The Ghost Machine
Philosophy 14F/A: TR 4:30-6:25 Brower 0102 crn#91391
Fall 2012

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Overview

Our First Year Connections seminar is about "the ghost machine". The natural world around us is a machine, but it has ghosts in it: conscious entities like ourselves. This class will be an introduction to philosophy, and to a key issue in philosophy, the mind/body problem.

Philosophy is about the big picture. It asks: what is there in the world? how can we know about what there is? how should we live? what can we hope for in this life on earth, and for life after this one?

These kinds of questions don't have easy answers. They may not be even be good questions (compare: how many children did Lady Macbeth have?). Since "the big picture" includes *us*, we who ask and try to answer these questions, philosophy is "meta" (= "above", "after", "about", "higher-level"). That is: it steps back and asks, how are we thinking about this? are these good questions? what methods are, or might be, appropriate for answering these questions? So a lot of philosophy is **thinking about thinking**). It's about trying out answers to these questions: looking for reasons to believe one rather than another, and then (more critically) trying to figure out what makes one reason better than another, and which ones win that race.

Wilfrid Sellars put it this way: "The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term ... To achieve success in philosophy would be, to use a contemporary turn of phrase, to 'know one's way around' ..., not in that unreflective way in which the centipede of the story knew its way around before it faced the question, 'how do I walk?', but in that reflective way which means that no intellectual holds are barred".[1]

"The soul" seems like one of those things you can't really argue or think about, like religion or politics. But philosophy's business is to reason about everything. And it certainly has reasoned, and continues to reason, about the soul. Philosophy's puzzle is this: On the one hand, the natural world around us is "physical" in the sense that it's made up of nothing but physical matter. On the other hand, our own awareness of ourselves shows that somehow there's more to us than just physical matter. This seminar takes a 2500-year wide look at this puzzle. We'll look at the history of classical astronomy, from Aristotle to Copernicus and Galileo. We'll play the "Trial of Galileo" game. There is much that is philosophically interesting there. We'll be focussing on two things: (a) the way the arguments moved people's minds, and (b) the differences, subtle yet tremendously important, between the older, Aristotelian picture of how the world works, and the newer, materialist, Galilean picture.

Then we'll take up the "ghost in the machine" in earnest: first looking at the free will problem and various "solutions" (compatibilism, libertarianism, "hard" determinism), then at how contemporary science claims to show that we have no free will: that we are nothing but natural machines who lack free will.

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[1]Sellars, W. (1963). Philosophy and the scientific image of man. In *Science, Perception and Reality*, pages 1–40. Routledge & Kegan Paul, New York.

Texts

Kuhn, T. (1957). *The Copernican Revolution*. Harvard University Press.

Plato (1977). *Phaedo*. Hackett, Indianapolis. Translated by G.M.A. Grube.

Purnell, F., Pettersen, M., and Carnes, M., editors (2008). *The trial of Galileo*. Pearson Longman, New York.

Pereboom, D., editor (2009). *Free Will*. Hackett, Indianapolis, second edition.

Dardis, Anthony. Logic Handouts.

Requirements

(1) approximately 3 papers, approximately 12pp in total, in connection with "The Trial of Galileo" (specific assignments to be made during game). 30% of final grade.

(2) 2 further papers, one on the "free will" problem, one on the "willusionism" problem; approximately 5pp each; each worth 30% of final grade.

(3) You must lead the classroom discussion at least once. (See below.) 10% of your final grade will be a participation grade partly based on the classroom discussion, the rest based on your overall participation in the Trial and other class activities.

Class structure

There will be roughly three phases to the class. In the first 4 weeks of the semester the instructor will present material on logic and on the classical philosophers Plato and Aristotle. This phase will be highly interactive: we will discuss the concepts as intellectual equals.

The next 4 weeks will be devoted to a role-playing game called "The Trial of Galileo". There will be a variety of activities, including "faction meetings" where you interact in your role with other players, presentations by you to various formal bodies such as the College of Rome, discussion and debate between various factions, quizzes, etc.

For the last 5 weeks or so of the semester we will read short articles on questions about how the soul/the will/"the ghost" is related to the progress of the world. These meetings will be structured as seminars. This means that the focus will not be on me telling you what I think. The focus will be instead on our discussions of the articles we are reading.

To structure the seminar discussions, you have an additional responsibility: Most of our sections together will be led by one of you. At least a week in advance you will sign up to present the reading material for the day. You must write up a 2-page presentation for the class, in which you briefly describe what we have read and offer a critical commentary on these things. You will then start off the discussion by presenting, either by reading what you have prepared or simply by saying what conclusions you have reached. These presentations will not be graded but I will comment on them in writing. (Leading a class discussion on a given text or subject matter is an excellent way to work on a paper.)

Reading, writing and argument

Logic is a guide to checking someone's reasoning; it's also a guide to finding out what and how they are thinking; and it is a guide to producing one's own reasoning. When you are reading philosophical texts, like Plato's *Phaedo* or Thomas Huxley on zombies, the author will be presenting arguments (or at least relying on them, if not explicitly stating them). We can always ask the question,

what reason does the author have for saying these things? We want to identify those reasons and try to decide how good they are. As you read, want to answer the following questions for yourself:

(a) what is the structure of the argument I'm reading? what's the conclusion? what reasons support it? how are the reasons connected to each other and to the conclusion?

(b) are the reasons *true*? what can I say for and against believing them? what will other people say for and against believing them? what will the philosopher most likely say for them?

(c) regardless of whether the reasons are in fact true, if the reasons *were* true, would that be a good reason to believe the conclusion? if you can't imagine any way to believe the reasons and deny the conclusion, then the reason is good; if you can see how to accept the reasons and still say the conclusion is false, then the reason is bad.

Notice something **really** critically important: (b) is not **at all** the same as (c).

It's worth keeping in mind, both for our class, for your other classes, and for your life outside the university, that argumentation is always relevant to what you are encountering. Authors, and people in general, think various things—about the world of her writing, in an author's case, and about the world itself, for the rest of us. What do they think? why do they think that? (There's always another way to do something [or something else to do], so why did the author do it that way?) Answering a "why" question is providing a reason, and once again we have an argument to think about. Second, *you* think various things about what you are reading and about the world around you. To make discoveries, and to persuade others that you are right, you have to provide reasons for what you think. There you have more arguments, and more arguments to evaluate.

Your papers (almost always including your assignments for the Game) will present your thinking about the texts. I will ask you either to write about specific arguments that are made in our readings, or on problems or puzzles that arise as we think about these readings. I want you to think hard about the argument or problem or puzzle, and to call on your imagination and insight to work out a thoughtful response to it. (I put more weight on insight and imagination than I do on exposition or "research".) Getting started, the best strategy for writing a paper is to describe and evaluate an argument to a conclusion. Since philosophy is about thinking and reasoning about the big picture, most philosophical writing consists in giving reasons to believe some conclusion about the big picture, and showing the reader that they are good reasons. Most academic writing is very similar: it aims to persuade the reader to believe a conclusion, by producing the best set of reasons it can for that conclusion.

Good papers have three features: good mechanics (spelling, grammar); good understanding (accurate and insightful description of the subject matter, in our case, what goes on in a text); good thinking (interesting, insightful, accurate critical response to the text). *Good thinking is by far the most important.* It is easy to hide good thinking with bad writing.

Your papers **must** include at least one bibliographic reference, in the form of a footnote or an endnote. I do not have any preferences about the form of the reference. If you are comfortable with some standard reference format (MLA, APA), use that; if you don't have one that you are comfortable with yet, pick one, Google it (use the Hofstra Library main web page links to citation style guides . . .), and learn it cold. Suggestion: use/get a good reference management system for your computer.[2] You should also include a reference if you find yourself using or discussing the ideas

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[2]Microsoft Word includes a reference manager. EndNote is a very good professional reference manager but rather expensive. `http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_reference_management_software` describes many alternatives, some of which (for example, JabRef, which can work with Microsoft Word) are open-source–free– software. Zotero is a free plugin for the Firefox browser. You might also consider writing with the free typesetting

of others, for instance ideas that have come up in class from me or from your classmates.[3] Never assume that just because something seems well-known, that you shouldn't provide a citation to it.

Policies

- All papers must be typed, using standard margins and standard typefaces and fonts. In general I want hard copies; for the purposes of the Game you will post some work to a class website.

- No late papers accepted.

- Any paper (except the final paper) may be rewritten: a rewrite must be turned in by 2 weeks from the original due date.

- Excuse clause: stuff happens. If for some reason you are unable to hand in work, let me know as soon as possible, and be ready to provide documentation.

- A paper with no complete bibliographic reference will receive the grade of F.

- Turn off your phone or beeper before class.

- If you must leave class early, please inform me before class starts.

- If you cannot attend class, please inform me.

- Students with Disabilities: If you have any documented disability-related concerns that may have an impact upon your performance in this course, please meet with me within the first two weeks of the current semester, so that we can work out the appropriate accommodations on an individualized, as-needed basis after the needs, circumstances and documentation have been evaluated by Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). SSD is located in 212 Memorial Hall and can be reached at 516-463-7075 or ssd@hofstra.edu.

- **Academic dishonesy.** If I have reason to believe that any kind of plagiarism whatsoever has occurred I will request a discussion of the work. (See the *Hofstra Writer's Guide* for a definition of plagiarism. If you are in any doubt, consult with me.) If plagiarism has occurred, I will ask for the work to be completely rewritten. If rewritten work contains plagiarism, I will award the grade of F **for the course**. If there is plagiarism in the final paper, I will award the grade of F for the course. I will always file an academic dishonesty form with the Dean of Students if I believe that plagiarism has occurred. (These policies are in accord with the University's Policy on Academic Honesty as stated in the Hofstra University Bulletin. Procedures for Handling Violations of Academic Honesty by Students at Hofstra University are detailed in Faculty Policy Series #ll (rev. 2004.) for undergraduates.)

- Attendance is required. I will take attendance. If you are absent more than 4 times you will receive the grade of F.

- You are welcome to use a computer (including things like iPads or smartphones) in class to take notes or for other class-related purposes. If you use a computer for any non-class-related purpose, I will mark you absent for that day.

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program LATEX, along with its reference management system, BibTeX. These are very stable, very solid, very powerful programs; they are available for Windows, Mac OS X, and Linux. This *Syllabus* was prepared using LATEX.

[3]I want to thank James Wilkerson for discussion of ideas about how to organize a syllabus.

Schedule

We will discuss the following readings more or less during the weeks noted below. Do the reading before class.

Philosophy must be read **actively**. The aim of philosophical writing is to discover the truth—truth about something controversial and hard. **Read slowly.** Sentence by sentence, you must constantly question what you are reading, asking whether you think what the author says is true, and asking whether you think the author's conclusions follow. Figure out why, why not, take notes, write down what you think (and ask yourself: am I right?). Read with someone else, maybe out loud.

Date	Readings	Assignments
Sep 4	Introduction; logic and argumentation	
Sep 6	Logic + Kuhn Chapter 1	Logic quiz
Sep 11	Logic + Kuhn Chapter 2	
Sep 13	Logic + Kuhn Chapter 3	Logic quiz
Sep 18	(no class)	
Sep 20	Kuhn Chapter 4	
Sep 25	(no class)	
Sep 27	Kuhn Chapter 5	
Oct 2	Kuhn Chapter 6	
Oct 4	"Trial of Galileo" game setup 1, 2	
Oct 9	Game setup 3	
Oct 11	Game sessions 1 and 2	Main (game) paper
Oct 16	(Presidential debate: no class)	
Oct 18	(Telescope Lab)	
Oct 23	Game sessions 3 and 4	Secondary (game) paper
Oct 25	Game session 5 and 6	
Oct 30	Game sessions 7 and 8	
Nov 1	Game "post mortem"	Final (game) paper
Nov 6	Kuhn Chapter 7; D'Holbach on Free Will (Blackboard)	
Nov 8	Pereboom: Hume and Ayer	
Nov 13	Pereboom: Chisholm	
Nov 15	Pereboom: Peter van Inwagen	
Nov 20	Pereboom: Peter Van Inwagen (con't)	Free will paper
Nov 22	(Thanksgiving)	
Nov 27	(Blackboard) Huxley, "Automata"	
Nov 29	(Blackboard) Libet	
Dec 4	(Blackboard) Wegner	
Dec 6	(Blackboard) Shurger, Nahmias	
Dec 11	(Blackboard) Nahmias (con't)	
Dec 18	(Final exam scheduled: 4pm-6pm)	"willusionism" paper

Learning goals and objectives

This course has the following learning goals and objectives (drawn from the HCLAS General Education Learning Goals, at `http://www.hofstra.edu/Academics/Colleges/Hclas/hclas_goals.html`):

Goal 1. Students will demonstrate the ability to think critically and creatively.

    1a. Clearly and accurately summarize and evaluate the facts, presumptions, viewpoints, values, and arguments presented in a text or creative work.

    1b. Gather and assess relevant information, and apply appropriate cognitive methods in solving problems or answering questions raised in a text or creative work.

    1c. Construct well-reasoned solutions or conclusions; test and defend conclusions against relevant criteria and standards.

    1d. Critically analyze one's own thinking by identifying one's presumptions, values, and viewpoints as well as problems, inconsistencies, and unanswered questions.

    1e. Conceive and defend alternative hypotheses and viewpoints; offer and explain reasons for provisionally rejecting or accepting them.

Goal 3. Students will demonstrate proficiency in written communication.

    3e. Write an effective argumentative essay.