PHIL 240: Belief & Reality

Instructors
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weekly review session: TBA

Course Topics & Goals
You take yourself to know lots of things: your name, for example . . . and that you’re reading something now, what your favorite breakfast food is, that the sun will rise tomorrow, that smacking your roommate will cause him or her to get angry, and so on. These beliefs, if they are to count as pieces of knowledge, must, at the very least, correspond to how things really are: to reality. But how do we know that they do? What is the nature of this correspondence? How do we know anything about what reality is really like (after all, we could be in the Matrix!). In addition to these bits of specific knowledge, we might ask after the general features of reality and where we fit into the mix. What exists? What are objects? How do they persist through time and change? For that matter, how do we persist through change? Are our actions free?

We will tackle these questions in the pursuit of a few goals. First and foremost, the course will introduce you to a sampling of the topics and methods of contemporary analytic philosophy. Second, by dealing with these questions and problems, you’ll become a better philosopher — and hence a better, more careful thinker. It’s our conviction that the only way to become a philosopher is to actually do philosophy (rather than read about it). Part of becoming a good philosopher requires communication skills (oral and written); in this class you’ll learn how to write careful philosophical prose in the analytic tradition. This tradition emphasizes clarity and rigor above all. If you’re hoping for a class where you can write creatively and biographically (recording for posterity exactly how you just blew your mind), you should look elsewhere.

In order to fulfill these goals, I’ve decided to be somewhat flexible about our schedule. There are just two "textbooks", neither of which will constrain us much. One is essentially a writing manual for philosophy; the other is an extremely short dialogue about personal identity. The majority of the reading will be provided online as we go in PDF format. A good bit of the content we’ll be talking about will come directly from my lectures (when I lecture). But I’ll expect much of our class time to be dominated by discussion. You cannot be shy or sleepy: the only way to learn how to do philosophy well is to actually do it rather than read about it, memorize it, or listen to it being done. Ask questions, try out arguments or objections, clarify positions, and expect to be challenged in this class to think hard about issues remote from the warp and woof of ordinary life.

The Reading
Please purchase these texts (available at the UI bookstore): Perry’s A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality (Hackett) and Martinich’s Philosophical Writing, 3rd Ed. (Blackwell). The rest of the readings (the majority) will be made available on blackboard. Note that while you’ll be able to see the links within the announcements page (www.uidaho.edu/~mslater/teaching/belief-and-reality/), they won’t work unless you’re logged into blackboard.

You’ll notice that there’s not much reading to do, but it’s mostly very difficult. Indeed, most of it is deceptively difficult: it might seem easy while you’re reading it, but understanding what is said can be exceptionally challenging. I thus recommend reading everything twice (at least). No, I’m not kidding. You are to have done the reading for a particular day before class that day (not, say, during the first five minutes of class). Note too that sources of information on the web — other professors’ websites, sparknotes, wikipedia, &c. — are usually rather superficial and unreliable. We’ll be working at a much deeper level than they offer. If you’re looking for supplemental reading, you’ll be far better off with the few internet encyclopedias of philosophy (especially plato.stanford.edu) and online reference databases (I’ll post a few links on the website).
**Requirements & Assessment**

**Attendance & Participation (20%).** This should be obvious: you are required to come to every class meeting. **Be on time and stay the whole time** — otherwise you may miss important announcements or quizzes. Allison will take attendance. Each unexcused absence will reduce your final grade by three percentage points; **more than five unexcused absences will be an automatic failure** (you can’t miss a fifth of a course and expect to pass!). If you **must** miss a class (and we’ll be the judge of ‘must’), you should contact Allison before the class in question (unless circumstances make this impossible for some strange reason), get any missed notes/assignments from your peers, and make sure you bring documentation regarding your absence the next time you come. As far as participation goes, earning an ‘A’ will require being an involved and helpful participant (raising questions and engaging in the discussion without dominating it) in the vast majority of our meetings. Simply attending and at looking attentive will get you at most a ‘C’ for participation. I know it’s 8AM. Get used to it. Drink some coffee or something and notice how significant a part of your grade this is.

**Weekly Assignments (30%).** There will be more or less weekly assignments, due in class (at the beginning of class) that will require you to think and write carefully on a topic that we may or may not have already touched upon. These may involve summarizing in brisk prose the argument of an essay, offering an objection to particular theory, offering an argument of your own, solving a logical puzzle, and so on. Specific assignments will be announced at least two days before. They’ll be graded on a simple numerical scale and your lowest two scores will be automatically dropped.

**Tests/Quizzes (20%).** We’ll have a few (four or five, say) quizzes and longer tests (around midterm and during final exams) to keep you on your toes and make sure that everyone stays on the same page. Some of these will be scheduled and announced ahead of time; some will be “surprise” (either at the beginning of class or the end); if you miss them, you miss them.

**Essays (30%).** As a major goal of the course will be to make you a better philosophical writer, you will be asked to write and revise several short (2–3 page) essays and one longer final essay. We’ll talk about this as time approaches.

**Weekly Discussion Sections (optional — extra credit).** Allison will schedule a weekly, evening discussion section in which you will have an opportunity of discussing the material and asking questions in detail in a (presumably) smaller setting. These sessions will be optional and informal. Actively participating in them will counterbalance less active participation in class.

**Other Sources of Extra Credit.** The Philosophy Departments of UI and WSU share a colloquium series in which philosophers give talks. These usually occur on Friday afternoons; they’ll be happening a bit more frequently this term, as the department is hiring **two new philosophers** and having job candidates out. You may earn extra-credit points (which will go into your weekly assignment pool) by going to any of these talks and writing a short response or substantive/interesting question about them (these should be turned into Allison on paper in the following class). See the Philosophy Events page for details: http://www.uidaho.edu/philosophy/events/

**Other Fine Print**

**Late Work.** Late essays will be penalized by 5 percentage points each day (or partial day) they are late; late weekly assignments will be penalized by 1 point each day (or partial day) they are late. I’m extremely reluctant to grant extensions (especially if they are requested after a due date has already passed!).

**Academic Honesty.** Students who plagiarize or commit any other form of academic dishonesty will receive at a minimum a zero on the work in question. Action may also be taken in the Student Judicial system. In terms of citing sources and using quotations, when in doubt, cite. **You must include a Works Consulted/Cited page** (unless otherwise instructed) even if your only source was the primary source upon which your essay focuses. Cite correctly all materials used including primary sources, textbooks, materials from the internet, and lectures. Although we prefer that you use assigned readings and class texts rather than outside sources, if you consult sources such as Sparknotes or Clifftnotes, these must be cited. Consult G. Harvey, Writing with Sources or talk with one of us if you have any questions about proper citation. For the Dean of Students’ Academic Integrity site which includes UI Policies and Student Academic Dishonesty Resources see http://www.students.uidaho.edu/default.aspx?pid=45708.

**Reasonable Accommodations.** Students who require accommodation should notify the instructors the first week of class. All accommodations must be approved through Disability Support Services (DSS) located in the Idaho Commons Building, Room 306 (208-885-6307; http://www.access.uidaho.edu/default.aspx?pid=56098). If you need accommodations, we will be happy to work with you and DSS, and will do our best to support you in your work.

**Assignment/Grade Record Keeping.** Students are expected to save all graded work until final grades are recorded with the registrar and checked by the student. Grades for assignments will be recorded on Blackboard; you may check where you stand there.
Schedule Sketch

I’m only filling out a schedule a little ways out to make sure that you rely exclusively on in-class announcements and the website for current information. I want to play things by ear. If you can’t live with that, come see me and I’ll show you my super-secret draft schedule.

The Analysis of Knowledge

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<td>1.</td>
<td><strong>First Class: Administrivia, Introduction to the Course</strong></td>
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<td>• What is Metaphysics and Epistemology? What is Logic?</td>
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<td><strong>Knowledge and Belief / Conceptual Analysis</strong></td>
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<td>• Plato, selections from the <em>Meno</em></td>
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<td>• Ayer, “Knowledge as Having the Right to be Sure”</td>
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<td><strong>Knowledge and Belief [ Guest Lecturer: Chris Haufe ]</strong></td>
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<td>• Armstrong, “Knowledge Entails Belief”</td>
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<td>• Read through Martinich Chapter 2</td>
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<td>• Gettier “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”</td>
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<td>• Goldman, “The Causal Theory of Knowing”</td>
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<td><strong>The Search for the 4th Condition</strong></td>
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<td>• Lehrer and Paxson, “Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief”</td>
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<td><strong>Reliability and Truth-Tracking:</strong></td>
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<td>• Nozick, selections from <em>Philosophical Explanations</em></td>
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Further Probable Topics

We may get to these topics as time and interest allows. Check the website (subscribe to the RSS feed) for what we’re actually doing!

**What Exists?: Material Objects, Numbers, Properties, Holes?**

**Identity Through Time: The Problem of Change, The Ship of Theseus**

**Personal Identity: The Soul, Materialism, the Psychological Approach, Brain Transplants, Vague Identity**

**Paradoxes of Composition: Scattered or Overlapping Objects, Vague Objects, the Problem of the Many**

**Skepticism: The Cartesian Skeptical Argument, Pyrrhonian Skeptical Arguments, Contextualism**

**Freedom of the Will: Is there such a thing as fate? Is human freedom compatible with causal determinism?**

**Time: Is time static or dynamic? The Possibility of Time Travel**