

PHIL 241: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY
Samford University, Spring 2023

Basic Information:

Instructor: Dr. Taylor Cyr
Instructor's Email: tcyr@samford.edu
Instructor's Office: Chapman Hall 315

Class Meeting Times: TTh 11:00am-12:50pm
Class Meeting Location: Chapman 214
Office Hours: TTh 9:00am-10:00am

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 Objectives:

At the completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- CO#1: Recognize key ideas and concepts in philosophical texts.
- CO#2: Summarize various philosophical arguments.
- CO#3: Compare and contrast competing views on topics in epistemology, metaphysics, and value theory.
- CO#4: Apply views in epistemology, metaphysics, and value theory, to a variety of thought experiments.
- CO#5: Defend developed personal viewpoints on philosophical problems.

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

I. Statement regarding online or remote delivery if the course must transition to a digital learning format

The 22-23 academic year will see the return of many regular activities and operations; however, as the presence of Covid-19 is monitored on campus and within our community, state law, local health orders, and CDC guidance could affect the course activities and modality (including a change to an emergency remote or online course). Students must attend class and check email and Canvas regularly for any important updates from the course instructor and/or university administration.

II. Mask requirements within the educational setting:

The instructor reserves the right to require masking within the classroom.

III. Student illness or vulnerable to COVID-19

Vaccination and receipt of vaccine booster doses are the best way for a student to reduce the risk of academic disruption due to COVID-related illness. Samford University strongly encourages all members of our community, including students, to receive the COVID-19 vaccine and booster doses at recommended intervals. However, there may be individual circumstances where students may not be able to receive the vaccination or choose not to receive the vaccination. Students who are not able to attend a required class meeting because of quarantine, illness, or contact with a COVID-19 positive individual should notify the instructor of record within 24 hours of the class meeting. Additionally, students should respond to contact by the Academic Success Center for assistance in coordinating academic support due to Covid-19 related absences. An excused absence does not relieve a student of responsibility for the academic work in the class missed.

Students who have a disability which makes them more vulnerable to COVID-19 (e.g., immune-compromised,) must register with Disability Resources and follow standard procedure.

IV. Technology needs

Because of the possibility of a student needing to participate in the course virtually at some point during the semester, all students should have the following technology available to them:

- A Windows 10 or Macintosh desktop or laptop computer; although Chromebooks and mobile devices are capable of accessing the Canvas learning management system, they may not be compatible with certain third-party software.
- A web cam (built into most modern laptops)
- A microphone and speakers, headphones, or earbuds (also built in to most modern laptops)
- The most recent version of the Chrome or Firefox Web browser; the Safari browser can be particularly problematic when accessing online courses.
- A stable Internet connection capable of at least 2 Mbps upstream and 5 Mbps downstream.

Students may test the speed of their connection at <http://speedtest.net>

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.

V. Emergency Readiness

RAVE is the primary method of communication used by Samford University during a campus emergency. If you have not registered for RAVE alerts, please use the link provided below and go to the My Contact Information box on your Portal homepage to update your RAVE Emergency Alert Information. <https://connect.samford.edu/group/mycampus/student>

Samford University utilizes Alert Samford 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 Alert Samford app on your mobile device, laptop, desktop, or tablet, please click on this link

<https://connect.samford.edu/group/mycampus/student> and go to the Emergency Information 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.

VI. Americans with Disabilities Act

Students with disabilities who wish to request accommodations should register with Accessibility and Accommodations (205) 726-4892, access@samford.edu, DBH 105, <https://www.samford.edu/departments/disability-resources/>. Students who are registered with Accessibility and Accommodations 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.

VII. Title IX

Samford University and its faculty are committed to creating and maintaining a safe learning environment for all students and the entire University community. If you or someone you know has experienced sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, or discrimination based on sex or gender, please know that help and support are available. Samford University strongly encourages all community members to report incidents of sexual misconduct to the Title IX Office. You may contact the Title IX Office at 205-726-2764 or titleix@samford.edu.

Please be aware that all faculty members are required to disclose information concerning suspected or alleged sexual harassment or other violations of the Samford University Sexual Misconduct Policy to the Title IX Office. You can also make a disclosure yourself, including an anonymous report, through the Sexual Misconduct Report Form accessible on the Title IX website at <https://www.samford.edu/students/title-ix/>. If the Title IX Office receives information about an incident, they will reach out to offer information about resources, rights, and available procedural options. It is a student's choice whether they wish to engage or respond to that outreach.

If you, or another student you know, wishes to speak with a confidential resource who is not obligated to report information to the Title IX Coordinator, please reference the list of confidential resources in the online student handbook. You can also connect with a confidential resource through the Counseling Office at 205-726-4083 or the Office of Spiritual Life at 205-726-2825.

VIII. Student Bereavement Policy

In the event a student experiences the death of a significant member of his or her family or community, the University may excuse absences up to five days for travel and bereavement. The Provost's office will notify advisors and instructors of excused absences. It will be the responsibility of the student to follow up with faculty regarding missed exams, quizzes and required work for the class.

IX. 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. CRC appointments are available Monday-Thursday. Students can schedule appointments at samford.mywconline.com. Students will upload files for the tutor to review and meet in real-time sessions with a tutor. 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.

X. Inclement Weather

Inclement weather or other events beyond the control of the University that might cause risk or danger to students, faculty and staff may occasionally result in changes to normal University operations, including cancellation of classes or events; the class schedule and/or calendar may be adjusted.

XI. Counseling Services

Students may benefit from meeting with a counselor at some point to discuss difficult issues, gain insight for dealing with stress, or to process and understand events from the past. When a need for counseling arises, students should contact Counseling Services & Wellness Programs. On-site appointments are prepaid through student fees and there is no extra cost to the student. To schedule an appointment, please email counseling@samford.edu, call 205-726-2065, or stop by Dwight Beeson Hall (DBH) room 203.

XII. Library Services

Samford University Library (library.samford.edu) is more than just a building; it is a vast array of resources curated to support your success. In addition to print, media, and online resources, the library has collaborative meeting and study spaces, technology that supports your academic endeavors, and professional librarians with the expertise to assist with research needs. Please Ask Us (samford.libanswers.com), email us (reference@samford.edu), or call us at 205-726-2196 for more information about how we can help. We are here to assist with your information and research needs.

XIII. Student Government Association Samford University Honor Pledge

Preamble

Samford University's motto—For God, For Learning, Forever—brings together our commitment to our Christian heritage, the pursuit and transmission of knowledge, and the enduring virtues.

Only a particular kind of person and institution can fulfill such a demanding motto. To do this, the individuals who form the Samford community must embrace honor in all areas of life and scholarship. Thus, an honor pledge is an appropriate way for the Samford community to live out its motto.

Honor Pledge

I believe that the members of the Samford community possess dignity and are worthy of honor.

I understand that honoring others fosters academic achievement, personal growth, and spiritual development.

I commit to hold myself and my peers to the standards of conduct and academic integrity maintained by the University.

To this I, _____, pledge my sacred honor.

For God, For Learning, Forever

Note on Movie Content

Different people have different convictions and consciences when it comes to the content of movies. None of the films required for this course contain graphic nudity or sex scenes, but some may contain vulgar language, violence, and suggestive material. Every student is expected to consult the “Parents Guide” page for each film at the www.imdb.com website (or other similar guides). (Here are the guides for our three movies: [The Matrix](#), [Minority Report](#), and [Gattaca](#).) If you believe any of the movies would violate your conscience, would create a traumatic viewing experience for you, or would be objectionable in any other way, please contact me right away (and at the latest, a full week before you would have needed to see the movie) so that we can arrange an alternative assignment.

Course Schedule and Readings¹

Part 1: Introduction

- Week 1
 - 1/10: Introduction to the Course
 - *No Assigned Reading*
 - SF: *The Matrix* (first part shown in class)
 - 1/12: What Is Philosophy?
 - Susan Schneider, “Science Fiction as a Window into Philosophical Puzzles” (SF&P, introduction)
 - Plato, “Plato’s Cave. Excerpt from *The Republic*” (SF&P, chapter 3)
 - SF: *The Matrix* (second part shown in class)

Part 2: Epistemology

- Week 2
 - 1/17: Knowledge and Skepticism (continued)
 - Rene Descartes, “Some Cartesian Thought Experiments. Excerpt from *The Meditations on First Philosophy*” (SF&P, chapter 4)
 - 1/19: Knowledge and Skepticism (continued)
 - Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu), “Discussion on Making All Things Equal”
- Week 3
 - 1/24: Knowledge and Skepticism (continued)
 - SF: Eric Schwitzgebel, “Out of the Jar”
 - 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](#)”
 - 1/26: Knowledge and Skepticism (continued)
 - David Chalmers, “The Matrix as Metaphysics” (SF&P, chapter 5)

Part 3: Metaphysics

- Week 4
 - 1/31: Arguments for the Existence of God
 - St. Anselm, “The Ontological Argument”
 - St. Thomas Aquinas, “The Five Ways”

¹ 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.

- 2/2: Arguments for the Existence of God (continued)
 - Robin Collins, “God, Design, and Fine-Tuning”
- Week 5
 - 2/7: The Problem of Evil
 - J. L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”
 - Daniel Speak, “Free Will and the Problem of Evil” (pp. 489-495)
 - 2/9: The Problem of Evil (continued)
 - William Rowe, “The Inductive Argument from Evil against the Existence of God”
- Week 6
 - 2/14: Persons and Consciousness
 - SF: Isaac Asimov, *The Bicentennial Man*
 - SF: *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, “The Measure of a Man” (shown in class)
 - 2/16: Personal Identity
 - Eric Olson, “Personal Identity” (SF&P, chapter 7)
 - SF: Phillip K. Dick, “We Can Remember It for You Wholesale”
- Week 7
 - 2/21: Personal Identity (continued) and Review
 - Derek Parfit, “Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons” (SF&P, chapter 8)
 - 2/23: *Midterm*
- Week 8
 - 2/28: Time
 - Theodore Sider, “Time” (SF&P, chapter 25)
 - SF: Ray Bradbury, “A Sound of Thunder” (SF&P, chapter 24)
 - 3/2: Time Travel
 - David Lewis, “The Paradoxes of Time Travel” (SF&P, chapter 26)
 - SF: “How Does This Time Travel Work?” Scene from *Idiocracy* (shown in class)
- Week 9
 - 3/7: *Spring Break (No Class)*
 - 3/9: *Spring Break (No Class)*
- Week 10
 - 3/14: Free Will
 - SF: Ted Chiang, “Story of Your Life” (first half)
 - *Discuss Paper Topics*
 - 3/16: Free Will (continued)
 - SF: Ted Chiang, “Story of Your Life” (second half)
 - SF: *Minority Report* (first part shown in class)
- Week 11
 - 3/21: 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)
 - 3/23: Free Will (continued)
 - Harry Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”

Part 4: Value Theory

- Week 12
 - 3/28: Ethical Theory
 - John Stuart Mill, “Utilitarianism”
 - Immanuel Kant, “The Moral Law”

- SF: *The Good Place*, “The Trolley Problem” (select scenes shown in class)
 - 3/30: Metaethics
 - Harry Gensler, “Cultural Relativism”
 - SF: *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, “Half a Life” (shown in class)
- Week 13
 - 4/4: Meaning in Life
 - *Paper Topic Due*
 - Susan Wolf, “The Meanings of Lives”
 - SF: *Love, Death & Robots*, “Zima Blue” (shown in class)
 - 4/6: Justice and Equality
 - SF: Kurt Vonnegut, “Harrison Bergeron”
 - John Rawls, “A Theory of Justice”
- Week 14
 - 4/11: Applied Ethics
 - *Paper Due*
 - *No New Reading*
 - SF: *Gattaca* (first half shown in class)
 - 4/13: Applied Ethics (continued)
 - SF: *Gattaca* (second half shown in class)
 - Duncan Purves, “[The Non-Identity Problem](#)”
 - Molly Gardner, “The Nonidentity Problem” ([Wi-Phi Video](#) shown in class)
- Week 15
 - 4/18: Applied Ethics (continued)
 - Susan Leigh Anderson, “Asimov’s ‘Three Laws of Robotics’ and Machine Metaethics” (SF&P, chapter 22)
 - 4/20: Course Summary and Review
 - *No New Readings*
- *Final Exam Week*
 - 4/25 (Tuesday), 1:00pm-3:00pm: *Final Exam*
 - *No late work will be accepted after the end of the final exam period.*