if I find that I had been too lenient, I will lower it. Thus, if you think you have a strong case, then by all means appeal. If not, don't just "give it a shot": you'll waste your time and mine and it might even hurt your grade.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Since several readings are only available electronically, you may use a laptop, Kindle, Nook, Galaxy, iPad, or other electronic reader that is not also a cell phone. All uses unrelated to class are forbidden: at any given time I may ask you to show everyone your screen. Texting is especially forbidden.

ALL OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES MUST REMAIN OFF. NOT ON VIBRATE: OFF. NO EXCEPTIONS.

First infraction = I will yell at you. Second infraction = you're dismissed from the course.

ACCOMMODATION

Please see or e-mail me if you need accommodation due to learning disabilities or any other health-related reasons: we will work with you right away. Make sure to bring it up with me no later than **Friday 5/25** and produce all the required documentation.

VIRGINIA TECH HONOR CODE

www.honorsystem.vt.edu I take our honor code very seriously and so should you. Know the ins and outs of your dos and don'ts: plagiarism due to distraction or sloppiness is still plagiarism and may be punished as if it were intentional cheating.

Suspected violations will be reported to the Undergraduate Honor Court and fully processed; yes, even if it is a summer course, and yes, even if you are a graduating senior.

READING SCHEDULE AND DUE DATE

*Readings are DUE for the day that they are listed.
Changes to this schedule will be announced.*

(C) = reading in Cahn book
(D) = reading in Descartes book
(S) = reading on Scholar

Introduction		
	Syllabus review. Introductory lecture.	M 5/21
<i>Descartes' Meditations</i>	Descartes: Meditation One (D 9-13)	T 5/22
	Descartes: Meditation Two (D 13-19)	W 5/23
	Descartes: Meditation Three (D 19-29) <i>and skim Meditation Four, 29-35</i>	R 5/24
	Descartes: Meditation Five (D 35-40) QUIZ #1 DUE ONLINE	F 5/25
	MEMORIAL DAY: NO CLASS	M 5/28
	Descartes: Meditation Six (D 40-49)	T 5/29
Epistemology		
<i>How do I know I am not being deceived?</i>	Plato, Aristotle, Zhuāng Zǐ: various sources (S 1-2) Newman: "Descartes' Epistemology" (S 3-5) TV episode in class – Star Trek: "Waking Moments"	W 5/30
	Pollock: "Brain in a vat" (C 17-19) Movie in class: <i>The Matrix</i>	R 5/31
	Watch these two YouTube videos: link #1 and link #2 Bostrom: "The simulation argument" (link) Movie in class: <i>The Matrix</i> QUIZ #2 DUE ONLINE	F 6/1
	NO CLASS	M 6/4
<i>How do I know what I know?</i>	Chalmers: " <i>The Matrix</i> as metaphysics" (S 132-146) Short film in class: "Return to the Source: Philosophy and the Matrix"	T 6/5
	Gettier: "Is justified true belief knowledge?" (C 70-71) Nozick: "Conditions for knowledge" (C 71-73)	W 6/6
	Russell: "The problem of induction" (C 82-84) D'Amato: "Thinking in the best circles" (S 6-9)	R 6/7
	Mermin: "Is the moon there when nobody looks?" (S 38-47)	F 6/8
Midterm exam		
	MIDTERM EXAM in our usual classroom.	M 6/11

Metaphysics

What is a person?	Smart: "A case of identity" (C 323-325) Perry: "The problem of personal identity" (C 325-327) Johnson: "Teleportation and personal identity" (S 97-99)	T 6/12
	Dennett: "Where am I?" (S 310-323) Kurzweil: "Who am I? What am I?" (C 99-102)	W 6/13
What is a mind?	Nagel: "What is it like to be a bat?" (C 138-141) Lewis: "Knowing what it's like" (C 142-143)	R 6/14
	Turing: "Computing machinery and intelligence" (C 144-148) Searle: "Do computers think?" (C 148-150) TV in class – <i>Star Trek</i> : "The Measure of a Man" QUIZ #3 DUE ONLINE	F 6/15
	Anselm and Gaunilo: <i>Proslogion</i> and "On behalf of the fool" (C 261-265) Aquinas: <i>Summa Theologiae</i> (C 269-271) Mavrodes: "Some puzzles concerning omnipotence" (S 221-223)	M 6/18
Does God exist?	Paley: "Natural theology" (C 271-275) Hume: <i>Dialogues concerning natural religion</i> , part II (C 276-281)	T 6/19
	Pascal: "The wager" (C 294-296) Blackburn: "Pascal's wager" (C 231-233) Bostrom: "Pascal's mugging" (S 443-445)	W 6/20

The Big Picture

Are faith and reason compatible?	Flew, Mitchell: "Theology and falsification" (C 227-231) Movie in class: <i>Contact</i>	R 6/21
	Scriven: "Faith and reason" (C 234-238) Movie in class: <i>Contact</i> QUIZ #4 DUE ONLINE	F 6/22
	Clarke: <i>Profiles of the Future</i> (S) Shermer: "Shermer's Last Law" (link) TV episode in class – <i>Star Trek</i> : "Who Watches the Watchers?"	M 6/25
What is our place in the grand order of things?	Reading TBA TV episode in class – <i>Star Trek</i> : "Blink of an Eye"	T 6/26
	Taylor: "The meaning of life" (S 366-376) TV episode in class – <i>Star Trek</i> : "The Inner Light"	W 6/27
	NO CLASS. You may meet anyway for final exam review.	R 6/28
	NO CLASS. You may meet anyway for final exam review.	F 6/29

Final exam

FINAL EXAM @ 10:30 AM in our usual classroom.

S 6/30