

**Phil 300: Rationalism and Empiricism
CSUF, Fall 2016
Instructor: Jason Sheley
Second 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: In the film *The Prestige*, two magicians seek revenge upon one another. Consider Locke's theory of personal identity. According to Locke's criterion, how many magicians are there at the end of the film? Explain why. In your answer, you should also say whether you agree with Locke's assessment, and explain why or why not.

Option B: (*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*): At the end of the story (which turns out to be both the very beginning and end of the film), Joel and Clementine realize they have been in love before, and that the end was quite messy. Hume says that our knowledge of matters of fact quite often depends on the idea that the future will resemble the past. Apply Hume's analysis of causation to this question concerning the prospects of Joel and Clementine's love. Do they have reason to be hopeful that their love will work out? Why or why not?

Option C: 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 Hume's philosophy can offer a solution to the problem. Can Hume's methods offer a way out?

Write a short essay (no more than 1000 words) in which you take a position on whether Hume can offer a way out. You will want to choose the path that seems the most promising, or else, if you think Hume cannot offer a way out, show why the most promising way cannot work.

Option D: 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 Hume can offer a way out. You will want to choose the path that seems the most promising, or else, if you think Hume cannot offer a way out, show why the most promising way cannot work.

Option E: In the film *Memento*, the central character Leonard is on a quest to avenge his wife's murder, with the aid of the evidence before him. However, there is a catch: he is unable to form new memories. Enter the Empiricists: Locke, Berkeley and Hume. If we restrict ourselves to Empirical grounds, is there any hope that Leonard can gain the knowledge he seeks? For that matter, is there any hope of putting the world back together again?

Write an essay in which you apply the methods of one of our philosophers (choose only one) to the case. What does Leonard know if you restrict him to the evidence from the senses? Is there any role for reason to play in helping him stitch the case back together? (Hint: to restrict the scope of your essay, you may find it helpful to focus on one type of evidence: personal identity, or relations of cause and effect, for example)

Due date: The assignment will be due by Wednesday of Finals Week.

**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.