

# PHIL 241: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

Samford University, Spring 2020

## Basic Information:

Instructor: Dr. Taylor Cyr

Class Meeting Times: MWF 11:45am-12:50pm

Class Meeting Location: Chapman Hall 326

Instructor's Email: tcyr@samford.edu

Instructor's Office Hours: MW 1:30pm-3:00pm

Instructor's Office: Chapman Hall 315

## Required Text:

- Susan Schneider, *Science Fiction and Philosophy: From Time Travel to Superintelligence*. Second edition. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016.

## Course Overview

### Catalog Description:

Examination of perennial questions and problems of life that have inspired philosophical investigation over the past 2,500 years.

### Our Focus:

In this course, several core questions in philosophy will be introduced by way of science fiction. We will begin with questions that pertain to knowledge (epistemology), using skeptical hypotheses from stories like *The Matrix* to raise doubts about what we know. Turning to science-fictional examples of artificial intelligence (for example, from Isaac Asimov's "The Bicentennial Man"), we will explore several questions in metaphysics and philosophy of mind, ranging from the nature of consciousness and of persons to what is required to have free will to whether backward time travel is (metaphysically) possible. Along the way, we will be introduced to several ethical and political questions about how persons ought to be treated, but we will end the course by focusing more directly on questions in value theory, including questions about what is the correct normative ethical theory, what counts as a meaningful life, and how we ought to design artificial intelligences.

## Course Requirements (% of Final Grade)

- Midterm Exam (20%)
- Final Exam (25%)
- Paper (25%)
- Participation (20%)
- Reading Quizzes (10%)

### Midterm Exam and Final Exam:

- The midterm exam and final exam will be similar in length and in format. The final exam is not cumulative (it will only test material from the second half of the course).
- The format of both exams will be a combination of true/false, multiple-choice, and essay questions designed to test understanding of the material covered in the assigned readings and class discussions.

### Paper:

- A paper of 4-5 pages in length is due during week 14. More specific instructions for the paper (including potential topics) will be given during week 10.
- You must confirm your paper topic at least one week before the paper's due date.

- Late papers will be marked down 1/3 of a grade (e.g., from a B- to C+) for each day past their due date.

### **Participation and Reading Quizzes:**

- You must attend class, be on time, bring your copy of the assigned reading(s), listen attentively, and answer and ask questions. Your final participation grade will include an evaluation of your overall contribution to class discussion.
- There will be 12 unannounced reading quizzes throughout the term. These will be short, multiple-choice quizzes that will test basic comprehension of the assigned readings for the day of the quiz. At the end of the course, I will drop students' two lowest scores (i.e., only a student's 10 best reading quizzes will count toward the final grade).
- Make-up quizzes will not be offered.

**Grading Scale:** 93-100= A; 90-92= A-; 87-89= B+; 83-86= B; 80-82= B-; 77-79= C+; 73-76= C; 70-72= C-; 67-69= D+; 63-66= D; 60-62= D-; 0-59= F

### **Course Policies**

#### **Academic Integrity:**

Students are expected to act with academic integrity. As stated in the Samford University catalog, "students, upon enrollment, enter into voluntary association with Samford University. They must be willing to observe high standards of intellectual integrity; they must respect knowledge and practice academic honesty." Unless specified otherwise, students are expected to do their own independent work, and to refrain from cheating, copying or plagiarizing the work of others. When drawing from various resources for assignments, students must provide proper citations. For details, visit <https://www.samford.edu/departments/registrar/policies-and-definitions>. Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct will be reported to the Academic Integrity Office (AIO) and will result in an F on the assignment.

#### **Attendance Policy:**

All unexcused absences will negatively affect your participation average. Make-up work may be negotiated for absences due to medical or emergency reasons. Students who miss 6 classes will receive an "FA" for the course.

#### **Electronic Devices:**

As stated in the Student Handbook, "Student use of cell phones, messaging devices and other electronic devices (for example, recording devices, music players, PDAs, computers) is prohibited in classes unless specifically permitted by the instructor." In other words, you may not use your phone or computer (or any other electronic device) in class without meeting with me in advance to get permission. I will allow you to use a computer if you have an accommodation or if you otherwise make a case for why you want to use an electronic device in class, but in either case you will need to meet with me in person to discuss.

#### **Respect:**

Students are expected to treat each other and the instructor with respect. This includes, among other things, paying attention to what a person is saying, being charitable to others' points of views, and criticizing ideas rather than persons.

### **Canvas and Email:**

Course announcements will be delivered via Canvas or email, so students are expected to check Canvas and their email at least once per day on weekdays. (You can edit your notification settings in Canvas so that you are alerted to new Canvas announcements via email.) The instructor will respond to emails within 24 hours (and often much more quickly than that).

### **Disabilities:**

Students with disabilities who wish to request accommodations should register with Disability Resources (205) 726-4078, [disability@samford.edu](mailto:disability@samford.edu), University Center Room 205, [www.samford.edu/dr](http://www.samford.edu/dr)). Students who are registered with Disability Resources are responsible for providing me with a copy of their accommodation letter and scheduling a meeting with me to discuss how their approved accommodations will apply to this course. Accommodations will not be implemented until we have met to review your accommodation letter.

## **Other Helpful Information**

### **Campus Emergency**

*RAVE* is the primary method of communication used by Samford University during a campus emergency. If you have not registered for *RAVE* alerts, please go to the My Contact Information box on your Portal homepage to update your *RAVE* Emergency Alert Information. Samford University utilizes *Samford Alert* for desktop, laptop, tablet, and mobile devices to provide students with information, procedures, and links about what to do in the event of a variety of emergency situations that could occur on our campus. If you do not already have the *Samford Alert* app on your mobile device, laptop, desktop, or tablet, please go to the *In Case of Emergency* box on your Portal homepage for instructions on downloading the App. Once you have downloaded the App, please take time to review the information provided, it is important that you know what to do in the case of a campus emergency.

### **Title IX**

Samford University is committed to the creation and maintenance of a safe learning environment for students and the University community. In accordance with federal policy all University employees are required to report information related to discrimination and harassment which includes, but is not limited to, sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and sexual harassment. For this reason, if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence or other related misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the University Title IX Coordinator. If you wish to speak with an employee who is not required to report information, you can find a list of confidential resources listed in the online student handbook and the Title IX website or contact the Counseling Center at 205-726-4083 or the Office of Spiritual Life at 205-726-2825.

### **Communication Resource Center**

The Communication Resource Center (CRC) offers *free* tutoring for Samford students in oral and written communication as well as support for developing and improving critical reading skills. The CRC is in Brooks 222 and is open MTWR 10:00am-6:00pm. Students are encouraged to schedule appointments at [samford.mywconline.com](http://samford.mywconline.com). Students in online programs may opt for online appointments through the same appointment link and can upload files for the tutor to review. For more information, visit <http://www.samford.edu/departments/communication-resource-center/> Note: The first time you schedule an appointment, you will need to create an account, using your Samford email and password.

## Course Schedule and Readings<sup>1</sup>

### Part 1: Introduction

- Week 1
  - 1/20: *Martin Luther King Jr. Day (No Class)*
  - 1/22: Introduction to the Course
    - *No Assigned Reading*
  - 1/24: What Is Philosophy?
    - Susan Schneider, “Science Fiction as a Window into Philosophical Puzzles” (SF&P, introduction)
    - SF: *The Matrix* (first part shown in class)

### Part 2: Epistemology

- Week 2
  - 1/27: Knowledge and Skepticism
    - Plato, “Plato’s Cave. Excerpt from *The Republic*” (SF&P, chapter 3)
    - SF: *The Matrix* (second part shown in class)
  - 1/29: Knowledge and Skepticism (continued)
    - Rene Descartes, “Some Cartesian Thought Experiments. Excerpt from *The Meditations on First Philosophy*” (SF&P, chapter 4)
    - SF: *The Matrix* (final part shown in class)
  - 1/31: Knowledge and Skepticism (continued)
    - Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu), “Discussion on Making All Things Equal”
- Week 3
  - 2/3: Knowledge and Skepticism (continued)
    - SF: Eric Schwitzgebel, “Out of the Jar”
  - 2/5: Knowledge and Skepticism (continued)
    - Nick Bostrom, “Are You in a Computer Simulation?” (SF&P, chapter 2)
    - Preston Greene, “[Are We Living in a Computer Simulation? Let’s Not Find Out](#)”
  - 2/7: Knowledge and Skepticism (continued)
    - David Chalmers, “The Matrix as Metaphysics” (SF&P, chapter 5)

### Part 3: Metaphysics

- Week 4
  - 2/10: Arguments for the Existence of God
    - St. Anselm, “The Ontological Argument”
  - 2/12: Arguments for the Existence of God (continued)
    - St. Thomas Aquinas, “The Five Ways”
  - 2/14: Arguments for the Existence of God (continued)
    - Robin Collins, “God, Design, and Fine-Tuning”
- Week 5
  - 2/17: The Problem of Evil
    - J. L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”
  - 2/19: The Problem of Evil (continued)
    - Daniel Speak, “Free Will and the Problem of Evil” (pp. 489-495)

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<sup>1</sup> About half of the readings are included in the 2nd edition of Schneider, *Science Fiction and Philosophy* (the assigned textbook), abbreviated here as SF&P. All other materials will be provided electronically through Canvas. SF denotes that the item is science fiction. This schedule is subject to change (at the instructor’s discretion) with advanced notice.

- 2/21: The Problem of Evil (continued)
  - SF: Arthur C. Clarke, “Guardian Angel”
- Week 6
  - 2/24: Persons and Consciousness
    - SF: Isaac Asimov, *The Bicentennial Man* (first half)
    - SF: *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, “The Measure of a Man” (shown in class)
  - 2/26: Persons and Consciousness
    - SF: Isaac Asimov, *The Bicentennial Man* (second half)
  - 2/28: Personal Identity
    - Eric Olson, “Personal Identity” (SF&P, chapter 7)
- Week 7
  - 3/2: Personal Identity (continued)
    - SF: Phillip K. Dick, “We Can Remember It for You Wholesale”
  - 3/4: Personal Identity (continued) and Review
    - Derek Parfit, “Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons” (SF&P, chapter 8)
  - 3/6: *Midterm*
- Week 8
  - 3/9: *Spring Break (No Class)*
  - 3/11: *Spring Break (No Class)*
  - 3/13: *Spring Break (No Class)*
- Week 9
  - 3/16: Time
    - Theodore Sider, “Time” (SF&P, chapter 25)
    - SF: “How Does This Time Travel Work?” Scene from *Idiocracy* (shown in class)
  - 3/18: Time Travel
    - SF: Ray Bradbury, “A Sound of Thunder” (SF&P, chapter 24)
  - 3/20: Time Travel (continued)
    - David Lewis, “The Paradoxes of Time Travel” (SF&P, chapter 26, pp. 357-363)
- Week 10
  - 3/23: Time Travel (continued)
    - David Lewis, “The Paradoxes of Time Travel” (SF&P, chapter 26, pp.363-369)
    - SF: *Futurama*, “Roswell That Ends Well” (shown in class)
  - 3/25: Free Will
    - *Discuss Paper Topics*
    - SF: Ted Chiang, “Story of Your Life” (first half)
  - 3/27: Free Will (continued)
    - SF: Ted Chiang, “Story of Your Life” (second half)
    - SF: *Minority Report* (first part shown in class)
- Week 11
  - 3/30: Free Will (continued)
    - *No New Reading*
    - SF: *Minority Report* (second part shown in class)
  - 4/1: Free Will (continued)
    - Michael Huemer, “Free Will and Determinism in the World of *Minority Report*” (SF&P, chapter 10)
    - SF: *Minority Report* (final part shown in class)
  - 4/3: Free Will (continued)
    - Harry Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”

## Part 4: Value Theory

- Week 12
  - 4/6: Ethical Theory
    - John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism"
    - SF: *The Good Place*, "The Trolley Problem" (select scenes shown in class)
  - 4/8: Ethical Theory (continued)
    - Immanuel Kant, "The Moral Law"
  - 4/10: Metaethics
    - Harry Gensler, "Cultural Relativism"
    - SF: *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, "Half a Life" (shown in class)
- Week 13
  - 4/13: *Easter Monday (No Class)*
  - 4/15: Meaning in Life
    - *Paper Topic Due*
    - Susan Wolf, "The Meanings of Lives"
    - SF: *Love, Death & Robots*, "Zima Blue" (shown in class)
  - 4/17: Justice and Equality
    - John Rawls, "A Theory of Justice"
    - SF: Kurt Vonnegut, "Harrison Bergeron"
- Week 14
  - 4/20: Applied Ethics
    - *No New Reading*
    - SF: *Gattaca* (first half shown in class)
  - 4/22: Applied Ethics (continued)
    - *Paper Due*
    - *No New Reading*
    - SF: *Gattaca* (second half shown in class)
  - 4/24: Applied Ethics (continued)
    - Duncan Purves, "[The Non-Identity Problem](#)"
    - Molly Gardner, "The Nonidentity Problem" ([Wi-Phi Video](#) shown in class)
- Week 15
  - 4/27: Applied Ethics (continued)
    - Susan Leigh Anderson, "Asimov's 'Three Laws of Robotics' and Machine Metaethics" (SF&P, chapter 22)
  - 4/29: Course Summary and Review
    - *No New Readings*
  - 5/1: *Study Day (No Class)*
- *Final Exam*
  - Wednesday, 5/6, 10:30am-12:30pm