

Chapman University

Spring 2021

PHIL398 Seminar: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy

Tuesday/Thursday 2.30-3:45pm on Zoom

Instructor: Dr. Kelvin J. McQueen

Email: mcqueen@chapman.edu

Office hours: email me to schedule a Zoom meeting.

The seminar focuses on David Chalmers' forthcoming book *Reality 2.0: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy*, which argues that virtual reality (VR) technology not only raises new philosophical problems but also helps to solve traditional ones. VR technology includes everything from video games through augmented reality glasses and virtual reality headsets to simulations of entire universes. Descartes' traditional problem of the external world will receive particular attention: How can we know anything about the external world? How do we know that reality is not an illusion? Many related questions arise along the way: Is there a God? What is consciousness? What makes for a valuable life? What is the difference between right and wrong? How should our society be organized? New philosophical questions include: How do we know we are not in a VR computer simulation? Is VR an illusion? How can we know we're not being deceived by deepfakes? Can AI be conscious? Do smartphones extend our minds? Can you live a meaningful life in VR? Does augmented reality genuinely augment reality? Are there ethical constraints on the creators of virtual worlds? Should humans ultimately upload themselves to the cloud entirely? What is a computer, anyway?

Course Delivery

Lectures are given via Zoom every Tuesday and Thursday 2.30-3.45pm (unless the Covid situation improves and we are allowed to return to classrooms). The lectures are recorded. Our primary reading, which we will work through each week, can be found on Canvas. Chapter topics are:

- I Virtual Worlds
- II Knowledge
- III Reality
- IV Real Virtual Reality
- V Mind
- VI Value
- VII Foundations

Tuesday's lecture will usually be a lecture on a section of the book. Thursday's lecture will usually be a recap and will involve breakout room activities that enable you to discuss that week's topic in depth. Each week you will also contribute to discussion boards for a portion of your grade. You should use the breakout rooms to refine your discussion board post for that week. The remainder of your assessment will require you to write papers, details below.

Assessment and grading

Participation. 10%

You receive 10% simply for attending all lectures and participating constructively in breakout rooms. You are allowed three unexcused absences. Every subsequent unexcused absence will cost 1%. Failure to participate in breakout room activities will also cost 1% per breakout room activity.

Weekly discussion board contributions. 20%

Beginning week 2, you will be required to make *at least two* discussion board contributions per week. Links to discussion boards are found in the Canvas modules. Each week, you will **(1) respond to a posted prompt** (try to do this mid-week or right after the Thursday lecture) and then **(2) provide constructive feedback** on someone else's response to the prompt. You have until Saturday night at midnight each week to complete your two contributions. **Late contributions will not be graded. Missed contributions cannot be made up.**

1st short paper. Due: Sunday 11.59pm March 14. 15%

Write a philosophical paper on a topic covered so far. 500-700 words. Upload to Canvas before deadline.

2nd short paper. Due: Friday 11.59pm April 23. 15%

Write a philosophical paper on a topic covered so far (distinct from 1st short paper). A bibliography is necessary and must include at least one reference (other than the Chalmers book). 600-800 words. Upload to Canvas before deadline.

Long paper. Due: Thursday 11.59pm May 20. 40%

Write a philosophical research paper on a topic covered in the course. The paper may build on a short paper but must go well beyond it. A bibliography is necessary and must include at least 6 references. 2500-3500 words. Upload to Canvas before deadline.

General note: If a student is going to miss a paper deadline, the student must contact the instructor in advance to give a reason. Proof of the student's excuse is due asap.

Final grades will be assigned as follows:

A	93 - 100	B+	87 - 89	C+	77 - 79	D+	67 - 69
A-	90 - 92	B	83 - 86	C	73 - 76	D	60 - 66
		B-	80 - 82	C-	70 - 72	F	0 - 59

In preparation for writing philosophical papers you must read:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

The following is a helpful guide to general academic writing:

<http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/jfb/bengor.pdf>

Lectures are Recorded

Software will be used to record live class discussions. As a student in this class, your participation in live class discussions will be recorded to assist those who cannot attend the live session, or to serve as a resource for those who would like to review content that was presented. These recordings will be made available only to students who are enrolled in the class, and only during the period in which the course is offered. All recordings will become unavailable to students in the class shortly after the course ends. Students who prefer to participate via audio only will be allowed to disable their video camera so only audio will be captured. Please discuss this option with your instructor.

Academic Integrity Principle Statement

Chapman University is a community of scholars that emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith. Students are responsible for doing their own work, and academic dishonesty of any kind will be subject to sanction by the instructor/administrator and referral to the University's Academic Integrity Committee, which may impose additional sanctions up to and including expulsion. For further information see: chapman.edu/academics/academic-integrity/

Students with Disabilities

In compliance with ADA guidelines, students who have any condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this class should inform the instructor at the beginning of the term. The University no longer makes the initial contact with professors--the student does. The University will determine what accommodations are suitable based on documentation and individual student needs, and students will email this information, in pdf form, to their teachers. Contact Ms. Andrea Tedford, the Counselling & Disability Services coordinator, at atedford@chapman.edu or 714-516-4520 (410 N. Glassell St.). The Disability Services Specialist, Mr. Jason Alexander, will then work with faculty members, who are asked to provide appropriate accommodations for these students. The granting of any accommodation will not be retroactive and cannot jeopardize the academic standards or integrity of the course.

Philosophy Program Learning Outcomes (PLO's)

PLO1: Writing

Ability to state and support a thesis, apply knowledge of critical reasoning, accurately interpret philosophic sources, and clearly communicate a balanced account in writing.

PLO2: Critical Reasoning

Ability to construct and analyze complex arguments, and distinguish good reasoning from bad.

PLO 3H: History of Philosophy

Ability to demonstrate a deep understanding of central figures, texts, and ideas from the Modern or Ancient and Medieval periods of the history of philosophy.

PLO 3M&E: Metaphysics & Epistemology.

Ability to demonstrate knowledge of some of the most important figures and theories in metaphysics and epistemology.

PLO 3L: Logic

Ability to demonstrate knowledge about and skill in deductive or inductive reasoning.