Evidence of Teaching Excellence

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1 Teaching philosophy

Teaching matters to me. I have always known that I enjoy teaching, that it is fun, interesting, etc., but I was not aware of just how important it is to me until May 2009 when I was at the diploma ceremony to receive my Ph.D.

I realized it when I saw S—a football player I tutored through the athletic program. I started working with him when he took PHIL 100, and continued with him for three years as he took Logic, Ancient Philosophy, and so on.

S was one of the most difficult students in the tutoring program. In our early sessions he was rude, distracted, and unwilling to work. According to other tutors, S never changed. But something exciting happened for me: he did.

The change was slow. In Intro, I showed I cared and wouldn't be scared off. In Logic, S knew he needed help, and as we learned to work together, S learned he needed to slow down, focus, and think carefully. In Ancient, plodding together through Aristotle again showed S the value of working slowly. There he also learned about the creativity involved in writing papers and responding to objections.

To be frank, I was more proud when I saw S accept his degree than when I accepted my own. He worked hard for that degree, and I believe the skills he learned as a philosophy major will prepare him for whatever career he chooses. I am thankful I had the opportunity to help him develop those skills.

Philosophers have many skills: we are creative, careful, precise, and intellectually honest. And we are reasonable in the most literal sense, giving pride of place to reasons for beliefs. Every student, whether a philosophy or economics major, whether bound for academia or middle-management, would be well served to learn these skills. So teaching them is my aim.

What is the point in an engineering student taking one required philosophy class? Important as I think our intellectual history is, I do not think the point is that she knows basic facts about Plato. Rather, I think she should take a philosophy class so she can learn how to look for, think about, and respond to objections to her point of view; she should take a philosophy class in order to learn the value—and some of the skills—of putting her thoughts and arguments as clearly and concisely as possible.

In order to teach the skills of philosophy, my classes employ both lecture and discussion. Good lectures are powerful: they offer students a broad view of an issue, and they allow me to clearly and carefully present arguments, model philosophical thinking, and express my excitement about the material at hand. This last point is significant: the challenging, abstract material we deal with can demotivate students, but I believe my genuine excitement and love of the material can counter this and enliven what seems dry or irrelevant.

But lectures are insufficient to teach the skills of philosophy. To learn many of these

skills—and properly understand the material—students must be involved through discussion.

I frequently have students discuss in groups of two or three. Not only are there fewer competing voices in a group of two, but many students find a small group less intimidating (and hence easier to speak to). Additionally, since I often have group discussion directly before class discussions, students get the opportunity to try out their arguments or ideas on a small audience before putting them before the entire world.

I also regularly employ class discussion. Large discussions have benefits group discussions lack, such as my participation. Though I involve myself in as many group discussions as possible, I cannot be at every one. In class discussion, my participation keeps the conversation on track and I can answer questions as needed. As with lectures, in class discussion I both model the skills of philosophy and demonstrate my excitement about the material. Listening to others and crafting arguments are philosophical skills that can't be demonstrated or learned in lecture or writing. Whole-class discussions provide an opportunity for this.

Writing is another tool for teaching skills that I rely on. It develops a significant portion of the skills of philosophy by allowing students to think seriously, carefully, and creatively about a topic. To further the aim of writing as an instructional tool, I have experimented with a variety of techniques for helping my students—–offering one-on-one discussion of papers, instructional handouts, and in-class, directed peer review sessions. These have improved student writing, and I look forward to trying additional techniques that will help my students learn even more from that process.

I think writing assignments are also an important assessment tool. In past courses, I have used them as the only means of assessment. Upon reflection, I am convinced that in most undergraduate courses they are not sufficient for that task. Fortunately, I have had the opportunity to work with many talented professors and take seminars on assessment, and have thus seen a variety of approaches to assessment. I am excited to try some of these assessment techniques. I also look forward to continuing to research assessment on my own, and to talking with colleagues about what they find effective. Ultimately, I anticipate developing a style that expresses my core beliefs about philosophy and pedagogy while complementing the vision and approach of my department.

This is important because philosophy is important. I believe S's work in philosophy made him a better citizen. I believe it will help him have a successful and happy career. I am thankful for my opportunity to work with S—and all my other students—and I eagerly anticipate the opportunities for teaching that await me.

2 Quantitative evaluations

The course evaluations at the University of Virginia are primarily scored in two categories: the overall rating of the course and the overall rating of the instructor. Below are my scores for each of the classes for which I was the instructor of record. (Data from any courses I have taught or been a teaching assistant for is available upon request.)

2.1 The data

Term	Course Name	Overall Instructor Rating 5 pt. scale	Overall Course Rating 5 pt. scale
Spring 2010	Seminar for Majors: Material Objects	5.0	5.0
Summer 2008	Free Will	4.33	4.53
Summer 2007	God and Evil	4.42	4.42
January 2007	Philosophy Through Film	4.38	4.62
Summer 2006	Intro. to Philosophy	3.68	4.18
Spring 2006	Philosophy of Religion	3.80	4.16
Fall 2005	Free Will	3.18	3.68

2.2 Reflections on the data

I would like to highlight the following facts about these ratings:

- In my Free Will and Determinism course, my overall course rating improved by 1.15 points and my overall instructor rating improved by 0.85 points.
- In my Philosophy of Religion course (taught once under the title 'God and Evil'), my overall course rating improved by 0.62 points and my overall instructor rating improved by 0.74 points.
- Over the course of my six classes, my overall course rating improved by 1.15 points and my overall instructor rating improved by 0.85 points.

I am proud of the improvement in my evaluations, and I want to briefly explain what I think caused these increases. I begin by offering a specific explanation of the improvement in the free will course; I conclude with a more general reflection.

The differences between the free will course in 2005 and 2008—the differences which presumably explain the increased scores—seem to primarily involve my expectations of my students. For example: my initial expectations of what students would or should find interesting were mistaken. Upon discovering this I altered the way I structured the course and presented the material. In 2008 my structure worked much better, in large part, I think, because it helped the students see a clear order to the debate and gave them proverbial coat hooks for understanding new readings, theories, and arguments. Another example: in 2005 I expected too much from the students by way of discussion. I expected them to read the material, understand it, and come to class ready for a roaring discussion. Though I believe they tried, they often simply did not know what to focus on in the difficult and dense readings. In 2008 I made two important changes to help this: First, I gave students questions to consider as they read some of the more difficult texts. The questions helped them know what was important, where to slow down, etc. These handouts greatly increased the quality of discussion the next day. Second, I offered more lecture in 2008 than in 2005. I continued to use ample discussion, but I spent more time setting things up and reviewing arguments through lecture or a heavily guided discussion. This allowed students to check and correct their understanding where necessary; more importantly, it lead to increased confidence in—and quality of—the discussions we did have.

Now I want to offer a brief explanation for my general improvement as a teacher. I think this explanation is necessary because not only did each of my courses receive better reviews the second time I offered it, but my teaching evaluations continued to improve through the six courses I taught at the University of Virginia. Simply enough, I credit this to the work I have done on my teaching. I think about teaching and pedagogy; I attend events put on by the Teaching Resource Center at the University of Virginia; I read about teaching in general and teaching philosophy in particular. I am reflective about my teaching and I take pedagogy seriously. I believe teaching is a crucial and exciting part of my career as a professional philosopher, and I afford it the attention it deserves. As a result, my teaching

has improved. And since my excitement about, and interest in, teaching will continue, my teaching will continue to improve.

3 Written evaluations

3.1 Complete written evaluations from most recent course

Course evaluations at the University of Virginia include a quantitative and a written portion. I discussed the quantitative portion in §2.1. There are six questions on the written portion of the evaluations. In this section, I transcribe each and every answer to each of those questions in my most recent course evaluations.

In the Spring 2010 semester I taught PHIL 4020: Seminar for Majors. My seminar was on material objects (I include the syllabus below (§4.3)). The class was made of five third- and forth-year philosophy majors (that is, five Juniors and Seniors).

These comments illustrate my strengths as a teacher: my ability to present arguments and positions clearly; my ability to interact with students, gauge their understanding, and alter my presentation of the material in light of that knowledge; and my excitement about and facility with the material I am teaching. (Complete written comments for any and all courses available upon request.)

Student A:

1. What are the instructor's strengths and weaknesses in this course?

> His strengths were that he was really effective in explaining complex and confusing points and brought in interesting points about other philosophers and papers. He was also very helpful in helping me make clear what I wanted to actually say in the final paper.

2. In your opinion, did the instructor welcome alternative viewpoints? Did the instructor treat all students fairly? Why do you feel this way?

> Yes, absolutely, he always listened to anything anyone had to say and then really gave it some thought on how to respond and give that person feedback.

3. What are the strengths or weaknesses of the readings in this course?

> This was an extremely difficult book so often times I was completely confused until coming to class that week, but it was really thought-provoking and especially interesting in discussion.

4. Overall, what are the strengths or weaknesses of this course? What suggestions would you make for improving this course in the future?

> The strengths were that this course really helped me with my writing and I liked the progression of writing my rough draft, persenting it, and then having another final draft.

5. Would you recommend this course to others? Why or why not?

> Cannot recommend it because it changes every term, but I would like to if I could.

6. Please add any other comments that you think may be helpful to the instructor in improving this course in the future

> Charlie was a really informative, helpfully critical, and extremely intelligent professor.

Student B:

1. What are the instructor's strengths and weaknesses in this course?

> He is brilliant and discussion was great, no weaknesses.

2. In your opinion, did the instructor welcome alternative viewpoints? Did the instructor treat all students fairly? Why do you feel this way?

> He is very understanding of many different views, and discussion was approached from all sides fairly.

3. What are the strengths or weaknesses of the readings in this course?

> There was just one book, which I liked a lot (that there was one, I mean). It allowed us to really focus on the text.

4. Overall, what are the strengths or weaknesses of this course? What suggestions would you make for improving this course in the future?

> This course was perfect, I can literally think of nothing.

5. Would you recommend this course to others? Why or why not?

Absolutely, except it's the majors seminar and it changes every year.

6. Please add any other comments that you think may be helpful to the instructor in improving this course in the future

Student C:

1. What are the instructor's strengths and weaknesses in this course?

Strengths: Great lectures, always prepared, lots of knowledge and can always answer questions very well. Weaknesses: N/A.

2. In your opinion, did the instructor welcome alternative viewpoints? Did the instructor treat all students fairly? Why do you feel this way?

Yes, from everything I saw he treated all students fairly and welcomed alternative viewpoints.

3. What are the strengths or weaknesses of the readings in this course?

Strengths: very clear, easy to understand readings, most of the time. Weaknesses: occasionally readings were difficult to understand.

4. Overall, what are the strengths or weaknesses of this course? What suggestions would you make for improving this course in the future?

N/A Seminar

5. Would you recommend this course to others? Why or why not?

N/A Seminar

6. Please add any other comments that you think may be helpful to the instructor in improving this course in the future

Student D:

1. What are the instructor's strengths and weaknesses in this course?

Strengths—very patient, intelligent, prepared, encouraging
Weaknesses—Too awesome

2. In your opinion, did the instructor welcome alternative viewpoints? Did the instructor treat all students fairly? Why do you feel this way?

Yes he did, as this is a seminar class and full of discussion. He treated everyone's viewpoints with courtesy and helped the understanding of both strong and weak points of their view.

3. What are the strengths or weaknesses of the readings in this course?

Strengths—Interesting
Weaknesses—None

4. Overall, what are the strengths or weaknesses of this course? What suggestions would you make for improving this course in the future?

Strengths—Fun, interesting
Weaknesses—difficult
Having general weekly responses instead of question-specific responses.

5. Would you recommend this course to others? Why or why not?

Yes, unless they don't like talking

6. Please add any other comments that you think may be helpful to the instructor in improving this course in the future

Student E:

1. What are the instructor's strengths and weaknesses in this course?

> Strengths: comments on papers and summaries of arg./disc. Willingness to provide big picture relevance. Approachability and knowledge of the material. Weaknesses: He doesn't draw well. But it works out.

2. In your opinion, did the instructor welcome alternative viewpoints? Did the instructor treat all students fairly? Why do you feel this way?

> Yes, in fact we didn't know his view on Merricks theory until half way through the term; every valid view was welcomed and addressed. We had some weird ones.

3. What are the strengths or weaknesses of the readings in this course?

> Strengths: readable and instructive. Dense, but not huge quantity. Weaknesses: He's all wrong. Very frustrating, but that's inescapable.

4. Overall, what are the strengths or weaknesses of this course? What suggestions would you make for improving this course in the future?

> Strengths: fascinating topic. My fave class this semester. Weaknesses: we took too long with weekly summary papers. I think disc. would have been better if we were encouraged to form our own opinions from the get go.

5. Would you recommend this course to others? Why or why not?

> Absolutely. I learned a lot, not just on the topic but w/philosophical writing as well

6. Please add any other comments that you think may be helpful to the instructor in improving this course in the future

3.2 Selected written evaluations from all courses taught

In this section I have included some of the best written comments I have received from each of the classes I have taught at the University of Virginia as the instructor of record (except the most recent course, comments for which are available above in § 3.1). These comments illustrate my ability to engage students in discussion, help students understand complicated arguments, and develop student interest in philosophy. Though they are not all the comments for these courses, I believe the following is a representative sample.

3.2.1 Summer 2008—Free Will and Moral Responsibility

- He explains the arguments really well, he's good at breaking the argument down to better understand.
- He was very knowledgeable and had an apparent love of the subject. He made himself readily available for extra discussion and wanted students to do well.
- Able to think about his lecture carefully before doing the class. Able to explain the course.
- Extremely intelligent in the field. Very knowledgeable and helped me realize determination.
- The instructor was excellent at clarifying subjects, and good at provoking discussions.

3.2.2 Summer 2007—God and Evil

- He daily inspires discussion among the students.
- Yes [I would recommend the course to others], it is very interesting and well-taught.
- The lectures and the discussions were well led and taught.
- Good at provoking discussion about readings.
- Mr. Tanksley has extensive knowledge on the topic, he knows his stuff—good examples.
- The instructor was very knowledgeable of the material. It was very helpful to do in class group discussions and discussions as a class. It improved [my] thinking analytically.
- The instructor was a very genuine person and willing to help in and out of class. He cared for his students, in my opinion and helped to get us to think.
- I felt he was very good at encouraging discussion. Very good at showing all view points.
- Very organized, balances lecture and discussion well, unbiased and does not express own opinions—gives reasons for each view and leaves it up to class to discuss.
- This course definitely opened my eyes to new ideas and new ways of thinking. As my first philosophy course, I definitely feel prepared to take on other courses.

3.2.3 January 2007—Philosophy Through Film

- This is the first class that made long discussions interesting for me.
- Charlie was a fantastic teacher of a relatively difficult subject to teach. I really enjoyed his lectures. He was extremely knowledgeable about the subject matter and made me more interested in philosophy.
- Professor Tanksley did an excellent job answering questions effectively. Also, I liked how he formatted the class discussion.
- Good movie choices. I wasn't looking forward to the J-term, but it turned out to be an enjoyable experience!
- I enjoyed this course because it focused on some of the more practical concerns of the subject matter—the philosophy courses I have been in in the past have tended to focus on abstract concepts or single-sided teaching methods, which has not been very beneficial. The combination of films, readings, and writings really helped me to grasp my understanding of the concepts and what I felt was right, wrong, and confused about.
- I thought the class was great because I had no prior knowledge of philosophy and now I feel I have a basic understanding of what it is about.

3.2.4 Summer 2006—Introduction to Philosophy

- He definitely knows his stuff.
- He knows a lot about his field and applies it well in discussion.
- Yes [he welcomed alternative viewpoints] because he was really interested in our points of view and was eager to teach each one of us.
- He really understands the topics and does a great job of hearing out other's views and evaluating them.
- Good at asking us to think critically.
- Good with asking questions.
- The instructor was very competent in pursuing both sides of the argument and therefore giving a full, unbiased observation to a topic.
- Yes [I would recommend the class to others]—-greatly augmented my ability to read and comprehend, as well as defend an argument.

3.2.5 Spring 2006—Philosophy of Religion

- Charlie always gave great thought-provoking remarks for everything we read. He always made you think.
- Well prepared and very able to think and articulate on his feet.
- Good discussion leader, good mix of lecture and discussion.
- He is very well prepared and leads

very thought provoking discussions. He exhibited no real weaknesses to me.
- He welcomed all viewpoints and treated students fairly. I feel this way because this class had some of the best discussions I've participated in at UVA.
- Good at keeping discussion flowing during class and explaining tough ideas.

3.2.6 Fall 2005—Free Will and Determinism

- He approached how to teach the material in various ways and stuck with the ones that worked for us. He seemed very prepared for each lecture and was always capable of answering our questions.
- It's hard material, Charlie did well with it.
- Flexible for students.
- Strengths were the well put together analyses of the papers.
- He understood material and lectured/led discussion well.
- He knew what he was talking about, he was friendly and easy to approach and facilitated discussion.
- Discussions were strong.
- Discussions were good and thought provoking, which was a strength, and the lectures were usually good as well.

3.3 Unsolicited comments from students

In addition to the written comments on official evaluation forms, I have received numerous comments by students via email. Here are some of them:

- "I know it's been a while since I last saw you in Free Will last summer, but you immediately came to mind when I was trying to think of somebody that could bring a critical eye to my thesis work. I'm currently hunting for a handful of advisors to look at specific sections in my political and social thought thesis. [...] Since you really pushed the preciseness of my arguments in free will, I thought you would be perfect to help me eliminate any sloppiness in the first chapter."—Matt (09/02/2009)
- "I wanted to express to you how much that I enjoyed taking your Philosophy of Religion lecture in the summer. It was a needed break from the monotony of being a biology major, and it really helped me to solidify some concepts I was struggling with in my own spiritual beliefs. There is not a huge opportunity for an educator to connect with someone face to face in the biology department, and I feel that I did get that contact with the small lecture environment of your class during the summer."—Michael (11/16/2007)

- "I did want to tell you that I thoroughly enjoyed your class this semester despite missing several classes. I wish I had taken it last semester or last year when I had a little more time, but I guess you probably weren't teaching it then either, haha. Anyways, good luck, and I just wanted to let you know I really got a lot out of your instruction this semester"—Joseph (05/03/06)
- "thanks for providing an interesting and thought-provoking class"—Jason (01/23/2007)
- "Your class was great, and I very much enjoyed it!!"—Lyndsay (01/17/2007)
- "Thanks for a great class, I've really enjoyed it."—Amar (12/07/2005)

4 Syllabi

The following pages contain sample syllabi for three courses I would love to be able to teach (two of which I am thankful to have had the opportunity to teach at the University of Virginia). In an attempt to balance considerations about the length of this document with my desire to accurately represent my teaching philosophy, I have only included three sample syllabi here, though I am happy to provide syllabi for any course. I have included syllabi for courses on Free Will, Twentieth Century Analytic Philosophy, and Metaphysics. The courses are geared at a 100/200-level, a 300-level, and a 400-level respectively. The courses build on the skills developed at previous levels, such that students in a 400-level class are employing more philosophical skills than those in their first class.

4.1 Free Will

Course description
In his closing statements of the 1924 Leopold and Loeb murder trial, Clarence Darrow argued that Leopold be spared the death penalty in spite of the fact that he confessed to the murder. The defense is famous because Darrow's argument trades on the truth of determinism: Leopold is not guilty because all Leopold's actions, including the killing, were the result of his nature and surroundings. Simply rejecting determinism looks insufficient to make Leopold guilty, since undetermined actions seem just random or lucky. Surely Leopold is not morally responsible if his killing is the result of sheer chance. It looks like moral responsibility is in trouble.

In this class we will consider this question: are we ever morally responsible for our actions? We begin the class by considering a forceful argument that moral responsibility is, in fact, impossible. The rest of our time will be spent considering ways to reply to this challenge. In the end, you will have to judge for yourself if any are up to the task.

Course objectives
This class will focus on two skills in the philosopher's toolbox: (1) the ability to understand complex theories, and (2) the ability to isolate and identify arguments. Why learn these skills? Here are two of the many reasons. First, they will help you in all your other classes. Second, they will help you understand bigger issues in life. To see this, suppose you need to vote on a complex issue—an issue at a board meeting, a local referendum, a Presidential race—and you are faced with scads of information (some of it aimed at misleading you) presented in complex and confusing ways. The skills you learn in this class will help you understand difficult issues and actually determine what the arguments for both side are. Pretty practical results from a philosophy class. But it will not all (or even mostly) be practical. Fortunately, we will get to practice these skills while considering one of the most interesting and intricate issues in all of philosophy: do we have free will?

With all this in mind, there are three primary goals for this course:

1. Students will be able to explain complex philosophical positions.
2. Students will be able to isolate and present arguments in print sources.
3. Students will know some fun and interesting (and scary) information about free will.

Required texts
Watson, Gary. (ed.) 2003. *Free Will.* Second Edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
Additional papers made available electronically.

Course requirements
Midterm: 25%
Final: 30%
Three short papers: 15% each

Schedule of readings
1. The threat to moral responsibilty
    - G. Strawson, "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility"
    - Smart, "Free Will, Praise and Blame"
2. Compatibilism
    - P. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment"
    - Frankfurt, "Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility"
    - Widerker, "Libertarianism and Frankfurt's Attack on the Principle of Alternative Possibilities"
    - Fischer, "Frankfurt-Style Compatibilism"
    - Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"

- Watson, "Free Agency"
- Scanlon, "The Significance of Choice"
- Pettit and Smith, "Freedom in Belief and Desire"
- Wolf, "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility"

3. Libertarianism
    - Chisholm, "Human Freedom and the Self"
    - Clarke, "Toward a Credible Agent-Causal Account of Free Will"
    - Kane, "Responsibility, Luck, and Chance: Reflections on Free Will and Indeterminism"
    - Mills, "The Sweet Mystery of Compatibilism"
    - Markosian, "A Compatibilist Version of the Theory of Agent Causation"
4. The threat renewed?
    - Pereboom, "Defending Hard Incompatibilism"

4.2 Twentieth Century Analytic Philosophy

Course description
This is a course on the recent history of philosophy—philosophy in the 20^{th} Century. Given its proximity to our own time, understanding this period is crucial to understanding contemporary philosophy. Many of the readings and topics we will cover are, rightly, considered classics or must-reads, and we will focus on a number of issues central to philosophy in this period (e.g., the focus on logic and language). But there is more to be said for the period and its interest. Philosophy in the 20^{th} century presents us with a mystery. In this class we will try to solve that mystery.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, metaphysics—the philosophical study of what the world is like and what sorts of objects exist—was a well-respected branch of philosophy. Metaphysical speculation was part and parcel of doing philosophy. Alexius Meinong, for example, argued that any object you can imagine (the present king of France, a unicorn, a square circle) actually exists in our world; in America, debate raged between Idealists (those who believed that the external world depends upon our minds) and Realists—and the Idealists were in the majority.

Things were not rosy for metaphsyics for long. With the rise of analytic philosophy, with its focus on logic and language, metaphysics was, for all practical purposes, resigned to the dustbin. Metaphysical assertions were derided by the Logical Positivists as meaningless; Bertrand Russell (and, later, W. V. O. Quine) outright made fun of Meinong's views in their published works.

Then, in the second half of the century, something changed. Metaphysics slowly started gaining traction. Mainstream analytic philosophers began embracing metaphysical theories and speculation. In fact, just recently, Meinong's own view has been recussitated, and it looks like it is gathering momentum, not (just) insults.

This class is about the history of philosophy in this period. It is about the story of metaphysics. In it, we will (I hope) formulate a plausible story to explain this crazy history.

Course objectives
This is an upper-level course (though students with no prior experience in philosophy will be able to succeed in the course). This fact helps shape the following course objectives:

1. Students will be able to clearly and concisely explain important arguments and positions from the era.
2. Students will be able to raise objections to written arguments.
3. Students will be able to clearly and carefully develop an original argument.

Required texts
Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*
Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*
Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*
Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*
Papers available electronically.

Course requirements
Two tests: 25% each
Two short papers: 25% total
One longer paper: 25%

Schedule of readings
1. Early Analytic Philosophy
    - Meinong, "On the Theory of Objects."
    - Frege, "On Sense and Nominatum."
    - Russell, "On Denoting."
    - Strawson, "On Referring"; Russell, "Mr. Strawson on Referring."
    - Russell, "What There Is."
    - Russell, *Problems of Philosophy,* ch. 1–3.
    - Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, ch. 5–8.
    - Moore, "A Defense of Common Sense" and "Proof of an External World."

2. Positivism
    - Hempel, "Empiricist Criteria of Cognitive Significance."
    - Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology."
    - Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic,* ch. 1–4.
    - Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic,* ch. 5–8.
    - Quine, "Two Dogma's of Empiricism."
    - Quine, "On What There Is."
    - Quine, "Identity, Ostension, and Hypostasis."
3. Post-Positivism
    - Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* §§ 1-27; 199-219.
    - Lewis, From *On The Plurality of Worlds.*
    - Kripke, *Naming and Necessity,* Lectures 1-2.
    - Kripke, *Naming and Necessity,* Lectures 2-3.
    - Williamson, "Necessary Existents."

4.3 Metaphysics

Course description
"[…] we live amongst riddles and mysteries—the most obvious things, which come our way, have dark sides, which the quickest sight cannot penitrate into; and even the clearest and most exalted understandings amongst us find ourselves puzzled and at a loss in almost every cranny of nature's works […]"—*Tristram Shandy*

This class is about the metaphysics of ordinary objects. In it will will consider the existence of objects—such as tables and chairs—that most of us take for granted. Careful thinking about such objects, some think, reveals that many of the objects we ordinarily believe in, in fact, do not exist. In the end, you will have to decide for yourself just how the scales balance: is the world more mysterious than we thought?

Course objectives
This is an advanced course in philosophy. My expectations of you will be shaped by this fact, and your expectations of the course should be shaped by this fact as well. The real work of philosophy is in writing. So that is what we shall do in this course: write. This emphasis on writing will improve your writing. In light of this, here are the course objectives:

1. Students will be able to craft careful and precise arguments.
2. Students will develop their skills in presenting their work to others.
3. Students will learn to respond to objections and setbacks in their work.

Required text
Merricks, Trenton. 2001. *Objects and Persons.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Course requirements

- Six short papers: 50% total
- Long paper: 50%

This course is designed to help develop your abilities as a writer. The emphasis is thus on writing. Our primary text has seven chapters. I will ask you to write a short paper on chapters 2–7 (more on those assignments will follow). Frequent writing will help you develop your abilities to understand the arguments you read, carefully and concisely explain those arguments, and develop creative objections to them. Half your grade in this class will come from those six papers. I will drop the lowest of those grades and then average the remaining five grades.

The other half of your grade will come from a long paper. Actually, it will come from the long paper you write *plus* the process of writing the paper. The process of writing is important, and most of that process inovlves revising. In this course, you will write—and substantially revise—a long paper. You will give me a draft of your paper around halfway through the semester (after talking with me about your topic). I will give you feedback on your paper and you will rewrite it. The last few weeks of class are devoted to student presentations: you will have approximately half a class period to present what is, in essence, the second draft of your paper (revised in light of my feedback). Your peers will give you helpful comments and objections. Then you will rewrite your paper a third time, taking into account those comments, your reading, etc., and you will give me a final draft of your paper on the day of our exam. This process, and the paper that results, is worth half your grade.

Schedule of readings

Week 1 Chapter 1
Week 2 Chapter 2 **(short paper due)**
Week 3 Chapter 3 **(short paper due)**
Week 4 Chapter 4 **(short paper due**; **paper topic due)**
Week 5 Chapter 5 **(short paper due)**
Week 6 Chapter 6 **(short paper due**; **first draft due)**
Week 7 Chapter 7 **(short paper due)**
Weeks 8–12 Student presentations