

## **Skepticism, Rationality and Free Will (Lower Division)**

Instructor: Alexandru Radulescu

University of California, Los Angeles

Office Hours: Tu Th 3-4, Dodd Hall 385

Email: radulescu@humnet.ucla.edu

Spring, 2011

Mon Wed 12:30-2

Homepage: aradulescu.bol.ucla.edu

### **Course Description:**

Our main focus in this course are certain radical forms of skepticism, that have generated replies and criticisms both in theory of knowledge, and in action theory. The main idea, according to these theories, is that knowledge, or freedom, for that matter, is impossible to achieve. Few people have embraced radical forms of skepticism, but they have fascinated many philosophers and we will try to understand what underlies this deep fascination.

We will spend about half of the semester reading texts written in the 17th and 18th centuries, but our principal goal is neither historical nor scholarly. However, the texts chosen from those periods have inspired much reflection on skepticism. In the second half of the semester, we'll be looking at how some of the successors of Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume have responded to skepticism, in addition to studying certain issues surrounding skepticism about freedom.

### **Overview:**

As the title of the course indicates, we will cover three major topics in this course:

- Skepticism
- Rationality
- Free Will

### **Course Requirements:**

Students are expected to regularly attend lectures and sections. There will be four assignments for this course: two short papers (about 1500 words each), each worth 20%, and two in-class exams: a midterm and a final exam, worth 25%, and 30%, respectively. Essay assignments will be due on the following dates:

**1st Essay:** 1/31, at 5:00pm.

**2nd Essay:** 3/28, at 5:00pm.

The exams are going to take place on the following dates:

**Midterm exam:** 2/28, during class.

**Final exam:** 5/9, from 1:00 to 3:00.

Late papers will be accepted up to one week after the due date and will be marked down 1/3 of a grade point (e.g. from a B+ to a B) for each 24 hour-period of lateness. Section participation is worth 5% of the full grade and can make a real difference in borderline cases.

## Texts:

- Descartes, Rene. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Translated and edited by John Cottingham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. ISBN: 0521558182.
- Plato. *Theaetetus*. Translated by M. J. Levett. Edited (with introduction) by B. Williams. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992. ISBN: 0872201589.
- Watson, Gary, ed. *Free Will*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. ISBN: 9780199254941.
- The other required readings have been collected in a packet that can be bought at the bookstore.

## Schedule of Readings:

The schedule is subject to change. Revisions will be announced in class and posted on the course website.

### I. Skepticism and the Rationalist Response

Week 1	1/10	Introduction
	1/12	Plato: <i>Theaetetus</i> – 145c–172c; 177c–179b
Week 2	1/17	No class, MLK Day
	1/19	Descartes: Meditation I
		Descartes: Objections and Replies, pages 63–67
Week 3	1/24	Descartes: Meditation II
		Descartes: Objections and Replies, pages 68–77
	1/26	Descartes: Meditation III
		Descartes: Objections and Replies, pages 78–89
Week 4	1/31	Putnam: “Brains in Vats” – chapter 1 of <i>Reason, Truth and History</i>
	2/2	Descartes: Meditation IV
		Descartes: Objections and Replies, pages 90–94
Week 5	2/7	Descartes: Meditation V
		Descartes: Objections and Replies, pages 95–106
	2/9	Descartes: Meditation VI
		Descartes: Objections and Replies, pages 107–115

### II. Empiricists: The Theory of Ideas, and Its (Alleged) Skeptical Consequences

Week 6	2/14	Locke: Selections from <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> “Of Ideas in General”, II. i (104–118); “Of Our Complex Ideas of Substance,” II. xxiii (295–317)
	2/16	“Of Knowledge in General”, “Of the Degrees of Our Knowledge”, “Of the Extent of Humane Knowledge”, IV. i–iii (525–562).
Week 7	2/21	Berkeley’s idealism and his attack on materialism : Selections from <i>A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge</i> Sections: 4–8; 17–20; 23; 26–30; 33; 35–57.

### III. The Common Sense Response

- Reid: Selections from *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*  
“Of Common Sense,” 423–434
- 2/23 Reid (ctd.) “Of First Principles in General,” 452–467  
& Moore: “Proof of An External World”
- Week 8 2/28 Moore: “Proof of An External World” (ctd.), & Austin: “Other Minds”

### IV. The Problem of Induction

- 3/2 Hume: Selections from *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*  
Sections II; IV–VII
- Week 9 3/7 Russell: “On Induction” – Chapter VI of *The Problems of Philosophy*  
3/9 Moore: “Hume’s Theory Examined” – Chapter VI from *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*

**Spring Break** – 3/14–3/16

### V. What Is Knowledge?

- Week 10 3/21 Lewis: “Elusive Knowledge”  
3/23 Gettier: “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”
- Week 11 3/28 Goldman: “A Causal Theory of Knowing”  
3/30 Armstrong: “The Thermometer-Model of Knowledge”
- Week 12 4/4 Lehrer: “The Coherence Theory of Knowledge”

### VI. Free Will

- 4/6 Van Inwagen: “An Argument for Incompatibilism”
- Week 13 4/11 Lewis: “Are We Free To Break the Laws?”  
4/13 Frankfurt: “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”
- Week 14 4/18 Strawson: “Freedom and Resentment”  
4/20 Albritton: “Freedom of Will and Freedom of Action”
- Week 15 4/25 Randolph Clarke: “Toward a Credible Agent-Causal Account of Free Will”  
4/27 Concluding Class (No reading).