

Philosophy 111, 2017

Course Outline

1. A brief description of the course

The course starts off by tackling a philosophical problem to give you an idea of the sort of issue we will be dealing with. Then you go on to study a number of basic philosophical problems, using René Descartes' *Meditations* as a starting point. This work raised many tough questions that are still being fought about by philosophers today. For example: what do I really know? What am I? Can I know that God exists? Would God ever deceive me? Am I as free to do things as I think I am?

The first part of the course will focus on Descartes' own thought; the second part will focus on two problems that arise out of it: the question of how our minds are related to our bodies, and the question of whether or not we really have free choice in our actions.

The course will be taught by Prof Simon Beck.

2. Classes – Lectures, tutorials and tests.

Regular classes will be a lecture on Tuesdays at 08h30 and on Thursdays at 13h10 in C5. Tutorials will be in the period assigned to you on your timetable (on a Tuesday or a Wednesday). Four of the tutorial classes during the semester will be used for class tests (two in each term). Your first tutorial class will be in week 3.

3. Course reader.

Course readers are available from Printwize in the Student Centre. There is no other text book required. Some of the readings, as well as extra material, will be posted on the course website.

4. Course website.

A website has been set up with course information, as well as extra course materials that you may find useful, on the university's iKamva site. You will find it at <https://ikamva.uwc.ac.za/portal>. If you are registered for the course, you will find a tab with the course code on it there, once you have logged on.

5. Lecture topics, tutorial questions and readings.

Week 1

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| Tue 28 Feb | Introduction to the course and discussion of what you are expected to do |
| Thu 2 Mar | A taste of philosophy
Reading: 'The Umpire's Dilemma' (Course reader p2, also under Week 1 on the course website) |

Week 2

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| Tue 7 Mar | A taste of philosophy, continued. You must bring with you to class a short written answer to the following questions:
1) If you were the umpire, what would you decide?
2) How would you justify your decision? |
| Thu 9 Mar | (a) Who was Descartes?
Reading: Notes for week 2 on the course website
(b) Can I trust my senses?
Reading: Meditation 1 (Reader p5, lines 1-43) |

Week 3

Tue 14 Mar

(a) Can I have knowledge of the truths of maths and logic?

Reading: Meditation 1, lines 44-108

(b) What can I really not doubt?

Reading: Meditation 2, lines 109-142

Thu 16 Mar

What am I? Descartes on his essence.

Reading: Meditation 2, lines 143-221

Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy* (p32 in Reader)

Tutorial

Class Test 1**Week 4**

Tue 21 Mar

No class – public holiday

Thu 23 Mar

Things and their essences

Reading: as for 16 Mar

Tutorial

Tutorial 1: Bring with you to the tutorial (and add a short reason in support of) your answer to this question:**What is the essence of a female?****Week 5**

Tue 28 Mar

How not to discover something's essence

Reading: Meditation 2, lines 222-307 and the extract from *Principles of Philosophy*.

Thu 30 Mar

Some questions and difficulties for Descartes

Reading: Meditation 2

Ifeanyi Menkiti, from 'Person and community in African traditional thought'. Reader p34.

Tutorial

Tutorial 2: Class exercise on the upcoming essay**Week 6**

Tue 4 Apr

Getting rid of the evil demon: can I seriously doubt that God exists?

Reading: Meditation 3, particularly lines 309-346 and 409-499 (*but you do need to read it ALL*).

Thu 6 Apr

Has Descartes proved that God exists?

Reading: Meditation 3

Tutorial

Class Test 2**Week 7**

Tue 11 Apr

The problem of error

Reading: Meditation 4

Thu 13 Apr

No class

Tutorial

No tutorial this week. Your assignment is due to be handed in.

STUDENT VACATION

Week 8

Tue 25 Apr

Descartes' theory of mind and the relation between mind and body

Reading: Meditation 2 and Meditation 6, particularly lines 1016-1135 and lines 1207-1244.

Thu 27 Apr

Investigating Descartes' theory of mind

Tutorial

Tutorial 3: Is it possible to think without a brain?**(a) what would Descartes say?****(b) what do you say?****Week 9**

Tue 2 May

Problems facing Descartes' theory of mind

Reading: Meditation 6

Churchland, from *Matter and Consciousness*, Reader pp 38-46

Thu 4 May	One way of responding to Descartes' problems: Interpretationism. Reading: Churchland, pp 48-49
Tutorial	Class Test 3
Week 10	
Tue 9 May	The costs of interpretationism. Reading: as for Thur 4 May, and on course website.
Thu 11 May	Another way of responding to Descartes' problems: Physicalism. Reading: Churchland, pp 51-57
Tutorial	No tutorial.
Week 11	
Tue 16 May	Physicalism 2. Reading: Churchland, pp 59-62
Thu 18 May	Actions, freedom and responsibility Reading: Meditation 4, especially p14
Tutorial	Tutorial 4: If God already knows what you are about to do, do you really have any choice in what you are about to do? Answer the question and back up your answer in less than 15 lines (you must assume that God <i>does</i> know what you are about to do).
Week 12	
Tue 23 May	Are our actions determined or are they free?
Thu 25 May	A middle path: Compatibilism 1 Reading: Hume, "Liberty and Necessity"
Tutorial	Class Test 4
Week 13	
Tue 30 May	Compatibilism 2 Reading: Ikuenobe, 'Relational autonomy, personhood and African traditions'
Thu 1 June	Making up our minds

6. Assessment

Your Class Assessment Mark (CAM) will result from a written assignment (70%) and 4 tests (your 3 highest marks will count 10% each). The CAM will make up 60% of your final mark. The tests will be MCQ tests in the tutorial slots listed above. The tests will assess your familiarity with the central texts we study and the assignment will assess your understanding of them and your ability to engage with them. The assignment details are here:

Assignment

You will have to submit one essay assignment for this module (as well as the tutorial tasks). Here is the topic. Make sure that you follow the notes after the topic carefully. Also look at the advice for writing a philosophy essay on the course website.

Descartes writes in Meditation 2, "I am forced to conclude that the nature of this piece of wax ... is perceived by the mind alone" (lines 256-258). Does his discussion of the piece of wax really succeed in showing that the essential nature (or essence) of something like a piece of wax can only be discovered through reason rather than through our senses? Argue in support of your answer.

- The deadline for your essay is **12h00 on Wed 12 April**. The essay must be submitted in electronic form via Turnitin and in (electronically printed) hardcopy to the essay box outside Room D11 on the ground floor of the New Arts Building. Your essay *may not be longer than 750 words* (this is *not* a target, just an upper limit).
- I am not prepared to listen to requests for an extension and I will not mark an essay that is handed in late unless it has a medical certificate attached showing why you could not complete it on time.

7. Requirements to qualify to write the exam

To qualify to write the exam, you must write all four of the tests and complete the assignment on time, achieving an overall classmark of above 40%. You must also submit the tutorial tasks *at the relevant tutorial*.

8. The Exam

The exam will be divided into 3 sections. The first section will be made up of multiple choice questions. They will cover the whole course and it will be worth 20 marks. The second and third sections will be essay questions covering the two parts of the course; you must answer one question in each of these sections, and each will be worth 40 marks. These are the questions you will be asked on Part One:

Section B

- (1) In Meditation 2 Descartes writes, "Thinking...is the one thing that can't be separated from me...Strictly speaking, then, I am simply a thing that thinks" (lines 175-179). Does Descartes succeed in proving that thinking is his essence? Argue in support of your answer.
- (2) Descartes writes in Meditation 2, "I am forced to conclude that the nature of this piece of wax ... is perceived by the mind alone" (lines 256-258). Does his discussion of the piece of wax really succeed in showing that the essential nature (or essence) of something like a piece of wax can only be discovered through reason rather than through our senses? Argue in support of your answer.
- (3) Although Descartes accepts that we have no guarantee that the ideas in our minds match up to anything in the real world, he argues (in Med 3) that his having the idea of God means that God must exist. Explain the argument he offers for this idea being so different from all others and argue whether or not he succeeds in proving that God exists.

Section C

- (1) Explain the problem that Descartes' dualism faces with regard to our behaviour being caused by our beliefs and desires. Then explain what you think is the best solution to this problem.
- (2) If it is true that everything that happens is causally determined, does that mean we cannot freely choose how to act? Explain your answer and explain what it means for our being morally responsible individuals.

9. Consultations

If you want to discuss any part of the course with me, please do so. You can either drop in or make an appointment with me at one of the classes. My office is Room D19 on the ground floor of the New Arts Building.

Prof Simon Beck