

Philosophical Questions
Rocky 210, Tuesday/Thursday, 12PM-1:15PM

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Office Hours: Rocky 206, Thursday, 1:30PM-3:30PM

Course Summary: Are you awake or dreaming? Could you be having the same conscious experiences either way? For that matter, what does it mean to *be* conscious? Could computers be conscious? Could your consciousness and memories be transferred into another body? Would the recipient of those memories become *you*? Are you just a bundle of experiences, or is there some underlying soul or chunk of brain that makes you who you are? Do you have a free will? We will approach these questions through classic writings by René Descartes, Elisabeth of Bohemia, John Locke, and David Hume, as well as responses to their arguments from the 20th and 21st centuries.

Required Texts

René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*

- All other readings on Moodle

Course Grading and Requirements: Participation (20%); 3 Papers (80%)

Attendance & Participation (20%): This includes attendance, participation, and pop quizzes. **Attendance to class is mandatory, as is arriving on time.** Excused absences require signed documentation from a doctor or dean. **Participation and preparation are crucial.** There are a variety of ways to participate, including: actively contributing to discussions, demonstrating reflection on the readings, listening carefully to others' contributions (not dominating discussion), and showing respect toward classmates. There will also be a number of pop quizzes to make sure students are keeping up with the assignments. **Laptops will not be permitted in class unless you clear it with me in advance.** All cell phones must be silent and put away.

3 papers: 1st: 3 pages (20%) – due Friday, 2/20
 2nd: 5-7 pages (25%) – due Friday, 4/10
 3rd: 5-7 pages (35%) – due during Exam Week (5/18-5/22)

Academic accommodations are available for students registered with the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity. Students in need of ADA/504 accommodations should schedule an appointment with me early in the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course that have been approved by the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity, as indicated in your AEO accommodation letter.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated in this course. Students caught plagiarizing will receive an F in the course and be referred to the Dean of Studies. I will not make any “judgment calls” to ascertain whether instances of plagiarism are intentional. A handout entitled “Plagiarism and Academic Integrity” will be distributed again with the first paper assignment, and signed by each student. See also Vassar’s guide on “Originality and Attribution”: deanofthecollege.vassar.edu/documents/originality/.

Topics, Readings, and Tentative Schedule

Week 1 (1/29) Hello

Week 2 Foundations of Knowledge, Skepticism, and Thinking Things

- 2/3: Jim Pryor, "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy"
René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* I
- 2/5: Descartes, *Meditations* II
David Foster Wallace, Kenyon College Commencement Speech
- 1st Paper Assignment Distributed

Week 3 Minds and Bodies

- 2/10: Descartes, *Meditations*, skim III-IV, read V-VI
- ADD PERIOD ENDS
- 2/12: Elisabeth of Bohemia and Descartes, *Correspondence*

Week 4 Minds as Physical Things, and Minds from the First-Person Perspective

- 2/17: Pryor, "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper"
- 2/19: David Armstrong, "The Nature of Mind"
Thomas Nagel, "What is it Like to Be a Bat?"
- 2/20: **1st Paper Due on Friday**

Week 5 A.I., the Brain, and the Special Knowledge of Consciousness

- 2/24: Alan Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence"
- 2/26: John Searle, "Minds, Brains and Programs"
Frank Jackson, "What Mary Didn't Know"

Week 6 The Science of Consciousness; Personal Identity

- 3/3: Patricia Churchland, "The Hornswoggle Problem"
- 3/5: John Locke, "Of Identity and Diversity"
David Hume, "Of Personal Identity"

Week 7 Personal Identity cont.

- 3/10: Daniel Dennett, "Where Am I?"
- 3/12: Bertrand Williams, "The Self and the Future"
- 2nd Paper Assignment Distributed
- 3/13: DROP PERIOD ENDS
- 3/13-3/29: SPRING BREAK

Week 8 Expectations for Your Future Self; Innate Ideas and God

- 3/31: Laurie Paul, "What You Can't Expect When You're Expecting"
- 4/2: Anselm, *Proslogion*, Chapter 2
Descartes, *Meditations*, III
- 4/3: **Rough Draft of 2nd Paper Due on Friday**

Week 9 Freedom of the Will

- 4/7: Writing Workshop – read 3 classmates' drafts and **bring printed comments to class**
- 4/9: Descartes, *Meditations*, IV
Hume, "Of Liberty and Necessity"
Reread Wallace's Commencement Speech
- 4/10: **Final Draft of 2nd Paper Due on Friday**

Week 10 Freedom and Moral Responsibility cont.

- 4/14: Harry Frankfurt, "Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility"
Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"
4/16: Peter Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment"

Week 11 Passivity and Responsibility

- 4/21: Angela Smith, "Responsibility for Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life"
4/23: Nomy Arpaly, "When Cheap Will Just Won't Do"
• Final Paper Assignment Distributed

Week 12 Good, Evil, and Beyond

- 4/28: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, selections
4/30: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, selections

Week 13 Moral Relativism

- 5/5: James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"
Reread Wallace's Commencement Speech
5/7: Jennifer Saul, "Feminism and 'Respect for Cultures'"

Week 14

- 5/12: Plato, *Euthyphro* or Makeup Session

5/18-5/22: **Exam Week, Final Paper Due**