

**Phil 300: Rationalism and Empiricism  
CSUF, Fall 2016  
Instructor: Jason Sheley  
First Writing Assignment**

**Overview: This exam is designed to do three things: first, to test your knowledge of the material covered in the first part of the course; second, to test your ability to apply the concepts you have learned to new cases and contexts; third, to both broaden and deepen your knowledge of the relevant concepts.**

**Assignment:**

**Option A: At the end of the film *Shutter Island*, Teddy Daniels finds himself in quite the predicament. It is not clear what is real. And worse: Teddy Daniels does not know who he really is.**

**In this writing assignment, I want you to explore whether Descartes' philosophy can offer a solution to the problem. Can Descartes' methods offer a way out?**

**Write a short essay (no more than 1000 words) in which you take a position on whether Descartes can offer a way out. You will want to choose the path that seems the most promising (for example: the cogito, the CDP rule, or the proof of God's existence), or else, if you think Descartes cannot offer a way out, show why the most promising way cannot work.**

**Option B: At the end of the film *Inception*, Dom returns to his children, and spins the top before he walks outside. The film ends before we find out whether the top falls over (which would indicate whether he is still dreaming or not).**

**Write a short essay (no more than 1000 words) in which you take a position on whether Descartes can offer a way out. You will want to choose the path that seems the most promising (for example: the cogito, the CDP rule, or the proof of God's existence), or else, if you think Descartes cannot offer a way out, show why the most promising way cannot work.**

**Option C: Consider the film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Build a skeptical scenario for the Mary character. What doesn't she know that could undermine her knowledge? (Hint: think here in terms of sources of knowledge, rather than particular items) Does this scenario undermine her knowledge in general? How does the Mary scenario compare to Descartes' own skeptical scenario?**

**Due date: The assignment will be due by November 9th.**

**Please send a copy of your paper to the following e-mail  
jasondsheley@gmail.com**

**You may also wish to send a copy to my other address:  
jsheley@fullerton.edu. I would encourage you to e-mail a copy to  
yourself, as well.**

**Important points to keep in mind:**

**I recommend you begin as soon as possible, and work in short bursts every day.**

**I recommend that you see me in my office hours (in H 313) to discuss your drafts.**

**If you wish, you may compose your essay in the form of a dialogue, letter, or in  
Meditation style. If you choose this option, please see me to discuss your  
drafting process.**

**I recommend following this structure. Briefly set out the predicament, being  
careful not to engage in too much exposition of the film. Then take up your  
proposed solution (or solution you wish to discredit). Explain how the view  
works. Then explain why the view allows the best solution to help Teddy (or else,  
why it cannot solve the problem).**

**Late assignments will be penalized one letter grade for every day they are late,  
unless arrangements are made with me in advance.**

**Essays are to be typed, using standard fonts and margins (e.g. 12 point font, 1  
inch margins) Remember: concision is a virtue!**

**Answers to the exam questions must be a product of your own effort. All answers  
should be written in your own words. Plagiarism will be sufficient to earn a grade  
of F on this exam. (Plagiarism is defined here as the presentation of another  
person's work as one's own effort.) Please note that no outside research is  
required for this exam. Please also note that Internet sources are often of very  
poor quality, and are thus very easy to detect. Lastly, I do not mind if you talk to  
other members of the class about the questions, but make sure to write up your  
own exam independently of other classmates. Essays will be graded for accuracy,  
completeness, and relevance. Evidence used in support of your views needs to  
be explained fully. Finally, quoting the texts at length is not encouraged, since  
you need to explain all quotes in your own words.**

**Feedback: You will receive three kinds of feedback on this assignment. First, you will receive extensive oral feedback if you discuss your draft with me in my office hours. At this phase, students may also volunteer to have parts of their essay examined during class. Second, you will receive a detailed rubric assessing your performance according to various criteria. Finally, you also have the option of receiving further feedback after the assignment is handed back.**