



FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY, POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**PHILOSOPHY PROGRAMME
PHIL 409: Topics in Contemporary Philosophy**

**TRIMESTER 1 AND 2 2013
4 March to 17 November 2013**

Trimester dates

Trimester dates: 4 March to 17 November 2013
Teaching dates: 4 March to 18 October 2013
Easter break: 28 March to 3 April 2013
Mid-trimester break 1/3: 22–28 April 2013
Mid-year break: 4–14 July 2013
Mid-trimester break 2/3: 26 August to 8 September 2013
Last piece of assessment due: November 4.
Study week: 21–25 October 2013

Withdrawal dates

Information on withdrawals and refunds may be found at
www.victoria.ac.nz/home/admisenrol/payments/withdrawalsrefunds

Names and contact details

Course Coordinator: Professor Richard Joyce
Room No.: MY713
Email: richard.joyce@vuw.ac.nz
Office hours: By appointment

Lecturer: Associate Professor Ken Perszyk
Room No.: MY718
Email: ken.perszyk@vuw.ac.nz
Office hours: TBA

Lecturer: Dr Justin Sytsma
Room No.: TBA
Email: justin.systema@vuw.ac.nz
Office hours: TBA

Class times and locations

Can be found on the Victoria website at:

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/subjects/coursecatalogue>

It is advisable to check the above for any changes to the timetable programme.

Seminar Time: Mon 10-12pm
Seminar Venue: Murphy 617

Teaching/learning summary

The weekly meetings will include lecturing and discussion. There are no tutorials for this course.

Communication of additional information

This course uses Blackboard and presumes that all enrolled students have valid myvuw.ac.nz addresses. Please check that this account is active and you have organised email forwarding. Additional information and any changes to the timetable or lecture and seminar programme will be advised by email, announced in lectures, and posted on the Honours section of the Blackboard site.

Course prescription

This course is divided into three 6-week sections. Each section will be run by a different lecturer on material related to his/her current research interests. In this way students can gain a knowledge and appreciation of the most current and cutting edge problems in philosophy.

Course content

The first part of the course will be run by Richard Joyce. We will be discussing moral skepticism, with particular attention paid to Walter Sinnott-Armstrong's 2006 book *Moral Skepticisms* (Oxford University Press). A blurb of the book runs as follows: "Sinnott-Armstrong here provides an extensive survey of the difficult subject of moral beliefs. He covers theories that grapple with questions of morality such as naturalism, normativism, intuitionism, and coherentism. He then defends his own theory that he calls 'moderate moral skepticism,' which is that moral beliefs can be justified, but not extremely justified."

Copies of the reading for the first week will be distributed by email prior to the start of term.

The second part of the course will be run by Justin Systma, and will work through Eric Schwitzgebel's recent book, *Perplexities of Consciousness*. The blurb for the book reads as follows: "Do you dream in color? If you answer Yes, how can you be sure? Before you recount your vivid memory of a dream featuring all the colors of the rainbow, consider that in the 1950s, researchers found that most people reported dreaming in black and white. In the 1960s—when most movies were in color and more people had color television sets—the vast majority of reported dreams contained color. The most likely explanation for this, according to philosopher Eric Schwitzgebel, is not that exposure to black-and-white media made people misremember their dreams. It is that we simply don't know whether or not we dream in color. In *Perplexities of Consciousness*, Schwitzgebel examines various aspects of inner life—dreams, mental imagery, emotions, and other subjective phenomena—and argues that we know very little about our stream of conscious experience. In fact, he contends, we are prone to gross error about our ongoing emotional, visual, and cognitive experiences. Western philosophical tradition is nearly unanimous on the accuracy of our knowledge of our current conscious experience. Schwitzgebel is skeptical. Drawing broadly from historical and recent philosophy and psychology to examine such topics as visual

perspective, human echolocation (about which he is doubtful), and the unreliability of introspection even about emotional states (do we really enjoy Christmas? a family dinner?), he finds us singularly inept in our judgments about conscious experience."

Ken Perszyk's portion of the course will discuss the contemporary free will and moral responsibility literature.

Learning objectives

Students passing the course should advance their knowledge of several key areas of value theory. They should also advance their abilities to undertake logical and critical thinking, especially as it pertains to value theory. They should also practise and improve their critical writing skills. Students are expected to attend classes regularly, take part in class discussion, and keep up with the reading.

Graduate attributes

As with all Philosophy courses, learning objectives of this course contribute to the attainment of specific attributes in the areas of logical and critical thinking, conceptual analysis and rational and ethical decision-making. For more details please consult our website

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/hppi/about/overview-of-the-school/phil-overview#grad-attributes>

Expected workload

In accordance with the Faculty Guidelines, this course has been constructed on the assumption that students will devote a total of 300 hours to PHIL 409, including two hours of seminars per fortnight. Over the 24 teaching weeks of the academic year, that is an average of 12.5 hours per week.

Assessment requirements

PHIL 409 is assessed on the basis of three mandatory essays:

1. A 3-3500 word essay on Richard's section of the course, due Monday May 20.
2. A 3-3500 word essay on Justin's section of the course, due Monday Oct 14.
3. A 3-3500 word essay on Ken's section of the course, due Monday Nov 4.

Each essay is worth 1/3 of the final grade.

These essays will assess your knowledge of the material covered in class and in readings, your capacity to select and develop a viable writing project, your ability to undertake independent research and develop independent ideas, and your skills at critically analysing philosophical arguments relevant to your chosen topics.

Mandatory course requirements

There are no mandatory course requirements for PHIL 409.

Penalties

Philosophy Programme policy stipulates that late submission of essays is penalised. For each week or part thereof of lateness, a late assignment gets a 5 point penalty, up to three weeks, after which the assignment will get a zero mark. (i.e. 1-7 days late a loss of 5%; 8-14 days late a loss of 10 %; 15-21 days late a loss of 15%, and after that a zero mark.) Extensions may be granted in exceptional circumstances, but **all extensions require the student to provide documentation**. If granted an extension, students must agree to a new due date. Contact

your lecturer as soon as a problem emerges. Extension forms are available in the School office.

Submission of work

Essays should be submitted to Blackboard.

Class representative

A class representative will be elected in the first week, and that person's name and contact details will be available to VUWSA, the Course Coordinator and the class. The class representative provides a communication channel to liaise with the Course Coordinator on behalf of students.

You can find out more information on Class Representatives on the [VUWSA website](#).

Academic integrity and plagiarism

Academic integrity means that university staff and students, in their teaching and learning are expected to treat others honestly, fairly and with respect at all times. It is not acceptable to mistreat academic, intellectual or creative work that has been done by other people by representing it as your own original work.

Academic integrity is important because it is the core value on which the University's learning, teaching and research activities are based. Victoria University's reputation for academic integrity adds value to your qualification.

The University defines plagiarism as presenting someone else's work as if it were your own, whether you mean to or not. 'Someone else's work' means anything that is not your own idea. Even if it is presented in your own style, you must acknowledge your sources fully and appropriately. This includes:

- Material from books, journals or any other printed source
- The work of other students or staff
- Information from the internet
- Software programs and other electronic material
- Designs and ideas
- The organisation or structuring of any such material

Find out more about plagiarism, how to avoid it and penalties, on the University's website: <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/plagiarism>

Where to find more detailed information

Find key dates, explanations of grades and other useful information at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study. Find out how academic progress is monitored and how enrolment can be restricted at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/academic-progress. Most statutes and policies are available at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/policy, except qualification statutes, which are available via the *Calendar* webpage at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/calendar (See Section C).

Other useful information for students may be found at the Academic Office website, at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/avcademic.