

# Critical Inquiry Seminar

## *Manifest versus Scientific Image*



### Objectives

- To think critically about and discuss whether science has a place for conscious, thinking, free, morally responsible creatures.
- To improve your written presentation of ideas and arguments.

<b>Course:</b>	IDI, section I6, Fall 2004
<b>Meeting:</b>	Tuesday/Thursdays 11 a.m.–12:10 p.m. Carnegie 12
<b>Instructor:</b>	Peter Kung, Department of Philosophy
<b>Contact:</b>	Pearsons 209, 607-2910 <a href="mailto:Peter.Kung@pomona.edu">Peter.Kung@pomona.edu</a>
<b>Office Hours:</b>	Tue/Thu 2:30–3:30; Wed 2–3; by appointment
<b>Website:</b>	<a href="http://pages.pomona.edu/~pfk04747/IDI/">http://pages.pomona.edu/~pfk04747/IDI/</a>

### Description

We regard ourselves as conscious, thinking creatures who are free to act and are, to some extent, in control of (and hence responsible for) our fate and the fate of others. But science presents a quite different picture of the world, one in which everything is explained in terms of very minute basic particles whose behavior is completely governed by laws of nature. Is there a clash between these two images of the world? How can the mind, free will, and morality exist if the world is nothing but a conglomeration of law-governed particles? Descartes grapples with these questions in his *Meditations*, but they are also given vivid articulation in recent films like *Twelve Monkeys* and *The Matrix*. Using the *Meditations* and these films as a framework, we will examine various historical (Aquinas, Hume, Leibniz) and contemporary (Thomas Nagel, Harry Frankfurt) philosophers' attempts to reconcile the world as we experience it with the world as described by science.

### Philosophical Writing

The study of philosophy offers an excellent opportunity to focus on two features that are especially important in good writing, **clarity** and **precision**. You will develop your ability to:

- Formulate positions and distinctions.
- Explain arguments for or against a position.
- Critically evaluate distinctions, positions, and arguments.

In casual conversation, and in class discussions, you sometimes have a point or question — you know what you want to say — but you can't quite put it into words. While this is fine for conversation, in your formal writing you are expected to present your considered thoughts on an issue. Throughout your professional life (and, more immediately, in

college), you will frequently be evaluated not on what you think, but rather on what you can *articulate*. Clear, well-structured writing is excellent evidence of clear, well-structured thinking.

## Readings

Readings will come from two sources:

1. *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings*, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (1988: Cambridge University Press)
2. Bulk packet

The textbook is available at Huntley Bookstore. You may purchase the bulk pack from Vicki Hiraes in the Philosophy Department office (Pearsons 208).

## Assignments

Weekly writing assignments (some ungraded) are designed to help you develop your analytic and critical writing skills. You must complete all writing assignments to pass the course. Here is a rough idea of what the graded assignments will be:

- i. Two short précis
- ii. Two short essays
  - a. Essay revisions
  - b. Peer review of second essay
  - c. Response to peer
- iii. Paper
  - a. Précis
  - b. Draft
  - c. Peer review
  - d. Final

## Policies

Class participation encouraged and expected, and will be factored into your grade:

- iv. Presentation (approx. 10%)
- v. Participation (approx. 10%)

Two other policies deserve note.

- Lateness is bad, very bad. No late work will be accepted. If an emergency prevents you from turning in your paper at the beginning of class on the due date, please have your adviser provide a letter or email requesting an extension.
- The orange handout is a statement on academic honesty; please read it carefully. We will discuss the application academic honesty to specific assignments as they approach. In brief: any work that is submitted as your own but written in whole or in part by someone else is plagiarism. Just for the record: plagiarism results in an F for the course and is subject to further disciplinary action.

## Tentative Schedule

This tentative schedule is subject to change depending on how much material we are able to cover week to week. Please check the course website for updates.

### Introduction

Week 1 Descartes, *Discourse*, parts I–III  
Screening: *The Matrix*, Monday evening (Sep. 6)

### Skepticism

Week 2	Descartes, Meditations I & II	précis 1
Week 3	Barry Stroud, “Philosophical Skepticism and Everyday Life” J.L. Austin, “Other Minds”	précis 2

### Existence of God

Week 4	Descartes, Meditations III & V	essay 1
Week 5	Saint Thomas Aquinas, “The Five Ways”	revise essay 1
Week 6	Hume, “Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion”: Parts II & III Roger White, “Does Life’s Existence Call for an Explanation?”	essay 2

**Truth, Error and Free Will**

Week 7	Descartes, Meditation IV Screening: <i>Twelve Monkeys</i> , Monday evening	revise essay 2
Week 8 (fall recess)	Time Travel and Fatalism	peer review essay 2
Week 9	Incompatibilism Hume, <a href="#">Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</a> , §VIII, “Of Liberty and Necessity”	response to peer

**Mind and Body**

Week 10	Descartes, Meditation VI	paper précis
Week 11	Smart, “ <a href="#">Sensations and Brain Processes</a> ” Nagel “ <a href="#">What Is It Like to Be a Bat?</a> ”	meeting
Week 12	student presentations	draft paper
Week 13	student presentations	peer review paper
Week 14	topic selected by students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”</li> <li>• Nagel, “War and Massacre”</li> <li>• Singer, “Famine, Affluence and Morality”</li> <li>• Jackson, “What Mary Didn’t Know”</li> <li>• Hume on induction</li> <li>• Locke on personal identity</li> </ul>	final paper