The Value of Reflection

A semester-long high school philosophy course curriculum

Designed by Kelley Schiffman and Justin Boucher
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Course Outline

Texts: We will be reading selections from the following:

A. Bertrand Russell’s “The Value of Philosophy”  

B. Friedrich Nietzsche’s “Prejudices of Philosophers”  
   (from his book *Beyond Good and Evil*, published in 1886)

C. Erich Fromm’s “The Illusion of Individuality”  
   (from his book *Escape from Freedom*, published in 1941)

D. René Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*, Ch. 2  
   (Published in 1637)

E. Ursula K. Le Guin’s “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”  
   (Published in 1973)

F. Thomas Nagel’s “The Absurd”  
   (Published in 1971)

G. Harry Frankfurt’s “Taking Ourselves Seriously”.  
   (Published in 2004)

Grade Break-down:

Participation: _____%  
   • Attendance  
   • In-class discussion  
   • Journal completion

Quizzes: _____%  
   • 2 key terms quizzes  
   • 6 reading quizzes  
   • 1 final exam

Papers: _____%  
   • Roughly 4 shorter essays throughout the semester  
   • One final longer essay due at the end of the semester

Homework: _____%
Brief Course Overview:

One of the most amazing aspects of philosophy is that nothing escapes its reach. There is philosophy of math, philosophy of biology, philosophy of art, philosophy of history, philosophy of religion . . . the list goes on and on. Philosophy is so far-reaching because it is philosophy's job to investigate whether the beliefs and values we normally take for granted (be it in science, or religion, or everyday life) are actually true. Philosophy's reach is so all-encompassing, in fact, that we can even philosophize about philosophy itself. We can investigate what philosophy is and whether it is valuable. This course is, broadly speaking, an exercise in this sort of philosophy of philosophy.

In particular, this course is focused on investigating the nature of (philosophical) reflection. We will be reflecting on reflection itself: What is involved in being a self-reflective individual? What are some of the benefits of reflecting on our beliefs and values? What are some of the costs? What is the best way to engage in self-reflection? In fact, what is it about us humans that makes us capable of reflection in the first place?

We will address each of these questions in turn during the semester. Bertrand Russell’s “The Value of Philosophy” will introduce us to a compelling account of philosophical reflection and the value it provides. We will then see this optimistic account challenged by Nietzsche’s skepticism about the value of philosophy in “Prejudices of Philosophers”. As a possible response to this skepticism and a further defense of the value of reflection we will then read Erich Fromm’s “The Illusion of Individuality”. These three readings cover our initial discussion of the value of reflection.

From here we move on to examine in more detail when and how one should go about reflecting on one’s beliefs and values. Descartes Discourse on Method provides us with our jumping-off point here. We will discuss Descartes’ proposed method of reflection, assess its strengths and weaknesses, and compare it to alternative methods of reflection. From here we will then move on to actually employ these reflective techniques to a concrete case. The concrete case is provided by Ursula Le Guin’s story “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” and several real-life parallels. After practicing techniques of reflection using this story we will then return to the topic with which we began the class: the value of philosophical reflection. In particular we will raise and address the following question: “Can too much reflection be a bad thing?”. Thomas Nagel’s argument in “The Absurd” and Frankfurt’s contrasting argument in “Taking OurselvesSeriously” will guide us in our discussion of this question. The final paper, while allowing for a synthetic discussion of all of the material covered in the course, will be focused in particular on this last point of discussion.

Reflection is also the focus of this class insofar as we will be learning and practicing throughout it the tools and skills needed for becoming critical, reflective thinkers. We will cover roughly 15 key philosophical concepts and distinctions in class. We will also emphasize the importance of close, critical reading of texts as well as the importance of synthesizing the ideas presented in one text with those presented in another. Thus, at the same time that we are discussing the nature of reflection, we will also be acquiring the tools necessary for engaging well in reflection ourselves.
**Key Philosophical Concepts and Distinctions**

**Justification:**

Both actions and beliefs can be justified. To determine whether a belief or action is justified you need to **reflect** on it critically and examine whether there are good, defensible **reasons** for taking that action or for holding that belief. Reasons for belief and action are drawn from your experience of the world as well as your other beliefs. Generally, when we take someone’s belief or action to be justified, we do not criticize her for having that belief or for doing that action.

**Pro-Tanto Reasons and All-Things-Considered Judgments**

Any consideration that carries **some** weight in your decision making is a **pro tanto reason**. When deciding what action to take (or what to believe) you will often have pro tanto reasons both **in favor of** taking that action and pro tanto reasons **against** taking that action. Typically we then weigh these positive and negative pro tanto reasons against each other to come to an **all-things-considered judgment** about what to do.

For example, a pro tanto reason in favor of hitting someone who has insulted me is that it will make me feel better, while a pro tanto reason against hitting that person is that it would be morally wrong for me to do so. However, because the fact that hitting would be morally wrong outweighs the fact that it would make me feel better, my all-things-considered judgment about what I should do in this case is that I should **not** hit the person who has insulted me.

**Consistent/Inconsistent:**

No single claim on its own can be consistent or inconsistent. Only a collection or group of claims can be consistent or inconsistent. A collection of claims is **consistent** if they could all be true together. A collection of claims is **inconsistent** if they could not all be true together. You can show that a collection of claims is inconsistent by deriving a **contradiction** from them.

Consider, for example, the following collection of claims: (a) An all-good God exists; (b) If an all-good God exists, then there is no evil in the world; and (c) There is evil in the world. Claims (a), (b), and (c) are inconsistent because from claims (a) and (b) it follows that there is no evil in the world, which contradicts claim (c). Claims (a), (b), and (c) cannot all be true together.

**Normative Claim**

To make a normative claim is to express your **evaluation** of something. To evaluate X is to (often implicitly) assess X relative to some standard, or ideal, or alternative way that X could be. It is to say that the way X actually is, is (maybe in some particular respect) better than, or worse than, or on par with this standard/ideal/alternative. Examples of how we express our evaluation of something include saying things like: X is good, X is bad, X is both good and bad, X is good enough, it doesn’t matter how X is, X is better than Y, X is no better and no worse than Y, X is
permissible, X is impermissible, X ought to be that way, X shouldn't be that way, X is fine, X is not okay, X is ridiculous, X is disgusting, X is awesome, it would be nice if X were more like Y.

Descriptive Claim

To make a descriptive claim is to express your understanding of how something simply is, or was, or will be, or could be, but **without** any (even implicit) evaluation of it relative to a standard or ideal or alternative. Examples of descriptive claims include: the earth is flat, dinosaurs used to exist, if we don't control global climate change then many other species will become extinct, I have brown hair, he kills people for a living, she has a large head, I could have more money.

Notice that even if I am likely to have a normative evaluation of the fact that he has a large head, or of the fact that I could have more money, this is not being expressed in the descriptive claim itself. Based just on the descriptive claim you cannot tell whether I think the way things are is better than, or worse than, or on par with, the way things could be.

Instrumental Value vs. Intrinsic Value

Something has **intrinsic** value, when we value it simply **for its own sake**. Something has **instrumental** value when we value it, not for its own sake, but rather because it helps us to get something else that we **do** value for its own sake. In other words, something has instrumental value when it serves as a **means** to some **end** that we value for its own sake. Money, for example, has only instrumental value. No one wants money just for the sake of having money. Rather, people want money because money lets you buy things that you do value for their own sake. Love, or wisdom, or pleasure are, in contrast, things which we value for their own sake and so have intrinsic value.

Premise

The premises of an argument are the claims from which the conclusion of the argument is derived. For example, from the two premises (a) Joe is either sick or playing hooky, and (b) Joe is not sick, we can derive the conclusion that (c) Joe is playing hooky.

Suppressed Premises and Hidden Assumptions

**A suppressed premise** is a premise that is needed for the conclusion to follow, but which is not explicitly stated. Consider the following argument: **Developing a heroin addiction will ruin your life, therefore you should not develop a heroin addiction.** Here the suppressed premise is: **You should not do things that will ruin your life.** When a premise is both (i) uncontroversial and (ii) obvious to the person being presented with the argument, it is often acceptable to keep the premise suppressed. Sometimes, however, people will suppress a premise even if it fails to meet these conditions in order to make their argument appear more persuasive. These misleadingly suppressed premises are sometimes called **hidden assumptions**.
Deductive Argument

A deductive argument is supposed to draw a conclusion from a group of premises through logical inference alone. An example of a deductive argument is:

1. Either Bobby is at work or Bobby is at home.
2. Bobby is not at work.
3. So, Bobby is at home (follows from 1 and 2)
4. If Bobby is at home, then I don’t need to go home to let the dog out.
5. Therefore, I don’t need to go home to let the dog out. (follows from 3 and 4)

In this everyday example of a deductive argument, premise 3 is derived from premises 1 and 2 according to the law of logic that says: if (X or Y) is true and X is false, then Y is true. The conclusion in 5 is derived from premises 3 and 4 by the law of logic that says: If (if X, then Y) is true and X is true, then Y is true.

Validity

All good deductive arguments are valid. An argument is valid if it is impossible, according to the laws of logic, for all of the premises to be true, but the conclusion false. In other words, in a valid argument, if all of the premises are true, then the conclusion must be true. When a deductive argument is valid we say that the premises entail the conclusion or that the conclusion follows from the premises.

Notice that an argument can be valid even if one or more of its premises is false. All that is required for an argument to be valid is for it to be the case that the conclusion would have to be true if all of the premises were true. For example, even if it is false that Bobby is not at work, the above argument (see “Deductive Argument”) is nonetheless a valid one. Validity depends on the logical structure between premises, not on whether the premises are in fact true.

Soundness

A deductive argument is sound if it is (1) valid and (2) all of its premises are true.

(Here end the terms officially covered in the course curriculum. The following terms may be useful to know as well though).  

Argument by Elimination

One common form of deductive argumentation is called argument by elimination. A stripped-down example of an argument by elimination is the following:

1. Either A or B or C.
2. Not A
3. Not B
4. Therefore, C.
Arguments by elimination, while widespread, can be difficult to defend. The reason for this is that it is difficult to conclusively show that you have exhausted all of the possible options. Someone who wanted to defend the above argument would have to try to persuade us, for example, that there is no further option D that is being overlooking.

Necessary and Sufficient Conditions

If $P$ is a necessary condition of $Q$, then $Q$ cannot be true unless $P$ is true. [Q only if P]
If $P$ is a sufficient condition of $Q$, then $P$ being true is enough to make $Q$ true too. [If $P$, then $Q$]

Example of a necessary but not sufficient condition: Steering well is a necessary condition of driving well. You cannot drive well unless you steer well. However, steering well is not sufficient for driving well, since steering well is not enough to make it true that you are driving well (you can steer well but still drive badly for other reasons).

Example of a sufficient but not necessary condition: Boiling potatoes in water is a sufficient condition of cooking them, since it is true that boiling potatoes is enough to cook them (if you boil potatoes, then you cook them). However, boiling potatoes in water is not a necessary condition of cooking them, since you can cook them in other ways as well (frying, grilling, baking, roasting, etc.)

Example of a necessary and sufficient condition: Getting all of the answers correct on a test is necessary for getting a perfect score on the test, because you will not get a perfect score on the test unless you get all of the answers correct. Getting all of the answers correct is also a sufficient condition for getting a perfect score, because getting all the answers correct is enough to get a perfect score. There is nothing else you must do in order to get a perfect score.

Analysis

Analysis is an activity that philosophers engage in when they want to better understand a concept (e.g., equality) or a claim (e.g., It’s wrong to murder). Analysis very generally involves breaking a concept or claim down into its simpler parts and then understanding those parts and how they are related. Analysis is thus a process of working back to what is more fundamental. Analysis allows us to better understand and explain, and sometimes even refine, concepts and claims that we previously simply took for granted. Analysis also has the benefit of allowing us to better comprehend the relationship that certain concepts and claims have to other important concepts and claims.
Russell Unit

Contents:
Selections from “The Value of Philosophy” by Bertrand Russell
Complete Russell reading questions (for parts I, II, and III)
Lesson Plan Day 1: Policies and Introductions
Lesson Plan Day 2: Introduction to Justification and Reflection
Lesson Plan Day 3: The Value of Reflecting on our Beliefs
Lesson Plan Day 4: Consistent vs. Inconsistent Claims
Russell Reading Questions Part I
Lesson Plan Day 5: Normative vs. Descriptive Claims
Lesson Plan Day 6: Review for Key Terms Quiz 1
Lesson Plan Day 7: Key Terms Quiz 1
Key Terms Quiz 1
Russell Reading Questions Part II
Russell Reading Questions Part III
Lesson Plan Day 8: Russell Reading Continued
Lesson Plan Day 9: Russell Quiz
Russell Quiz
“The Value of Philosophy”
by Bertrand Russell

Introduction

(1) HAVING now come to the end of our brief and very incomplete review of the problems of philosophy, it will be well to consider, in conclusion, what is the value of philosophy and why it ought to be studied. It is the more necessary to consider this question, in view of the fact that many men, under the influence of science or of practical affairs, are inclined to doubt whether philosophy is anything better than innocent but useless trifling, hair-splitting distinctions, and controversies on matters concerning which knowledge is impossible.

Part I

(2) This view of philosophy appears to result, partly from a wrong conception of the ends of life, partly from a wrong conception of the kind of goods which philosophy strives to achieve. Physical science, through the medium of inventions, is useful to innumerable people who are wholly ignorant of it; thus the study of physical science is to be recommended, not only, or primarily, because of the effect on the student, but rather because of the effect on mankind in general. This utility does not belong to philosophy. If the study of philosophy has any value at all for others than students of philosophy, it must be only indirectly, through its effects upon the lives of those who study it. It is in these effects, therefore, if anywhere, that the value of philosophy must be primarily sought.

(3) But further, if we are not to fail in our endeavor to determine the value of philosophy, we must first free our minds from the prejudices of what are wrongly called 'practical' men. The 'practical' man, as this word is often used, is one who recognizes only material needs, who realizes that men must have food for the body, but is oblivious of the necessity of providing food for the mind. If all men were well off, if poverty and disease had been reduced to their lowest possible point, there would still remain much to be done to produce a valuable society; and even in the existing world the goods of the mind are at least
as important as the goods of the body. It is exclusively among the goods of the mind that the value of philosophy is to be found; and only those who are not indifferent to these goods can be persuaded that the study of philosophy is not a waste of time.

**Part II**

(4) Philosophy, like all other studies, aims primarily at knowledge. The knowledge it aims at is the kind of knowledge which gives unity and system to the body of the sciences, and the kind which results from a critical examination of the grounds of our convictions, prejudices, and beliefs. But it cannot be maintained that philosophy has had any very great measure of success in its attempts to provide definite answers to its questions. If you ask a mathematician, a mineralogist, a historian, or any other man of learning, what definite body of truths has been ascertained by his science, his answer will last as long as you are willing to listen. But if you put the same question to a philosopher, he will, if he is candid, have to confess that his study has not achieved positive results such as have been achieved by other sciences. It is true that this is partly accounted for by the fact that, as soon as definite knowledge concerning any subject becomes possible, this subject ceases to be called philosophy, and becomes a separate science. The whole study of the heavens, which now belongs to astronomy, was once included in philosophy; Newton's great work was called 'the mathematical principles of natural philosophy'. Similarly, the study of the human mind, which was a part of philosophy, has now been separated from philosophy and has become the science of psychology. Thus, to a great extent, the uncertainty of philosophy is more apparent than real: those questions which are already capable of definite answers are placed in the sciences, while those only to which, at present, no definite answer can be given, remain to form the residue which is called philosophy.

(5) This is, however, only a part of the truth concerning the uncertainty of philosophy. There are many questions -- and among them those that are of the profoundest interest to our spiritual life -- which, so far as we can see, must remain insoluble to the human intellect unless its powers become of quite a different order from what they are now. Has the universe any unity of plan or purpose, or is it a fortuitous concourse of atoms? Is consciousness a permanent part of the universe, giving hope of indefinite growth in
wisdom, or is it a transitory accident on a small planet on which life must ultimately become impossible? Are good and evil of importance to the universe or only to man? Such questions are asked by philosophy, and variously answered by various philosophers. But it would seem that, whether answers be otherwise discoverable or not, the answers suggested by philosophy are none of them demonstrably true. Yet, however slight may be the hope of discovering an answer, it is part of the business of philosophy to continue the consideration of such questions, to make us aware of their importance, to examine all the approaches to them, and to keep alive that speculative interest in the universe which is apt to be killed by confining ourselves to definitely ascertainable knowledge.

(6) Many philosophers, it is true, have held that philosophy could establish the truth of certain answers to such fundamental questions. They have supposed that what is of most importance in religious beliefs could be proved by strict demonstration to be true. In order to judge of such attempts, it is necessary to take a survey of human knowledge, and to form an opinion as to its methods and its limitations. On such a subject it would be unwise to pronounce dogmatically; but if the investigations of our previous chapters have not led us astray, we shall be compelled to renounce the hope of finding philosophical proofs of religious beliefs. We cannot, therefore, include as part of the value of philosophy any definite set of answers to such questions. Hence, once more, the value of philosophy must not depend upon any supposed body of definitely ascertainable knowledge to be acquired by those who study it.

Part III

(7) The value of philosophy is, in fact, to be sought largely in its very uncertainty. The man who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the co-operation or consent of his deliberate reason. To such a man the world tends to become definite, finite, obvious; common objects rouse no questions, and unfamiliar possibilities are contemptuously rejected. As soon as we begin to philosophize, on the contrary, we find, as we saw in our opening chapters, that even the most everyday things lead to problems to which only very
incomplete answers can be given. Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what
is the true answer to the doubts which it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which
enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom. Thus, while diminishing
our feeling of certainty as to what things are, it greatly increases our knowledge as to what
they may be; it removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never
travelled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by
showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect.

(8) Apart from its utility in showing unsuspected possibilities, philosophy has a
value -- perhaps its chief value -- through the greatness of the objects which it
contemplates, and the freedom from narrow and personal aims resulting from this
contemplation. The life of the instinctive man is shut up within the circle of his private
interests: family and friends may be included, but the outer world is not regarded except as
it may help or hinder what comes within the circle of instinctive wishes. In such a life there
is something feverish and confined, in comparison with which the philosophic life is calm
and free. The private world of instinctive interests is a small one, set in the midst of a great
and powerful world which must, sooner or later, lay our private world in ruins. Unless we
can so enlarge our interests as to include the whole outer world, we remain like a garrison
in a beleaguered fortress, knowing that the enemy prevents escape and that ultimate
surrender is inevitable. In such a life there is no peace, but a constant strife between the
insistence of desire and the powerlessness of will. In one way or another, if our life is to be
great and free, we must escape this prison and this strife. . . . . .

(9) The mind which has become accustomed to the freedom and impartiality of
philosophic contemplation will preserve something of the same freedom and impartiality
in the world of action and emotion. It will view its purposes and desires as parts of the
whole, with the absence of insistence that results from seeing them as infinitesimal
fragments in a world of which all the rest is unaffected by any one man's deeds. The
impartiality which, in contemplation, is the unalloyed desire for truth, is the very same
quality of mind which, in action, is justice, and in emotion is that universal love which can
be given to all, and not only to those who are judged useful or admirable. Thus
contemplation enlarges not only the objects of our thoughts, but also the objects of our actions and our affections: it makes us citizens of the universe, not only of one walled city at war with all the rest. In this citizenship of the universe consists man's true freedom, and his liberation from the thralldom of narrow hopes and fears.

**Conclusion**

(10) Thus, to sum up our discussion of the value of philosophy; Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation; but above all because, through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great, and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest good.
**Russell Reading Questions Part I**

**Paragraph (2)**

1. What does “this view of philosophy” refer to? (sentence 1)
2. What does Russell think are the two factors that, in combination, cause people to believe in “this view of philosophy”? (sentence 1)
3. Russell emphasizes an important difference between philosophy and the “physical sciences”. (sentences 2-3) What is this difference?
4. Where does Russell think “the value of philosophy must be primarily sought”? (sentence 4)

**Paragraph (3)**

1. How does Russell describe the “practical man”? (sentences 1-2)
2. Explain Russell's distinction between “goods of the body” and “goods of the mind”. (sentence 3)
3. Why does Russell think it is important that we acknowledge the existence of “goods of the mind”? (sentence 4)

**Russell Reading Questions Part II:**

**Paragraph (4)**

1. In this paragraph Russell continues to compare and contrast philosophy with other fields of study. How is the aim of philosophy like that of other fields? (sentences 1-2) How do the results of philosophy differ from those achieved in other fields? (sentences 3-5).
2. Russell acknowledges that “to a great extent, the uncertainty of philosophy is more apparent than real.” (sentence 9) What does he mean by this?
3. Connecting Back to Part I: How does Russell’s comparison of philosophy to other fields in section II tie into his comparison of philosophy to the “sciences” in section I?

[The place in Section I here referred to is the place where Russell says: “Physical science, through the medium of inventions, is useful to innumerable people who are wholly ignorant of it; thus the study of physical science is to be recommended, not only, or primarily, because of the effect on the student, but rather because of the effect on mankind in general. This utility does not belong to philosophy.”]
**Paragraph (5-6)**

1. What are some questions that Russell thinks we will never be able to answer in a fully satisfactory way? (paragraph 5, sentences 1-7)
2. Why does Russell think that it is important for us to ask and try to answer these questions even though a fully satisfactory answer to them is impossible? (paragraph 5, sentence 8)
3. Connecting Back to Part I: Do the benefits we receive from contemplating these “unanswerable” questions belong to the “goods of the mind” described by Russell in Part I?

**Russell Reading Questions Part III**

**Paragraph (7)**

1. Russell says: “The value of philosophy is, in fact, to be sought largely in its very uncertainty.” (sentence 1) Uncertainty, however, is not something we consider to have intrinsic value. Therefore, if uncertainty has value at all, it must be instrumental value.

   This conclusion fits with the text. Russell spends the rest of paragraph 7 arguing that the uncertainty produced in us by philosophy is instrumentally valuable. What benefits does he think result from this uncertainty? (Note: he lists at least 6 distinct benefits).

   How are these benefits related to his claim that philosophy delivers us into “the region of liberating doubt”? (sentence 6)

**Paragraph (8)**

1. Describe, in your own words, the life of the *instinctive man* as portrayed by Russell? (sentences 2-4, 6)
2. Why do you think Russell chooses to call such a person “*instinctive*”?
3. What are some similarities and some differences between Russell’s description of the “*instinctive man*” and his description of the “*practical man*” back in section I, paragraph 3?
4. How does Russell’s metaphor about the “garrison in a beleaguered fortress” fit into his description of the *instinctive man*? (sentence 5)
5. How can philosophical contemplation help free us from the life of the *instinctive man*? (sentence 1)

**Paragraph (9)**
1. Russell says that philosophical contemplation is essentially *impartial*. (sentence 1). What is “impartiality”? How does someone act or think in a way that is impartial? (sentences 2-3).

   [Note: It may not be possible for you to satisfactorily answer this question by looking at the text alone. You may also need to consult a dictionary].

2. Russell suggests that if we achieve impartiality in *thought*, then we are more likely to achieve impartiality in *action* as well. (sentence 1)

   How is this related to his claim a few sentences later that “The impartiality which, in contemplation, is the unalloyed desire for truth, is the very same quality of mind which, in action, is justice, and in emotion is that universal love which can be given to all, and not only to those who are judged useful or admirable.” (sentence 3-4)

   In what sense are *justice* and *universal love* impartial?

3. What, according to Russell, makes someone a “citizen of the universe” rather than an “instinctive man”?

   **Wrap-Up question for section III:** List all of the “goods of the mind” that Russell thinks arise from philosophical contemplation. Then decide, for each of these goods, whether it has instrumental value, intrinsic value, or both.
Day 1: Policies and Introductions
(Note: this lesson plan is designed for a shorter 55 min class)

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to
1. List and explain the policies and expectations of the course
2. Review and explain the course structure and layout
3. Explain the utility of reading the way we will practice reading

Materials:
A class policies/expectations sheet (not provided), course outline, Russell reading, blank seating chart

Procedure:
1. Begin class with an overview of the policies and expectations of the course.
2. Introduce the class to the course outline, explaining its parts.
3. Introduce the class to the idea of reading as a critical endeavor.
   • First, introduce the “4 Big Questions” that will be used throughout the term to aid students in critical reading
     1. What question is the author answering?
     2. Why is this question interesting?
     3. What is the author’s answer to this question?
     4. What is the author’s argument for this answer?
   • Second, explain the importance of these 4 questions in particular.
   • Third, handout the Russell reading and have the students break themselves up into groups of 3-4. Task: read the first paragraph of Russell and come to a group consensus regarding answers to questions (1) and (2).
   • Fourth, review their answers to (1) and (2) together.

Homework:
Read and take notes (in the margin is ok) on the Russell reading.
**Day 2: Introduction to Justification and Reflection**

**Objectives:**
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Define justification.
2. Discuss their own beliefs in terms of the value of reflection.
3. Reflect on a belief that has changed as a function of reflection.

**Materials:**
- Russell reading, key terms sheet, notebook, writing utensil, board, marker

**Anticipatory Set:**
Read the definition of *justification* provided on the key terms sheet. Then choose a belief that you hold and provide a justification for it.

**Procedure:**
1. Begin class by going over the AS. Ask students to share their justifications. Use these justifications to emphasize the connection between offering a justification for a belief and providing good reasons for thinking that belief is true.
2. When this is complete lead the students in discussing the connection between justification and *reflection*: A large part of what we do in philosophy is examine our own beliefs and values and ask ourselves whether or not we have good reasons for holding them to be true or correct.
3. As a class, have students suggest beliefs that they hold. Write these beliefs up on the board.
4. Then have the students brainstorm for 10 minutes their answers to these questions:
   a. What are some beliefs that you think you need to (further) reflect on?
   b. What are some beliefs that you actively resist reflecting on? Why do you experience this active resistance?
5. When this is complete the students will break into small groups and discuss their answers to (a) and (b).

**Homework:**
Describe (1-2 pages) a personal belief that you changed upon reflection. What did you believe before? And what do you believe now?
Day 3: The value of reflecting on our beliefs

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Summarize the conversation from day 2.
2. Evaluate the value of reflection on one’s beliefs.
3. Revise/rewrite their homework from day 2.

Materials:
Notebooks, writing utensils, Russell reading, board, markers

Anticipatory Set:
Summarize in 1 paragraph your answer to question (b) from last class:

(b) What are some beliefs that you actively resist reflecting on? Why do you experience this active resistance?

(Note—potential answers to the second part of the question might include: because I’m scared to reflect on my belief, because I don’t have enough time to reflect on my belief, because my current belief makes me feel good and I don’t want to lose that, because it takes a lot of hard work to reflect on my belief).

Procedure:
1. Begin by leading students in going over the AS. Focus especially on the second part of the question (Why do you experience this active resistance?). Write up students’ answers to this question on the board. It is helpful to set up a “cost/benefit” diagram and fill in the “costs” side with the students’ answers (leaving the “benefit” side blank for now).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflection</th>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can be stressful or scary</td>
<td>Helps unearth false beliefs and avoid bad decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Requires a lot of time and work</td>
<td>Strengthens your mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May lead you to become confused</td>
<td>Puts you in a position to understand why you disagree with others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May lead you to become pessimistic</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Lead the students in a conversation about the value of reflecting on their beliefs. The guiding question for this discussion is: What are some of the personal benefits that you receive from reflecting on your beliefs?
   a. Students will begin by writing for 10 minutes on this question.
   b. Students will then break into small groups to discuss their writing exercise.
   c. Lead the whole class in discussing their findings. Now the “benefits” side of the diagram may be filled-in with their answers.

3. When this is complete, explain the HW assignment, with a discussion of expectations:
   a. HW should build on previous night’s homework.
b. The homework should be an improvement, demonstrating conversation and thought since the previous night.

c. The homework is designed to solidify something in their thinking, or ensure a thought process has occurred…not just to put something on paper.

Homework:

Describe a personal belief that you changed upon reflection. How did your reflection on this belief benefit you? 1-2 pages.
Lesson 4: Consistent vs. Inconsistent Claims

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Define the terms consistent and inconsistent.
2. Apply the first two to Russell

Materials:
Key terms sheet, Russell reading, Russell reading questions for Part I, board, marker, notebook

Anticipatory Set:
Read the explanation of consistent/inconsistent on the key term sheet. Then explain why the following three claims are inconsistent:

i. All philosophy students are hard working.
ii. Luke is a philosophy student.
iii. Luke is not hard working.

Procedure:
1. Lead the students in going over the AS. Emphasize that a set of claims is inconsistent when a contradiction can be generated from them. Have the students identify the contradiction that is generated by claims i-iii.
2. Have the students review the Big 4 Questions for readings:
   a) What question is the author answering?
   b) Why is this question interesting?
   c) What is the author’s answer to this question?
   d) What is the author’s argument for this answer?
3. As a class review the answers that students gave to (a) and (b) for Russell back on the first day of class. This should serve as a review of the first introductory paragraph of Russell. Then explain that answering questions (c) and (d) is harder and will require carefully reading the rest of Russell’s essay.
4. Discussion of Part I of the Russell
   • Have students re-read in silence part I of Russell.
   • Break the students up into small groups and distribute the reading questions for part I of Russell. [Note: it may be good to provide these questions on a handout as this will help the students with the homework].
   • Have the students discuss these questions for 15-20 min.
   • As a class review the answers to these questions.
5. Describe the homework with particular emphasis on describing what makes for good reading guide questions.

Homework: Read Part II of Russell and write up reading guide questions for part II.
Russell Reading Questions Part I

Paragraph (2)

1. What does “this view of philosophy” refer to? (sentence 1)
2. What does Russell think are the two factors that, in combination, cause people to believe in “this view of philosophy”? (sentence 1)
3. Russell emphasizes an important difference between philosophy and the “physical sciences”. (sentences 2-3) What is this difference?
4. Where does Russell think “the value of philosophy must be primarily sought”? (sentence 4)

Paragraph (3)

1. How does Russell describe the “practical man”? (sentences 1-2)
2. Explain Russell’s distinction between “goods of the body” and “goods of the mind”. (sentence 3)
3. Why does Russell think it is important that we acknowledge the existence of “goods of the mind”? (sentence 4)
Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Explain the difference between normative and descriptive claims.
2. Identify normative and descriptive claims in the Russell reading.

Materials:
Key terms sheet, Russell reading, board, marker, notebook

Anticipatory Set:
Write a one paragraph summary of part I of Russell.

Procedure:
1. Open class with a brief review of the students’ summaries.
2. Explain the definitions of Normative and Descriptive claims provided on the Key Terms Sheet. (Be sure to emphasize that not all descriptive claims need to be true descriptive claims. The claim that “George Bush is a woman” is as much a descriptive claim as is the claim “George Bush is a man”.)
3. When this is complete break the students up into groups of 3 or 4. Students should come up with 12 examples of descriptive claims and 12 examples of normative claims, listing their top 3 favorites for each.
   a. Then lead the students in going over their examples.
   b. When this is complete try to challenge the students with the following “curveball examples”:
      • Michael thinks that dogs are awesome. (descriptive)
      • If I had a cold glass of water right now, I would find that very satisfying. (descriptive)
      • This class is just as boring as my government class. (normative)
      • Should we wait for Michael to arrive? (Neither, it’s a question not a claim).
4. When this is complete the class will go over Parts I and II of Russell with an eye toward identifying claims and labeling them Normative or Descriptive.
5. Introduce and explain the homework.

(Note: if there is extra time students may begin to work more carefully through Part II of the Russell using their own reading-guide questions and those of their group members).

Homework:
Identify 3 normative and 3 descriptive claims in Russell and explain your justification.
Lesson 6: Review for Key Terms Quiz 1

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Understand the difference between instrumental and intrinsic value
2. Explain all key terms taught so far.
3. Apply key terms to various situations.

Materials:
Key terms sheet, Russell reading, notebooks, board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
Read the explanation of *intrinsic vs. instrumental value* on the key terms sheet. Provide 3 examples of things that have *instrumental* value and 3 examples of things that have *intrinsic* value.

Procedure:
1. Begin class by leading the students in going over the AS. Have them share their examples. If any examples have both intrinsic and instrumental value, point this out to reinforce that some things are valuable in both ways.
2. Students will then break into small groups and go through a series of exercises designed to prepare them for the key terms quiz. After each exercise, review the groups’ answers as a class.
   a. Exercise for review of pro-tanto reasons/all-things-considered judgments: Have students list pro-tanto reasons in favor of getting married and pro-tanto reasons against getting married. Then have them weigh those pro-tanto reasons to come up with an all-things-considered judgment as to whether they should get married some day or not.
   b. Exercise for review of consistent/inconsistent: Explain why the following three claims are inconsistent:
      i. If it is true that it would be better for Sara to not get married, then she shouldn’t marry Tom.
      ii. It is true that it would be better for Sara to not get married.
      iii. Sara should marry Tom.
      (Answer: From (i) and (ii) it follows that Sara should not marry Tom, but this directly contradicts what is claimed in (iii). Thus, these claims are inconsistent because we can deduce from them a contradiction of the form P and not-P).
   c. Exercise for review of descriptive/normative claim: Have students describe themselves using 10 descriptive claims and 10 normative claims.
3. If there is time remaining, review the students’ HW on normative and descriptive claims from the previous night.

Homework:

Study for the quiz. The key terms to know are:

*Justification, reflection, pro-tanto reasons, all-things-considered judgments, consistent, inconsistent, contradiction, normative claim, descriptive claim, instrumental value, intrinsic value.*
Lesson 7: Key Terms Quiz 1

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Explain all key terms taught so far.
2. Apply key terms to various situations.
3. Understand part II of Russell.

Materials:
Key terms sheet, Key Terms Quiz 1, Russell reading, Russell reading questions for Part II (for in class), Russell reading questions for Part III (for homework), notebooks, board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
Write down any questions you have about the key terms before the quiz.

Procedure:
1. Begin class by leading the students in going over the AS.
2. Students take the quiz. (Allow roughly 45 min.) When a student finishes the quiz he/she should be handed the Russell reading questions for Part II (see end of lesson plan) and then should get to work answering those questions.
3. Return to the Russell reading.
   a. Disseminate the Russell reading questions for section II to any student who does not yet have them.
   b. Break the students up into groups (be sure to mix up students who have completed a lot of the questions already with those who have not).
   c. Students will then try to answer the questions. As they do this, circulate around the classroom to check their progress and understanding.
4. Lead the students in going over as many of the questions as possible.

Homework:
• Summarize your understanding of parts I and II of Russell.
• Re-read part III of Russell and answer the first half of the reading questions for part III (so the questions for paragraphs 7&8).
Philosophy Terms—Quiz # 1

Terms: justification, reflection, reasons, pro-tanto reasons, all-things-considered judgments, consistent, inconsistent, contradiction, normative claim, descriptive claim, instrumental value, intrinsic value.

(1) How do you justify an action of yours to others? (For example, how might someone who has decided to join the army justify this decision to her parents and friends?)

(2) List at least 3 pro-tanto reasons in favor of having an after-school job and at least 3 pro-tanto reasons against having an after-school job.

(3) After weighing both the positive and negative pro-tanto reasons listed in (2), what is your all-things-considered judgment about whether you should have an after-school job or not?

(4) If a group of claims cannot all be true together, then those claims are ____________

(5) Give an example of a contradiction (in the form of “P and not-P”).


(6) Explain why the following 3 claims are inconsistent:

   a) If Paolo is a reliable person, then he kept his promise.
   b) Paolo is a reliable person.
   c) Paolo did not keep his promise.

(7) A normative claim is a claim that expresses

(8) Is the following claim a normative or a descriptive claim? Explain.
   According to Patricia, Leroy is the cutest boy in the class.

(9) Is the following claim a normative or a descriptive claim? Explain.
   My math class is no better than my science class, although it’s also not any worse.

(10) First, explain the difference between instrumental value and intrinsic value. Then provide both an example of something that has instrumental value and an example of something that has intrinsic value.
Russell Reading Questions Part II:

Paragraph (4)

1. In this paragraph Russell continues to compare and contrast philosophy with other fields of study. How is the aim of philosophy like that of other fields? (sentences 1-2) How do the results of philosophy differ from those achieved in other fields? (sentences 3-5).
2. Russell acknowledges that “to a great extent, the uncertainty of philosophy is more apparent than real.” (sentence 9) What does he mean by this?
3. Connecting Back to Part I: How does Russell’s comparison of philosophy to other fields in section II tie into his comparison of philosophy to the “sciences” in section I?

   [The place in Section I here referred to is the place where Russell says: “Physical science, through the medium of inventions, is useful to innumerable people who are wholly ignorant of it; thus the study of physical science is to be recommended, not only, or primarily, because of the effect on the student, but rather because of the effect on mankind in general. This utility does not belong to philosophy.”]

Paragraph (5-6)

1. What are some questions that Russell thinks we will never be able to answer in a fully satisfactory way? (paragraph 5, sentences 1-7)
2. Why does Russell think that it is important for us to ask and try to answer these questions even though a fully satisfactory answer to them is impossible? (paragraph 5, sentence 8)
3. Connecting Back to Part I: Do the benefits we receive from contemplating these “unanswerable” questions belong to the “goods of the mind” described by Russell in Part I?
Russell Reading Questions Part III

Paragraph (7)

1. Russell says: “The value of philosophy is, in fact, to be sought largely in its very uncertainty.” (sentence 1) Uncertainty, however, is not something we consider to have intrinsic value. Therefore, if uncertainty has value at all, it must be instrumental value.

This conclusion fits with the text. Russell spends the rest of paragraph 7 arguing that the uncertainty produced in us by philosophy is instrumentally valuable. What benefits does he think result from this uncertainty? (Note: he lists at least 6 distinct benefits).

How are these benefits related to his claim that philosophy delivers us into “the region of liberating doubt”? (sentence 6)

Paragraph (8)

1. Describe, in your own words, the life of the instinctive man as portrayed by Russell? (sentences 2-4, 6)
2. Why do you think Russell chooses to call such a person “instinctive”?
3. What are some similarities and some differences between Russell’s description of the “instinctive man” and his description of the “practical man” back in section I, paragraph 3?
4. How does Russell’s metaphor about the “garrison in a beleaguered fortress” fit into his description of the instinctive man? (sentence 5)
5. How can philosophical contemplation help free us from the life of the instinctive man? (sentence 1)

Paragraph (9)

1. Russell says that philosophical contemplation is essentially impartial. (sentence 1). What is “impartiality”? How does someone act or think in a way that is impartial? (sentences 2-3).

[Note: It may not be possible for you to satisfactorily answer this question by looking at the text alone. You may also need to consult a dictionary].

2. Russell suggests that if we achieve impartiality in thought, then we are more likely to achieve impartiality in action as well. (sentence 1)

How is this related to his claim a few sentences later that “The impartiality which, in contemplation, is the unalloyed desire for truth, is the very same quality of mind
which, in action, is justice, and in emotion is that universal love which can be given
to all, and not only to those who are judged useful or admirable.” (sentence 3-4)

In what sense are *justice* and *universal love* impartial?

3. What, according to Russell, makes someone a “citizen of the universe” rather than an
“instinctive man”?

**Wrap-Up question for section III:** List all of the “goods of the mind” that Russell
thinks arise from philosophical contemplation. Then decide, for each of these goods,
whether it has instrumental value, intrinsic value, or both.
Lesson 8: Russell Reading Continued

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Review the vocabulary on their quiz.
2. Analyze the Russell reading using the reading guide questions.
3. Evaluate Russell’s views in parts I-III.

Materials:
Russell reading, graded quizzes, spare copies of Russell reading questions for Part III, notebooks, board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
Which questions from the HW did you have trouble answering?
(reminder: the HW was to answer the first half of the reading questions for Part III of Russell —so the questions for paragraph 7 & 8)

Procedure:
1. Lead the students in going over the AS. Discuss the answers to whichever questions the students found troubling or difficult to answer.
2. Lead the students in going over their key terms quiz from last class.
3. Break the students into (roughly) groups of three. Have the students work together to answer the remaining questions for part III of Russell (unless students are behind they should now be focusing on the questions for paragraph 9).
4. Review the students’ answers to the questions for paragraph 9 together as a class. It is important to review these questions especially thoroughly since they will be central to the Russell reading quiz.
5. If there is extra time have the class as a whole work together to come up with examples of impartial actions. [e.g., A boss who hires job candidates without considering their race, religion, etc.; A father who shows the same affection to all of his children irrespective of their particular talents; A teacher who holds all of his or her students to the same standard regardless of whether he or she is friends with the student’s parents.]

Homework:
Write up your answers to:
(a) The three reading questions for paragraph 9 of Russell (this will be good preparation for the quiz!)
(b) The “wrap-up” question at the end. (so will this!)

Study for the Russell reading quiz next class.
Lesson 9: Russell Quiz

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Demonstrate their understanding of Russell.
2. Review the “4 Big Questions”.

Materials:
Russell reading quiz, Nietzsche reading, writing utensil, notebooks

Anticipatory Set:
Have students spend a few minutes re-reading/skimming the Russell.

Procedure:
1. Ask students if they have any remaining questions about Russell before the quiz. Go over these questions as a class.
2. Administer the quiz (students can finish the essay for homework if they wish)
3. If some students finish the quiz before others, distribute the Nietzsche reading to them and have them begin it.
4. Review the “4 Big Questions” in preparation for the Nietzsche reading.

Homework:
Complete the essay portion of the quiz.
Read the Nietzsche reading.
Answer the “4 Big Questions” for the Nietzsche reading.
Russell Quiz

Understanding the Text:

Question 1

(a) Early in the essay Russell speaks of so-called “practical” men who are “under the influence of science or of practical affairs.” Later he similarly speaks of the “instinctive man” who is “shut up within the circle of his private interests.” Characterize in your own word the life of the “practical” man or “instinctive” man.

(b) Why, according to Russell, do “practical” men often have the belief that philosophy is nothing better than “innocent but useless trifling, hair-splitting distinctions, and controversies on matters concerning which knowledge is impossible.”?

(c) Why does Russell think that this belief of theirs is wrong?
**Understanding the Text:**

**Question 2**

(a) What does the word ‘impartial’ mean?

(b) In what sense are we approaching the world in an impartial way when we do philosophy?

(c) What benefits do we receive (either in the world of knowledge or in the world of action/emotion) from taking on this impartial view of the world?
Engaging with the Text:

Question 3

Russell says the following about the value of philosophy:

“Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation; but above all because, through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great, and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest good.”

Do you think that philosophy is valuable? If so, do you agree with Russell’s reasons for thinking it is valuable, or do you have different reasons for finding it valuable? If not, why do you doubt philosophy’s value?
Nietzsche Unit

Contents:

Selections from “Prejudices of Philosophers” by Friedrich Nietzsche (includes reading & discussion questions)
Lesson Plan Day 10: Russel Quiz Review/Nietzsche Part I
Lesson Plan Day 11: Nietzsche Part II
Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) was a German philosopher who challenged many commonly held beliefs and values. His writings include provocative criticisms of Christianity, traditional morality, and even philosophy itself as traditionally practiced. In the selections you will be reading below, Friedrich Nietzsche questions the conclusion (which Russell argues for) that there really is something especially valuable about philosophy’s pursuit of truth.

Whereas Russell thinks we benefit greatly from contemplating all the questions philosophy raises, Nietzsche proposes that these questions can lead to perplexity and distrustfulness. Whereas Russell suggests that there is no greater “goods of the mind” than those produced by the search after truth, Nietzsche proposes that “untruth” and “ignorance” may be equally as valuable, if not even more valuable. Whereas Russell argues that false opinions can only imprison us, Nietzsche argues that certain false opinions of ours are central to our lives and that “the renunciation of false opinions” would involve a “renunciation of life.” The following passages from Nietzsche thus represent a fundamental challenge to the picture put forward by Russell in “The Value of Philosophy.” But is this challenge successful?

**Selections from Friedrich Nietzsche’s “Prejudices of Philosophers” (in Beyond Good and Evil)**

(1) The Will to Truth\(^1\), ... the famous Truthfulness of which all philosophers have hitherto spoken with respect, what questions has this Will to Truth not laid before us! What strange, perplexing, questionable questions! ... Is it any wonder if we at last grow distrustful, lose patience, and turn impatiently away? What really is ... the value of this Will?\(^2\) Granted that we want the truth: WHY NOT RATHER untruth? And uncertainty? Even ignorance? The problem of the value of truth presents itself before us.

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\(^1\) The “will to truth” mentioned here is similar to what Russell describes as our desire to “aim at the truth” when doing philosophy.

\(^2\) Compare this question to Russell's question: “What is the value of philosophy and why ought it to be studied?”
(2) In spite of all the value which may belong to the true, the positive, and the unselfish, it might be possible that a higher and more fundamental value for life generally should be assigned to pretence\(^3\), to delusion, to selfishness, and lust... 

(3) The falseness of an opinion is not for us any objection to it. The question is, how far an opinion is life-furthering, life-preserving... [W]e are fundamentally inclined to maintain that the falsest opinions are the most indispensable to us, that without a recognition of fictions, without a comparison of reality with the purely imagined world of the absolute and immutable, without a constant counterfeiting of the world... man could not live. [T]he renunciation\(^4\) of false opinions would be a renunciation of life.

Reading Questions:

(a) What question does Nietzsche raise in paragraph 1? (Please phrase the question in your own words) How does this question compare to the question that Russell raises in paragraph 1 of “The Value of Philosophy”? (4-5 sentences)

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\(^3\) Pretense = A false display of feelings, attitudes, or intentions

\(^4\) Renunciation = Rejection
(b) Is Nietzsche making a normative or a descriptive claim in paragraph 2? Explain your answer. (2-3 sentences)

(c) In paragraph 3, Nietzsche suggests that when considering whether to keep or reject a certain opinion, we should not be so concerned with whether the opinion is true or false, but rather with whether the opinion is “life-furthering” or “life-preserving”. What might he mean by this? (4-5 sentences)

(d) Why do you think Nietzsche means when he says that we could not live without entertaining some “fictions”, “false opinions”, or “counterfeit” images of the world? Can you provide any examples from your own experience to support this claim? (4-5 sentences)
Discussion Questions

(a) Why do you think we tend to value truth more than falsehood, uncertainty, and ignorance?

(b) How might Russell respond to Nietzsche? In particular, what could Russell say to argue against Nietzsche’s claim that “in spite of all the value which may belong to the true, the positive, and the unselfish, it might be possible that a higher and more fundamental value for life generally should be assigned to pretence, to delusion, to selfishness, and lust...”

(c) Is it true that “the renunciation of false opinions would be a renunciation of life”? That is, is it true that giving up on all our mistaken beliefs would be mean giving up on life as we know it? Explain your answer.

(d) What is the fundamental disagreement between Nietzsche and Russell?

(e) Who do you think is correct, Nietzsche or Russell? Feel free to argue that both are correct in some ways and incorrect in others, so long as you make clear how.
Lesson 10: Russell Quiz Review / Nietzsche Part I

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Review their Russell reading quizzes.
2. Understand the Nietzsche reading
3. Compare Russell’s conclusions to Nietzsche’s

Materials:
Nietzsche reading, graded Russell quizzes, notebooks, board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
Is there any truth to the phrase “ignorance is bliss”?

Procedure:
1. Begin class by going over the AS together. Guide the students toward discussing the question: Is it sometimes better to believe something that is false about yourself (or someone else, or the world) than it is to actually know the truth of the matter? If so, when?
2. Ask students to re-read the Nietzsche reading in small groups.
   a. Students who haven’t taken the quiz may do so at this point.
3. Then have students answer the reading questions for Nietzsche in small groups.
4. Once students are done, review the reading questions as a class.
5. Review the Russell quiz together as a class.

Homework:
What would Nietzsche say about the phrase “ignorance is bliss”? What would Russell have to say? (1-2 pages)
Lesson 11: Nietzsche Part II

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Think critically about the Nietzsche reading.

Materials:
Nietzsche reading, Fromm reading, notebooks, board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
Answer question 1 of the discussion questions for Nietzsche.

Procedure:
1. Begin class by going over the AS together.
2. Break students up into small groups. Have them discuss the remaining 4 discussion questions (students should spend roughly 15 minutes on each question).
3. Once students are done, review their answers to the discussion questions as a class.

Homework:
Short essay: In 3-4 pages write up an extended answer to one of the Nietzsche discussion questions (questions (d) and (e) should be taken together).

Read the selections from Fromm.
Contents:

Selections from “The Illusion of Individuality” by Erich Fromm
Lesson Plan Day 12: Fromm Introduction
Lesson Plan Day 13: Fromm Introduction
Lesson Plan Day 14: Suppressed Premise and Fromm Continued
Lesson Plan Day 15: Fromm Reading Continued
Lesson Plan Day 16: Soundness and Validity
Soundness and Validity Handout
Lesson Plan Day 17: Key Terms Quiz 2
Key Terms Quiz 2
Fromm Short Essay Topics
Example Paragraphs for Short Essay
Lesson Plan Day 18: Fromm Reading Quiz
Fromm Reading Quiz
Selections from “The Illusion of Individuality”
in Erich Fromm's book *Escape From Freedom*

[There is a] conventional belief that by freeing the individual from all external restraints modern democracy has achieved true individualism. We are proud that we are not subject to any external authority, that we are free to express our thoughts and feelings, and we take it for granted that this freedom almost automatically guarantees our individuality. *The right to express our thoughts*, however, *means something only if we are able to have thoughts of our own*; freedom from external authority is a lasting gain only if the inner psychological conditions are such that we are able to establish our own individuality. Have we achieved that aim or are we at least approaching it? . . .

**Part I**

It is important to consider how our culture fosters [a] tendency to conform. . . . From the very start of education original thinking is discouraged and ready-made thoughts are put into people's heads. How this is done with young children is easy enough to see. They are filled with curiosity about the world, they want to grasp it physically as well as intellectually. They want to know the truth, since that is the safest way to orient themselves in a strange and powerful world. Instead, they are not taken seriously, and it does not matter whether this attitude takes the form of open disrespect or of the subtle condescension which is usual towards all who have no power (such as children, aged or sick people). Although this treatment by itself offers strong discouragement to independent thinking, there is a worse handicap: the insincerity—often unintentional—-which is typical of the average adult’s behavior toward a child. This insincerity consists partly in the fictitious picture of the world which the child is given. It is about as useful as instructions concerning life in the Arctic would be to someone who has asked how to prepare for an expedition to the Sahara Desert. Besides this general misrepresentation of the world there are the many specific lies that tend to conceal facts which, for various personal reasons, adults do not want children to know. From a bad temper, which is rationalized as justified dissatisfaction with the child's behavior, to concealment of the parents’ sexual activities and their quarrels, the child is “not supposed to know” and his inquiries meet with hostile or polite discouragement.

The child thus prepared enters school and perhaps college. I want to mention briefly some of the educational methods used today which in effect further discourage original thinking. One is the emphasis on knowledge of facts, or I should rather say on information. The pathetic superstition prevails that by knowing more and more facts one arrives at knowledge of reality. Hundreds of scattered and unrelated facts are dumped into the heads of students; their time and energy are taken up by learning more and more facts so that there is little left for thinking. To be sure, thinking without a knowledge of facts remains empty and fictitious; but “information” alone can be just as much of an obstacle to thinking as the lack of it . . .

**Part II**

What has been said about lack of “originality” in thinking holds true also of the act of *willing*. To recognize this is particularly difficult; modern man seems, if anything, to have too many
wishes and his only problem seems to be that, although he knows what he wants, he cannot have it. All our energy is spent for the purpose of getting what we want, and most people never question the premise of this activity: that they know their true wants. They do not stop to think whether the aims they are pursuing are something they themselves want. In school they want to have good marks, as adults they want to be more and more successful, to make more money, to have more prestige, to buy a better car, to go places, and so on. Yet when they do stop to think in the midst of all this frantic activity, this question may come to their minds: “If I do get this new job, if I get this better car, if I can take this trip—what then? What is the use of it all? Is it really I who wants all this? Am I not running after some goal which is supposed to make me happy and which eludes me as soon as I have reached it?” These questions, when they arise, are frightening, for they question the very basis on which man’s whole activity is built, his knowledge of what he wants. People tend, therefore, to get rid as soon as possible of these disturbing thoughts. They feel that they have been bothered by these questions because they were tired or depressed—and they go on in the pursuit of the aims which they believe are their own.

Yet all this bespeaks a dim realization of the truth—the truth that modern man lives under the illusion that he knows what he wants, while he actually wants what he is supposed to want. In order to accept this it is necessary to realize that to know what one really wants is not comparatively easy, as most people think, but one of the most difficult problems any human being has to solve. It is a task we frantically try to avoid by accepting ready-made goals as though they were our own. Modern man is ready to take great risks when he tries to achieve the aims which are supposed to be “his”; but he is deeply afraid of taking the risk and the responsibility of giving himself his own aims. Intense activity is often mistaken for evidence of self-determined action, although we know that it may well be no more spontaneous than the behavior of an actor or a person hypnotized. When the general plot of the play is handed out, each actor can act vigorously the role his assigned and even make up his lines and certain details of the action by himself. Yet he is only playing a role that has been handed over to him.

Part III

We have become automaton who live under the illusion of being self-willing individuals. This illusion helps the individual to remain unaware of his insecurity, but this is all the help such an illusion can give. Basically the self of the individual is weakened, so that he feels powerless and extremely insecure. He lives in a world to which he has lost genuine relatedness and in which everybody and everything has become instrumentalized, where he has become a part of the machine that his hands have built. He thinks, feels, and wills what he believes he is supposed to think, feel, and will; in this very process he loses his self upon which all genuine security of a free individual must be built.

What then is the meaning of freedom for modern man? He has become free from the external bonds that would prevent him from doing and thinking as he sees fit. He would be free to act according to his own will, if he knew what he wanted, thought, and felt. But he does not know. He conforms to anonymous authorities and adopts a self which is not his. The more he does this, the more powerless he feels, the more he is forced to conform. In spite of a veneer of optimism and initiative, modern man is overcome by a profound feeling of powerlessness which makes him gaze toward approaching catastrophes as though he were paralyzed.
Lesson 12: Fromm Introduction

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Describe the nature of philosophical skepticism.
2. Understand Nietzsche in the context of skepticism.
3. Understand and discuss the first paragraph of the Fromm reading.

Materials:
Nietzsche reading, Fromm reading, notebooks, board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
What characteristics do skeptical people typically have?

Procedure:
1. Begin by leading the class in a discussion of the AS.
   - Use this discussion to spring-board into a discussion of philosophical skepticism.
   - Emphasize that philosophical skeptics (a) doubt our ability to answers certain questions and/or (b) challenge beliefs that we ordinarily hold dear or take for granted.

2. Point out that Nietzsche takes a skeptical position (he argues that truth and philosophical reflection are “over-rated”). Then introduce the Fromm reading by pointing out that Fromm provides a potential response to Nietzsche’s skepticism. (He defends Russell’s view that philosophical reflection is good and that it is better to be freed from “false opinions”.)

3. Break students up into groups to have them discuss the first paragraph of the Fromm reading together.
   - In their groups students should read the first paragraph of Fromm and then answer the first 2 of the “4 Big Questions”:
     1. What question is the author trying to answer, and 2. Why is this question important or interesting?)
   - Then students should discuss how they themselves would answer the question that Fromm is raising.

Homework:
Create reading questions (5 or so) for Part I of the Fromm reading.
Lesson 13: Fromm Introduction

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Describe what a premise of an argument is.
2. Describe what a deductive argument is.
3. Answer their own reading questions for Part I of the Fromm reading.

Materials:
Fromm reading, key terms sheet, notebooks, board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
“The right to express our thoughts means something only if we are able to have thoughts of our own.” What is Fromm saying in this sentence?

Procedure:
1. Begin by leading the class in a discussion of the AS.
2. Go over what a deductive argument is. Refer to the example on the key terms sheet. Emphasize the components of an argument (premises, conclusion) and the purpose of an argument (to defend the conclusion).
   • It may be useful to present the students with further simple argument examples (e.g., 1. If it’s sunny, then I’m happy; 2. It’s sunny; 3. So, I’m happy) and then make explicit the underlying structure of these arguments (e.g., 1. If a, then b; 2. a; 3. So, b). Once this is done the students can be asked to create their own examples of arguments using these structures.
3. Break students up into small groups to discuss Fromm.
   • Students should form a set of “group reading questions” for Part I, using as a starting point the questions they wrote for HW. Then they should answer these questions as a group. Afterwards, students can present their questions and answers to other groups.
4. Introduce the homework. In preparation for it have students practice picking out individual claims and explaining how one might disagree with them.

Homework:
1 page: Pick one claim that Fromm makes that you disagree with. Explain your disagreement.
Lesson 14: Suppressed Premises and Fromm Continued

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Describe what suppressed and hidden premises are.
2. Identify suppressed premises in arguments.
3. Create and answer reading questions for part II of Fromm.

Materials:
Fromm reading, key terms sheet, notebooks, board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
Come up with an argument that follows this form:
(1) If A, then B
(2) If B, then C
(3) A
(4) Therefore, C

Procedure:
1. Begin by having students share their argument from the AS.
2. Explain what a suppressed premise is using the example provided on the key terms sheet. Be sure to emphasize that a suppressed premise is suppressed because it is (a) obvious and (b) uncontroversial.
3. Review the notion of a suppressed premise as a class using further examples:
   i. Pet owners are healthier than non-pet owners.
   ii. (SP)
   iii. So, it is good to own a pet.

   I. Henry is a good friend of mine.
   II. (SP)
   III. So, Henry will keep my secret.

4. Have students get into groups and come up with 2-3 examples of arguments with suppressed premises. Then have each group write up their best example on the board (with the SP missing). The rest of the class can then fill the SPs in.
5. Introduce the notion of a hidden premise. Explain that a hidden premise is like a suppressed premise except that it is either not obvious or not uncontroversial. To help the students understand this notion point them to the hidden premise identified by Fromm: “most people never question the premise of this activity: that they know their true wants.” (part II, paragraph I)
6. If there is remaining time have the students work in groups to come up with examples of arguments with hidden premises.
Homework:

Answer Big Questions 3 and 4 for Fromm (3. What is Fromm’s answer to the question he is asking?, 4. What is Fromm’s argument for this answer?)
Lesson 15: Fromm Reading Continued

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Create and answer reading questions for part II of Fromm.

Materials:
Fromm reading, key terms sheet, notebooks, board, marker

Anticipatory Set: What is the hidden assumption in the following argument? Why is it a hidden assumption and not merely a suppressed premise?
1. Alex is a man.
2. (SP)
3. So, of course he’s going to be a bit messy around the house.

Procedure:
1. Begin by reviewing the AS.
2. Break students up into groups. Have students work together to create reading questions for Part II of Russell. Then have them answer those questions in the group as well.
3. When that is complete, each group should send a “representative” to another group (and receive a “representative” from another group) to share the questions and answers that their group has come up with.
4. If there is remaining time, students should return to their groups and answer Big Questions 3 & 4 together (building off of their homework from the previous night).

Homework:
**Announce that there will be a key-terms quiz and a Fromm reading quiz the following week.**

Create AND answer 4 reading questions for Part III of Fromm.
Lesson 16: Soundness and Validity

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Explain what validity and soundness are.
2. Identify valid and sound arguments.

Materials:
key terms sheet, “Soundness and Validity” handout, notebooks, board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
Is the following argument a good argument?

(1) If it’s sunny out, then I’m happy.
(2) I’m happy.
(3) So, it’s sunny out.

Procedure:
1. Begin by reviewing the AS as a class.
   • Point out that the above argument contains a logical fallacy (namely, ‘affirming the consequent’) and so has a bad structure.
   • Have students come up with their own examples of arguments that have this same bad structure. (The bad structure is: 1. A \(\rightarrow\) B, 2. B, 3. So A)
2. Use this discussion to introduce the distinction between the logical structure of an argument and the truth of its premises. An argument can have: (a) good structure and true premises, (b) good structure and false premises, (c) bad structure and true premises (d) bad structure and false premises.
   • Write these 4 categories up on the board.
   • Have students help you come up with an example for each category.
3. Then introduce the notions of validity and soundness in this context, referring to the Key Terms sheet.
   • Explain that arguments of type (a) and (b) are valid but only arguments of type (a) are sound.
4. Break students up into groups. Have them come up with further examples of arguments falling into categories (a) and (b).

Homework:
**Announce that there will be a key-terms quiz and a Fromm reading quiz the following week.**

Complete the “soundness and validity” handout.
Soundness and Validity Handout

Instructions—For each argument below answer the following 2 questions and explain your answers: (i) Is the argument valid?, (ii) Is the argument sound?.

Argument 1

a. All high school teachers are human.
b. Mr. Smith is a high school teacher.
c. So, Mr. Smith is human.

Argument 2

a. All high school teachers are human.
b. Mr. Smith is a student.
c. So, Mr. Smith is human.

Argument 3

a. All high school teachers are birds.
b. Mr. Smith is a high school teacher.
c. So, Mr. Smith is a bird.

Argument 4

a. Some high school students get good grades.
b. Sara is a high school student.
c. So, Sara gets good grades.

Argument 5

a. Some high school students get bad grades.
b. Some high school students are in band.
c. So, some high school students are in band and get bad grades.
Lesson 17: Key Terms Quiz 2

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Review key terms.
2. Brainstorm their ideas for the Fromm essay.

Materials:
key terms sheet, terms quiz #2, Fromm essay-prompts, notebooks, board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
Is this argument valid?

(1) Our meat industry causes thousands of farm-animals each year to live pain-filled lives.
(2) So, you shouldn’t eat meat.

Procedure:
1. Begin by reviewing the AS as a class.
   - Explain that this argument is invalid (evidenced by the fact that (1) is descriptive while (2) is normative). Point out that it is invalid as it stands because it contains at least one hidden assumption. Have the students offer suggestions for how to fill in the argument to make it valid. This will function as a review of both validity and hidden assumptions.
2. Ask students if they have any last-minute questions about any of the key terms: Premise, Conclusion, Argument, Suppressed Premise, Hidden Assumption, Valid, Sound.
3. Students should then take terms quiz #2.
4. Pass out the Fromm essay paper prompts. Be sure to emphasize the importance of having a good structure for the essay as a whole and within each paragraph (point them toward the example paragraphs on the essay-prompt sheet).
5. Students should then choose which essay they want to write on.
   - Divide them into groups with prompt-1 people together and prompt-2 people together.
   - In their groups students should brainstorm together about how to answer the prompt.

Homework:
Review for Fromm reading quiz next class
Begin work on the essay.
Philosophy Terms—Quiz #2

Terms: Premise, Conclusion, Argument, Suppressed Premise, Hidden Assumption, Valid, Sound.

1) What is a premise?

2) The following argument has a suppressed premise. What is it? (Fill in the blank)
   1. If one has a friend that engages in a self-destructive behavior, one should tell that friend to stop engaging in that behavior.
   2. I have a friend that smokes.
   3. SP: ________________________________
   4. Therefore, I should tell my friend to stop smoking.

3) The following argument has a suppressed premise. What is it? (Fill in the blank)
   1. Eating lots of red meat will cause your life to be shortened by several years.
   2. SP: ________________________________
   3. Therefore, people should not eat lots of red meat.

4) How can you tell that the above argument (the argument about red meat) has a suppressed premise? Your answer should make use of the terms ‘descriptive claim’ and ‘normative claim’.
5) What is the difference between a suppressed premise and a hidden assumption?

6) Explain why the following argument is not a valid argument:

1. If more than 5 inches of snow falls near the school, then the school closes.
2. School is closed today.
3. So it must have snowed more than 5 inches near the school.

7) Consider this argument:

1. Everyone who studied sufficiently for this quiz will pass it.
2. Someone in the class studied sufficiently for this quiz.
3. Therefore, I will pass this quiz.

(a) Is this argument valid? Explain your answer.

(b) Is this argument sound? Explain your answer.
Fromm Short Essay Topics

Directions: Write a 3-4 page essay on one of the following two essay prompts. Be sure that your essay has good structure to it, both as a whole and within each paragraph. For help on how to structure your paragraphs please consult the example paragraphs on the back of this sheet.

(1) Fromm endorses the following view: In general, it is problematic to value certain things merely because you see that other people value them or because you have been told that you are “supposed to” value those things. Defend or challenge this view. If you defend Fromm’s view, be sure to make explicit why you think it is problematic to come to have values in this way. If you challenge Fromm’s view, be sure to specify exactly what aspect(s) of Fromm’s argument you disagree with.

(2) How do you know when you value something merely because you think you are “supposed to” value it? That is, what are some of the signs that might tell you that a value is not really “your own”, but arises merely from the influence of others? Are these signs always indications that the value is not your own, or are there exceptions? Please clarify your answer with examples from your own life or the lives of those you know.
Example Paragraph for Prompt #1

Main Claim: One problem with taking on certain values simply because you think you are supposed to is that this can lead you to miss out on new and interesting ways of viewing the world. **2-4 sentences explaining main claim:** When you simply adopt the values that you see others around you adopting (for example, the value of earning a lot of money), then this locks you into a certain way of thinking. You do not stop to consider whether this value is perhaps, in fact, a harmful value to hold or whether there are other, alternative values that it might instead be better to hold. You simply settle on one way of thinking—which is perhaps not the best way—and stick to it, ignoring other possible alternatives. As a result, you will often miss out on other, more interesting and beneficial ways of approaching life and viewing the world. **Example:** Consider, for example, the value of getting a good job and earning a lot of money. After graduating from college, my cousin simply adopted this value as the guiding value in his life because that is what he thought he was “supposed” to do. He is now a very successful lawyer and is in fact making a lot of money, but is also really stressed out and often overworked. **1-2 Sentence explanation of how the example illustrates your main claim:** It strikes me that there were a lot of more interesting life paths available to my cousin that he simply did not consider because of how readily he adopted the “common” value of making a lot of money. If he had stopped to consider these alternative life paths, then perhaps he would be a lot happier now.

Example Paragraph for Prompt #2

Main Claim: One thing that you should take into consideration when trying to determine whether a value is really yours or not is whether you can justify that value to others. **2-4 sentences explaining main claim:** If you cannot justify a value to others when faced with an objection to it, then that shows that you have not reflected on that value very much. If you have not reflected on that value very much, then there is some chance that you simply unreflectively took on that value from other people in your surroundings. In other words, the inability to justify one’s values can be a sign that you have not reflected very carefully on those values which, in turn, can be a sign that those values are not your own. **Example** Consider, for example, the following case: When I was very young I thought homosexuality was wrong. Soon, though, I realized that I had no reason to think that homosexuality was wrong and so no way to justify my belief to my friends who thought otherwise. Because of this I realized that I only thought that homosexuality was wrong because I was taught that this is what a Christian is “supposed” to think and because this is what I had heard other people at my church saying. Given this realization, I then abandoned the belief that homosexuality is wrong. **2-3 Sentences considering whether the proposed sing is always a sign or only sometimes:** However, the inability to justify one’s values is not always a sign that that value is not really one’s own. There can be cases where you have a value that is truly your own and that you cannot justify. This may happen in cases, for example, where you have a strong sense that you value something but have trouble putting into words your reasons for valuing it. For example, you may have a strong sense that you really value creativity, but not be in a position to explain to others why it is that you value creativity.
Lesson 18: Fromm Reading Quiz

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Understand and explain the core ideas in the Fromm reading.
2. Explain Descartes’ building metaphor to their fellow students.

Materials:
Fromm reading, Fromm reading quiz, Descartes reading, notebooks, board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
What is a metaphor? Provide an example.

Procedure:
1. Review the AS as a class. Mention that for homework they will be reading a selection from Descartes that involves an extended metaphor.
2. Ask students if they have any last-minute questions about Fromm.
3. Students should then take the Fromm reading quiz.
4. Pass out the Descartes reading. Introduce the reading and connect it up to Fromm. One connection to draw is the following: Fromm emphasizes the importance of being a reflective individual, but he doesn’t tell us how we should go about reflecting. Descartes does describe how he thinks we should go about reflecting on our beliefs and values. So we’re moving from the question ‘Is it valuable to be reflective?’ to the question ‘Granting that it is valuable to be reflective, how do we be reflective?’
5. Students should then divide up into groups of 3-4 to read and discuss the first few paragraphs of the new Descartes reading.

Homework:
Read the selections from Descartes’ Discourse on Method.
Create and answer 8 reading questions for the text.
**Remind students that the Fromm essay is due next class**
Fromm Reading Quiz

**Question 1:** Explain, in your own words, what Fromm means when he says that “the right to express our thoughts, however, means something only if we are able to have thoughts of our own.” (4 pts)

**Question 2:** Why, in Fromm’s opinion, does the US educational system tend to discourage original thinking? (2 pt)

**Question 3:** Explain, in your own words, what Fromm means when he says that “modern man lives under the illusion that he knows what he wants, while he actually wants what he is supposed to want.” (4 pts)
Descartes Unit

Contents:

Selections from Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*
Lesson Plan Day 19: Descartes Introduction
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Selections from 
Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, Chapter 2

René Descartes (1596-1650) was a French philosopher as well as mathematician (He developed the Cartesian coordinate system you use in geometry class). He is often called the “Father of Modern Philosophy” because his writings set philosophy on a new course which it has (some twists and turns aside) been on ever since. In 1637 Descartes published the *Discourse on Method* (it’s full name is: *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One’s Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences*). In chapter 2 of this work, from which our selections are drawn, Descartes introduces his famous “building metaphor” and lays out the 4 principle rules for the conduct of reason. Like Fromm, Descartes thinks that reflection on our beliefs is crucial (although he arrives at this conclusion by a rather different route). However, whereas Fromm provides no account of how we are to reflect on our beliefs, Descartes goes to great lengths to describe such a method of reflection. The question now is whether his method is a good one.

[A] I was then in Germany, attracted thither by the wars in that country, which have not yet been brought to a termination; and as I was returning to the army from the coronation of the emperor, the setting in of winter arrested me in a locality where, as I found no society to interest me, and was besides fortunately undisturbed by any cares or passions, I remained the whole day in seclusion, with full opportunity to occupy my attention with my own thoughts. Of these one of the very first that occurred to me was, that there is seldom so much perfection in works composed of many separate parts, upon which different hands had been employed, as in those completed by a single master. Thus it is observable that the buildings which a single architect has planned and executed, are generally more elegant and commodious than those which several have attempted to improve, by making old walls serve for purposes for which they were not originally built. Thus also, those ancient cities which, from being at first only villages, have become, in course of time, large towns, are usually but ill laid out compared with the regularly constructed towns which a professional architect has freely planned on an open plain; so that although the several buildings of the former may often equal or surpass in beauty those of the latter, yet when one observes their indiscriminate juxtaposition, there a large one and here a small, and the consequent crookedness and irregularity of the streets, one is disposed to allege that chance rather than any human will guided by reason must have led to such an arrangement...
[B] In the same way I thought that the sciences contained in books, composed as they are of the opinions of many different individuals massed together, are farther removed from truth than the simple inferences which a man of good sense using his natural and unprejudiced judgment draws respecting the matters of his experience. And because we have all to pass through a state of infancy to manhood, and have been of necessity, for a length of time, governed by our desires and preceptors (whose dictates were frequently conflicting, while neither perhaps always counseled us for the best), I farther concluded that it is almost impossible that our judgments can be so correct or solid as they would have been, had our reason been mature from the moment of our birth, and had we always been guided by it alone.

[C] It is true, however, that it is not customary to pull down all the houses of a town with the single design of rebuilding them differently, and thereby rendering the streets more handsome; but it often happens that a private individual takes down his own with the view of erecting it anew, and that people are even sometimes constrained to this when their houses are in danger of falling from age, or when the foundations are insecure. With this before me by way of example, I was persuaded that it would indeed be preposterous for a private individual to think of reforming a state by fundamentally changing it throughout, and overturning it in order to set it up amended; and the same I thought was true of any similar project for reforming the body of the sciences, or the order of teaching them established in the schools: but as for the opinions which up to that time I had embraced, I thought that I could not do better than resolve at once to sweep them wholly away, that I might afterwards be in a position to admit either others more correct, or even perhaps the same when they had undergone the scrutiny of reason. I firmly believed that in this way I should much better succeed in the conduct of my life, than if I built only upon old foundations, and leaned upon principles which, in my youth, I had taken upon trust.

[D] I had become aware, even so early as during my college life, that no opinion, however absurd and incredible, can be imagined, which has not been maintained by some
one of the philosophers; and afterwards in the course of my travels I remarked that all those whose opinions are decidedly repugnant to ours are not in that account barbarians and savages, but on the contrary that many of these nations make an equally good, if not better, use of their reason than we do. I took into account also the very different character which a person brought up from infancy in France or Germany exhibits, from that which, with the same mind originally, this individual would have possessed had he lived always among the Chinese or with savages, and the circumstance that in dress itself the fashion which pleased us ten years ago, and which may again, perhaps, be received into favor before ten years have gone, appears to us at this moment extravagant and ridiculous. I was thus led to infer that the ground of our opinions is far more custom and example than any certain knowledge. And, finally, although such be the ground of our opinions, I remarked that a plurality of suffrages is no guarantee of truth where it is at all of difficult discovery, as in such cases it is much more likely that it will be found by one than by many. I could, however, select from the crowd no one whose opinions seemed worthy of preference, and thus I found myself constrained, as it were, to use my own reason in the conduct of my life.

[E] But like one walking alone and in the dark, I resolved to proceed so slowly and with such circumspection, that if I did not advance far, I would at least guard against falling. I did not even choose to dismiss summarily any of the opinions that had crept into my belief without having been introduced by reason, but first of all took sufficient time carefully to satisfy myself of the general nature of the task I was setting myself, and ascertain the true method by which to arrive at the knowledge of whatever lay within the compass of my powers...

[F] As a multitude of laws often only hampers justice, so that a state is best governed when, with few laws, these are rigidly administered; in like manner... I believed that the four following would prove perfectly sufficient for me, provided I took the firm and unwavering resolution never in a single instance to fail in observing them.

The first was never to accept anything for true which I did not clearly know to be such; that is to say, carefully to avoid precipitancy and prejudice, and to comprise nothing more in my
judgment than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly as to exclude all ground of doubt.

The second, to divide each of the difficulties under examination into as many parts as possible, and as might be necessary for its adequate solution.

The third, to conduct my thoughts in such order that, by commencing with objects the simplest and easiest to know, I might ascend by little and little, and, as it were, step by step, to the knowledge of the more complex; assigning in thought a certain order even to those objects which in their own nature do not stand in a relation of antecedence and sequence.

And the last, in every case to make enumerations so complete, and reviews so general, that I might be assured that nothing was omitted.
Lesson 19: Descartes Introduction

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Understand any mistakes made on last week’s quizzes.
2. Identify the main claims of the Descartes reading.
3. Answer the 4 Big Questions for Descartes.

Materials:
Descartes reading, graded quizzes, notebooks, board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
Explain Descartes’ “building metaphor”.

Procedure:
2. Review graded key terms quiz #2 and graded Fromm reading quiz.
3. Discuss the AS as a class.
4. Have students work in groups to identify the main claim(s) of each paragraph in the Descartes reading.
5. Re-introduce the 4 Big Questions.
6. Have students answer questions 1, 2, & 3 for Descartes as a group.
7. Review students’ answers to questions 1, 2, & 3.

Homework:
Answer Big Question 1-4 for Descartes.
Lesson 20: Descartes and Fromm

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Explain their answers to Big Question 4 to others.
2. Understand the connection between Fromm and Descartes.

Materials:
Descartes reading, ‘Fromm and Descartes’ handout, notebooks, board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
List 3 questions you still have about the Descartes’ reading.

Procedure:
1. Ask students to share their questions from the AS and have other students attempt to answer them.
2. Break students up into groups so that they can come to a consensus on Big Question 4. Afterwards, have one “reporter” from each group share their group’s consensus-answer with another group.
3. Distribute the ‘Fromm and Descartes’ handout. Students should discuss the paired quotes on the handout as a group. Once they finish that they may move on to answer the two discussion questions at the end of the handout.

Homework:
Write up your answer to one of the two discussion questions on the ‘Fromm and Descartes’ handout.
Fromm and Descartes

Discuss the relation between the following pairs of quotes. On what points do Fromm and Descartes agree? How do they disagree? In what ways can Descartes be seen as responding to or expanding upon the sorts of considerations raised by Fromm?

Pair 1

Fromm: “From the very start of education original thinking is discouraged and ready-made thoughts are put into people's heads.”

Descartes: “And because we have all to pass through a state of infancy to manhood, and have been of necessity, for a length of time, governed by our desires and preceptors (whose dictates were frequently conflicting, while neither perhaps always counseled us for the best), I farther concluded that it is almost impossible that our judgments can be so correct or solid as they would have been, had our reason been mature from the moment of our birth, and had we always been guided by it alone.”

Pair 2

Fromm: “Hundreds of scattered and unrelated facts are dumped into the heads of students; their time and energy are taken up by learning more and more facts so that there is little left for thinking.”

Descartes: “In the same way I thought that the sciences contained in books, composed as they are of the opinions of many different individuals massed together, are farther removed from truth than the simple inferences which a man of good sense using his natural and unprejudiced judgment draws respecting the matters of his experience.”

Pair 3

Fromm: “All our energy is spent for the purpose of getting what we want, and most people never question the premise of this activity: that they know their true wants. They do not stop to think whether the aims they are pursuing are something they themselves want.”

Descartes: “I could, however, select from the crowd no one whose opinions seemed worthy of preference, and thus I found myself constrained, as it were, to use my own reason in the conduct of my life.”
Pair 4

Fromm: “He would be free to act according to his own will, if he knew what he wanted, thought, and felt. But he does not know. He conforms to anonymous authorities and adopts a self which is not his.”

Descartes: “But as for the opinions which up to that time I had embraced, I thought that I could not do better than resolve at once to sweep them wholly away, that I might afterwards be in a position to admit either others more correct, or even perhaps the same when they had undergone the scrutiny of reason. I firmly believed that in this way I should much better succeed in the conduct of my life, than if I built only upon old foundations, and leaned upon principles which, in my youth, I had taken upon trust.”

Discussion Questions:

(1) Like Fromm, Descartes thinks that “the ground of our opinions is far more custom and example than any certain knowledge.” To remedy this situation Descartes takes drastic steps. He decides to “sweep [his opinions] wholly away” and start from scratch in his search for truth and knowledge, just as someone might entirely demolish their home so as to build a better one.

Do you think Descartes’ plan is a good one that others should try to follow as well? Or is his plan bound to fail because of how radical it is? If it is bound to fail, what would be a more promising way to try to reach the truth?

(2) At the end chapter 2 of the Discourse on Method, Descartes lays out 4 rules that he will follow when trying to figure out what is true and what is not. Translate each of these rules into your own words. Then consider the following questions:

Are these good rules to following? Explain.
Might they be good rules to follow in some spheres of life but not in others?
Are there any other rules that you would add to the list?
Lesson 21: Problems with Descartes’ Picture

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Identify several problems with Descartes’ view.
2. Identify the main claims of the argument presented on the ‘Evaluating Descartes’ handout.
3. Answer the Big 4 Questions for this same handout.

Materials:

Anticipatory Set: Is the following argument valid? Sound?
 i. Martha believes that smoking is wrong.
 ii. Sara smokes.
 iii. Sara is doing something wrong when she smokes.
 (note: the argument is invalid, and therefore unsound)

Procedure:
1. Review the AS.
2. Break students up into groups to discuss their answers to the first discussion questions on the back of the ‘Fromm and Descartes’ handout.
3. Distribute the ‘Evaluating Descartes’ handout. Students should read through the handout in groups. Their task is to identify the main claim for parts 1-5.
4. After that students can work in groups to answer the 4 Big Questions for the material presented on the handout.

Homework:
Read “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”.

Answer the following question: Would you walk away from Omelas? Why or why not?
Evaluating Descartes’ View: The Dead-End Objection

(1) Descartes realizes that he does not know with certainty which of his beliefs are true and which are false. He therefore decides that the best thing he can do is to just get rid of all of his beliefs and start from scratch. He decides to wipe the slate of his mind clean, so to speak.

“But as for the opinions which up to that time I had embraced, I thought that I could not do better than resolve at once to sweep them wholly away.”

(2) However, Descartes now faces a problem. He wants to “rebuild” his knowledge. He wants to form correct beliefs. But he doesn’t have the resources to do so. Since he no longer has any beliefs (since his mind is empty) he has nothing to help him in forming new beliefs.

Descartes is like someone who has torn down her entire house. This person cannot build a new house because she doesn’t have any resources to do so: all of the building materials have been disassembled and thrown away. She has nothing to work with.

(3) The conclusion to be drawn from this is that we cannot simply “sweep away all our opinions” since doing so leads to a dead-end; if we get rid of all of our beliefs, then we are stuck, since we have no beliefs left on which to build further beliefs.

What should we do instead then? If we can’t sweep all our opinions away and start from scratch, how else are we supposed to figure out which of our beliefs are true and which are false?

(4) One suggestion is the following: Instead of abandoning all of your beliefs, you should simply try to refine the beliefs you currently have. You should slowly try to make your belief-system more coherent and well-justified as a whole. This process may lead you to reject some of your original beliefs. But it will let you keep others of them (or, at least, refined versions of them).

Someone who engages in this process of “slow refinement” is like someone who, instead of demolishing her whole house, decides instead to slowly repair it piece-by-piece: first replacing the carpet, then painting the walls, then fixing the landscaping, then changing the light bulbs, etc.
(5) But how do you begin to slowly refine your beliefs in this manner? For
starters, you can begin to “test” your beliefs against each other and against the
world, in much the same way that a scientist tests an hypothesis against
current scientific theories and the results of experiments.

Take, for example, the belief that killing is wrong. If you have this belief
(which I assume you do) I encourage you now to test this belief against
particular instances of killing in the world. Do you really find all instances of
killing to be wrong? Most likely not. Chances are you find killing to be
permissible in some cases, like cases of war or self-defense. So, it turns out that once you test
your belief against the world you discover that you need to refine your belief. What you really
should believe is something like the following: “Killing is wrong in all instances except in cases
of self-defense and war.” Here we have a case where a belief of yours has been refined.

The process can go on though. What about the death-penalty? Is it ok to kill people when they
have committed a serious crime and have been sentenced to death? Here you need to do a lot
more “investigation” to figure out the answer. Reflecting on your beliefs is no easy task!!
Fortunately, over the next few weeks we’ll be practicing a lot how to engage in such reflection.
Contents:

“The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas” by Ursula K. Le Guin
Lesson Plan Day 22: Omelas Introduction
Survey (Part I & II)
Lesson Plan Day 23: Decartes Quiz
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Lesson Plan Day 24: Omelas Continued
“Factors, Reasons, and All-things-considered Judgments”—for Omelas
“Factors, Reasons, and All-things-considered Judgments”—Blank
Lesson Plan Day 25: Practicing Slow Refinement
“Factors, Reasons, and All-things-considered Judgments”—Blank
New York Times Article: “In China, Human Costs are Built Into an iPad”
Lesson Plan Day 26: Omelas Reading Quiz
Omelas Reading Quiz
Omelas Essay Prompt
With a clamor of bells that set the swallows soaring, the Festival of Summer came to the city Omelas, bright-towered by the sea. The rigging of the boats in harbor sparkled with flags. In the streets between houses with red roofs and painted walls, between old moss-grown gardens and under avenues of trees, past great parks and public buildings, processions moved. Some were decorous: old people in long stiff robes of mauve and grey, grave master workmen, quiet, merry women carrying their babies and chatting as they walked. In other streets the music beat faster, a shimmering of gong and tambourine, and the people went dancing, the procession was a dance. Children dodged in and out, their high calls rising like the swallows’ crossing flights over the music and the singing. All the processions wound towards the north side of the city, where on the great water-meadow called the Green Fields boys and girls, naked in the bright air, with mud-stained feet and ankles and long, lithe arms, exercised their restive horses before the race. The horses wore no gear at all but a halter without bit. Their manes were braided with streamers of silver, gold, and green. They flared their nostrils and pranced and boasted to one another; they were vastly excited, the horse being the only animal who has adopted our ceremonies as his own. Far off to the north and west the mountains stood up half encircling Omelas on her bay. The air of morning was so clear that the snow still crowning the Eighteen Peaks burned with white-gold fire across the miles of sunlit air, under the dark blue of the sky. There was just enough wind to make the banners that marked the racecourse snap and flutter now and then. In the silence of the broad green meadows one could hear the music winding through the city streets, farther and nearer and ever approaching, a cheerful faint sweetness of the air that from time to time trembled and gathered together and broke out into the great joyous clanging of the bells.

Joyous! How is one to tell about joy? How describe the citizens of Omelas?

They were not simple folk, you see, though they were happy. But we do not say the words of cheer much any more. All smiles have become archaic. Given a description such as this one tends to make certain assumptions. Given a description such as this one tends to look next for the King, mounted on a splendid stallion and surrounded by his noble knights, or perhaps in a golden litter borne by great-muscled slaves. But there was no king. They did not use swords, or keep slaves. They were not barbarians. I do not know the rules and laws of their society, but I suspect that they were singularly few. As they did without monarchy and slavery, so they also got on without the stock exchange, the advertisement, the secret police, and the bomb. Yet I repeat that these were not simple folk, not dulcet shepherds, noble savages, bland utopians. They were not less complex than us. The trouble is that we
have a bad habit, encouraged by pedants and sophisticates, of considering happiness as something rather stupid. Only pain is intellectual, only evil interesting. This is the treason of the artist: a refusal to admit the banality of evil and the terrible boredom of pain. If you can’t lick ‘em, join ‘em. If it hurts, repeat it. But to praise despair is to condemn delight, to embrace violence is to lose hold of everything else. We have almost lost hold; we can no longer describe a happy man, nor make any celebration of joy. How can I tell you about the people of Omelas? They were not naive and happy children—though their children were, in fact, happy. They were mature, intelligent, passionate adults whose lives were not wretched. O miracle! but I wish I could describe it better. I wish I could convince you. Omelas sounds in my words like a city in a fairy tale, long ago and far away, once upon a time. Perhaps it would be best if you imagined it as your own fancy bids, assuming it will rise to the occasion, for certainly I cannot suit you all. For instance, how about technology? I think that there would be no cars or helicopters in and above the streets; this follows from the fact that the people of Omelas are happy people. Happiness is based on a just discrimination of what is necessary, what is neither necessary nor destructive, and what is destructive. In the middle category, however—that of the unnecessary but undestructive, that of comfort, luxury, exuberance, etc.—they could perfectly well have central heating, subway trains, washing machines, and all kinds of marvelous devices not yet invented here, floating light-sources, fuelless power, a cure for the common cold. Or they could have none of that; it doesn’t matter.

As you like it. I incline to think that people from towns up and down the coast have been coming in to Omelas during the last days before the Festival on very fast little trains and double-decked trams, and that the train station of Omelas is actually the handsomest building in town, though plainer than the magnificent Farmers’ Market. But even granted trains, I fear that Omelas so far strikes some of you as goody-goody. Smiles, bells, parades, horses, bleh. If so, please add an orgy. If an orgy would help, don’t hesitate. Let us not, however, have temples from which issue beautiful nude priests and priestesses already half in ecstasy and ready to copulate with any man or woman, lover or stranger, who desires union with the deep godhead of the blood, although that was my first idea. But really it would be better not to have any temples in Omelas—at least, not manned temples. Religion yes, clergy no. Surely the beautiful nudes can just wander about, offering themselves like divine souffles to the hunger of the needy and the rapture of the flesh. Let them join the processions. Let tambourines be struck above the copulations, and the glory of desire be proclaimed upon the gongs, and (a not unimportant point) let the offspring of these delightful rituals be beloved and looked after by all. One thing I know there is none of in Omelas is guilt. But what else should there be? I thought at first there were not drugs, but that is puritanical. For those who like it, the faint insistent sweetness of drooz may perfume the ways of the city, drooz which first brings a great lightness and brilliance to the mind and limbs, and then after some hours a dreamy languor, and wonderful visions at last of the very arcana and inmost secrets of the Universe, as well as exciting the pleasure of sex beyond belief; and it is not habit-forming. For more modest tastes I think there ought to be beer. What else, what else belongs in the joyous city? The sense of victory, surely, the celebration of courage. But as we did without clergy, let us do without soldiers. The joy built upon successful slaughter is not the right kind of joy; it will not do; it is fearful and it is trivial. A boundless and generous contentment, a magnanimous triumph felt not against
some outer enemy but in communion with the finest and fairest in the souls of all men everywhere and the splendor of the world’s summer: this is what swells the hearts of the people of Omelas, and the victory they celebrate is that of life. I really don’t think many of them need to take drooz.

Most of the procession have reached the Green Fields by now. A marvelous smell of cooking goes forth from the red and blue tents of the provisioners. The faces of small children are amiably sticky; in the benign grey beard of a man a couple of crumbs of rich pastry are entangled. The youths and girls have mounted their horses and are beginning to group around the starting line of the course. An old women, small, fat, and laughing, is passing out flowers from a basket, and tall young men where her flowers in their shining hair. A child of nine or ten sits at the edge of the crowd, alone, playing on a wooden flute. People pause to listen, and they smile, but they do not speak to him, for he never ceases playing and never sees them, his dark eyes wholly rapt in the sweet, thin magic of the tune. He finishes, and slowly lowers his hands holding the wooden flute.

As if that little private silence were the signal, all at once a trumpet sounds from the pavilion near the starting line: imperious, melancholy, piercing. The horses rear on their slender legs, and some of them neigh in answer. Sober-faced, the young riders stroke the horses’ necks and soothe them, whispering, “Quiet, quiet, there my beauty, my hope....” They begin to form in rank along the starting line. The crowds along the racecourse are like a field of grass and flowers in the wind. The Festival of Summer has begun.

Do you believe? Do you accept the festival, the city, the joy? No? Then let me describe one more thing.

In a basement under one of the beautiful public buildings of Omelas, or perhaps in the cellar of one of its spacious private homes, there is a room. It has one locked door, and no window. A little light seeps in dustily between cracks in the boards, secondhand from a cobwebbed window somewhere across the cellar. In one corner of the little room a couple of mops, with stiff, clotted, foul-smelling heads stand near a rusty bucket. The floor is dirt, a little damp to the touch, as cellar dirt usually is. The room is about three paces long and two wide: a mere broom closet or disused tool room. In the room a child is sitting. It could be a boy or a girl. It looks about six, but actually is nearly ten. It is feeble-minded. Perhaps it was born defective, or perhaps it has become imbecile through fear, malnutrition, and neglect. It picks its nose and occasionally fumbles vaguely with its toes or genitals, as it sits hunched in the corner farthest from the bucket and the two mops. It is afraid of the mops. It finds them horrible. It shuts its eyes, but it knows the mops are still standing there; and the door is locked; and nobody will come. The door is always locked; and nobody ever comes, except that sometimes—the child has no understanding of time or interval—sometimes the door rattles terribly and opens, and a person, or several people, are there. One of them may come in and kick the child to make it stand up. The others never come close, but peer in at it with frightened, disgusted eyes. The food bowl and the water jug are hastily filled, the door is locked, the eyes disappear. The people at the door never say anything, but the child, who has not always lived in the tool room, and can remember sunlight and its mother’s
voice, sometimes speaks. "I will be good," it says. "Please let me out. I will be good!" They never answer.

The child used to scream for help at night, and cry a good deal, but now it only makes a kind of whining, "eh-haa, eh-haa," and it speaks less and less often. It is so thin there are no calves to its legs; its belly protrudes; it lives on a half-bowl of corn meal and grease a day. It is naked. Its buttocks and thighs are a mass of festered sores, as it sits in its own excrement continually.

They all know it is there, all the people of Omelas. Some of them have come to see it, others are content merely to know it is there. They all know that it has to be there. Some of them understand why, and some do not, but they all understand that their happiness, the beauty of their city, the tenderness of their friendships, the health of their children, the wisdom of their scholars, the skill of their makers, even the abundance of their harvest and the kindly weathers of their skies, depend wholly on this child's abominable misery.

This is usually explained to children when they are between eight and twelve, whenever they seem capable of understanding; and most of those who come to see the child are young people, though often enough an adult comes, or comes back, to see the child. No matter how well the matter has been explained to them, these young spectators are always shocked and sickened at the sight. They feel disgust, which they had thought themselves superior to. They feel anger, outrage, impotence, despite all the explanations. They would like to do something for the child. But there is nothing they can do. If the child were brought up into the sunlight out of that vile place, if it were cleaned and fed and comforted, that would be a good thing indeed; but if it were done, in that day and hour all the prosperity and beauty and delight of Omelas would wither and be destroyed. Those are the terms. To exchange all the goodness and grace of every life in Omelas for that single, small improvement: to throw away the happiness of thousands for the chance of the happiness of one: that would be to let guilt within the walls indeed.

The terms are strict and absolute; there may not even be a kind word spoken to the child.

Often the young people go home in tears, or in a tearless rage, when they have seen the child and faced this terrible paradox. They may brood over it for weeks or years. But as time goes on they begin to realize that even if the child could be released, it would not get much good of its freedom: a little vague pleasure of warmth and food, no doubt, but little more. It is too degraded and imbecile to know any real joy. It has been afraid too long ever to be free of fear. Its habits are too uncouth for it to respond to humane treatment. Indeed, after so long it would probably be wretched without walls about it to protect it, and darkness for its eyes, and its own excrement to sit in. Their tears at the bitter injustice dry when they begin to perceive the terrible justice of reality, and to accept it. Yet it is their tears and anger, the trying of their generosity and the acceptance of their helplessness, which are perhaps the true source of the splendor of their lives. Theirs is no vapid, irresponsible happiness. They know that they, like the child, are not free. They know compassion. It is the existence of the child, and their knowledge of its existence, that makes possible the nobility of their architecture, the poignancy of their music, the profundity of
their science. It is because of the child that they are so gentle with children. They know that if
the wretched one were not there sniveling in the dark, the other one, the flute-player, could make no joyful music as the young riders line up in their beauty for the race in the sunlight of the first morning of summer.

Now do you believe in them? Are they not more credible? But there is one more thing to tell, and this is quite incredible.

At times one of the adolescent girls or boys who go to see the child does not go home to weep or rage, does not, in fact, go home at all. Sometimes also a man or woman much older falls silent for a day or two, and then leaves home. These people go out into the street, and walk down the street alone. They keep walking, and walk straight out of the city of Omelas, through the beautiful gates. They keep walking across the farmlands of Omelas. Each one goes alone, youth or girl, man or woman. Night falls; the traveler must pass down village streets, between the houses with yellow-lit windows, and on out into the darkness of the fields. Each alone, they go west or north, towards the mountains. They go on. They leave Omelas, they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not come back. The place they go towards is a place even less imaginable to most of us than the city of happiness. I cannot describe it at all. It is possible that it does not exist. But they seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away from Omelas.
Lesson 22: Omelas Introduction

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Explain to their peers why they would/would not leave Omelas.
2. Recognize that many of their beliefs are neither stable nor coherent.
3. Engage in a process whereby they begin to “slowly refine” their beliefs.

Materials:
Omelas reading, survey handout, notebook, marker

Anticipatory Set:
Fill out Part I of the survey.

Procedure:
1. Discuss students’ views on question 5 of Part I of the survey (the smartphone question).
2. Verify that students have understood the basic story-structure of Omelas.
3. Have students get into groups. Together students can discuss their answers to the previous night’s homework question (Would you walk away from Omelas? Why or why not?).
4. Then students should answer individually Part II of the survey.
5. Then poll the class using a show of hands to identify inconsistencies between the way that they answered Part I of the survey and Part II of the survey.
(Note that the survey is set up so that questions 1-5 of Part I correlate to questions 1-5 of Part II. Inconsistencies will arise if, for example, the reasons they provide in justifying their answer to question 1 of Part I are ignored or contradicted in the reasons they provide in justifying their answer to question 1 of Part II).
6. Use these inconsistencies to re-introduce the importance of “slowly refining” and “testing” our beliefs and values against each other.

Homework:
How, after answering Part II of the survey, did you change your mind about one of the answers you provided on part I of the survey? What caused you to change your mind?

Study for the Descartes Reading Quiz (students should review not only the Descartes reading itself but also the “Fromm and Descartes” handout as well as the “evaluating Descartes” handout).
Survey Part I

1. Are you living a moral life?

2. Is it always wrong to torture people?

3. How much is a life worth?

4. Is it ever ok to cause a little harm in order to bring about a much greater good? If so, when?

5. Is it morally acceptable to own a smartphone even though the production of every smartphone involves dozens of labor and environmental abuses?
Survey Part II

1. Are the citizens of Omelas living moral lives?

2. Is it wrong for the citizens of Omelas to torture the child as they do?

3. How much is the tortured child’s life worth?

4. Is it ok for the citizens of Omelas to torture the child because of all the wonderful, beautiful, and good things it makes possible?

5. Is it morally acceptable for the citizens of Omelas to stay in Omelas even after learning about the child and the horrible life it faces?
Lesson 23: Descartes Quiz

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Review the main take-away points of the Descartes unit.

Materials:
Descartes reading quiz, notebook, marker

Anticipatory Set:
Take a moment to prepare for the Descartes reading quiz. Write down any last-minute questions you still have.

Procedure:
1. Go over and answer students’ last-minute questions.
2. Distribute the quiz.
3. When students have finished the quiz they may begin work on the HW assignment.
4. If all students finish with left over time, you may review the quiz together as a class.

Homework:
Write an improved second-draft of your Descartes essay.
Descartes Reading Quiz

1. Explain Descartes' building metaphor. (4 points)

2. State in your own words the 4 “laws” that Descartes decides to conduct all of his thinking in accordance with. (4 points)

3. What connections can be drawn between the following two quotes? (4 points)

Fromm: “All our energy is spent for the purpose of getting what we want, and most people never question the premise of this activity: that they know their true wants. They do not stop to think whether the aims they are pursuing are something they themselves want.”

Descartes: “I could, however, select from the crowd no one whose opinions seemed worthy of preference, and thus I found myself constrained, as it were, to use my own reason in the conduct of my life.”
4. What is the “dead-end” objection to Descartes’ claim that he should sweep all of his opinions away and start from scratch? (4 points)

5. What is the “slow refinement” method that has been suggested as a competitor to Descartes’ method for gaining truth? It may be helpful to recall that the “slow refinement” method was represented by the following picture:  

Bonus Questions:

a. The name of the essay from which the Descartes reading is drawn is: __________________________ ? (1 bonus point)

b. Descartes was born in the country of __________ in the ______ century. (1 bonus point)

Essay Prompt: (15 points)

While Descartes method has its own problems, no method is perfect. State one worry or concern that Descartes’ might have about the “slow refinement” method as a method for determining which of our beliefs are true and which are false. Then consider how a defender of the “slow refinement” method could respond to this worry. Your discussion should be roughly 2 pages long. You may want to consider incorporating the building metaphor into your objection and response.
Lesson 24: Omelas Continued

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Explain the phenomenon of “moral dumbfounding”.
2. Understand that reasons should support judgments and not vice-versa.
3. Apply this understanding of reasons and judgments to Omelas.

Materials:
- Omelas reading, ‘Factors, Reasons, and all-things-considered Judgments’ Omelas handout, blank ‘Factors, Reasons, and all-things-considered Judgments’ handout for the homework, notebook, marker

Anticipatory Set:
The Smiths’ family dog was killed by a car in front of their house. Having heard that dog meat is sustaining and delicious, the Smiths decide to cut up the dog’s body and cook it and eat it for dinner.

Do the Smiths act wrongly in this situation?

Procedure:
1. Survey the class as to whether they found the Smith’s course of action wrong or not (research suggests most will find it to be wrong). Then have any students who find their actions immoral offer their reasons for why they think so. Point out (as this case is designed to make happen) that their reasons are not convincing (students may need a bit of persuading here). Ideally students will reach the state of saying something like: “I don’t know, it just feels wrong.”

2. Use this interaction to introduce the notion of moral dumbfounding.
   - Moral dumbfounding is “the stubborn and puzzled maintenance of a moral judgment without supporting reasons.”
   - Propose that people are susceptible to moral dumbfounding because they tend to first form immediate moral judgments and then only later search for reasons that could back up those judgments.

3. With this discussion as background, ask the students to reflect on how they handled the smartphone case: Did you weigh various reasons before concluding that it is permissible (or impermissible) to buy a smartphone or did you first form an immediate judgment and then only later try to back in up by reasons?

4. Explain that beginning with reasons and working up to judgments is a far better procedure: It makes it much more likely that your judgment will be correct and well-informed.
5. Then break students up into small groups. In their groups they should return to the *Omelas* story and answer the following questions using the ‘Factors, Reasons, and All-things-considered Judgments’ handout:

- What reasons are there for walking *away* from Omelas?
- What reasons are there for staying in Omelas?
- Given these reasons, should one walk away from Omelas or not?

If there is time students may share their reasons and judgments with other groups.

Homework:

Identify one situation in our current world that resembles the situation in Omelas in so far as it involves a great benefit to some people at the necessary cost of significant suffering to others. Fill out a new ‘Factors, Reasons, and Judgments’ handout for this situation.
Handout: Factors, Reasons, and All-things-considered Judgments

What are the morally relevant factors in the situation?:

- A child is being confined, neglected, and tortured at the hands of other human beings.
- This treatment of the child is necessary for others in the society to receive a great benefit.
- The amount of harm done to the child is far less than the amount of societal good that results.
- Those in society receiving the benefit know that the child is being treated horribly.
- The members of the society are free to leave the society.
- Leaving the society involves great personal cost: uncertainty about one’s future, separation from loved ones, likely decrease in quality of life, etc.

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<th>Imagine that you are a citizen of Omelas. Keeping these factors in mind, what reasons do you have for staying in Omelas?</th>
<th>Imagine that you are a citizen of Omelas. Keeping these factors in mind, what reasons do you have for walking away from Omelas?</th>
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After having weighed these reasons, what is your all-things-considered judgment about whether or not you should walk away from Omelas? Explain.

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What are the morally relevant factors in the practice you have chosen?:

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After having weighed these reasons, what is your all-things-considered judgment? Explain.

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Lesson 25: Practicing Slow Refinement

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Review the terms consistent/inconsistent.
2. Explain the method of “slow refinement” in more detail.
3. Apply the method of “slow refinement” to their own beliefs.

Materials:
Graded Descartes quizzes, Omelas reading, another blank ‘Factors, Reasons, and All-things-considered Judgments’ handout, Copies of the NY Times article “In China Human costs are built into an I-Pad”, notebook, board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
Clara believes the following 3 things. Are her beliefs consistent or inconsistent? Explain.
- Good friends will always tell you the truth.
- Martin is a good friend of mine.
- Martin has told me a lie.

Procedure:
1. Review the AS. Ask students what Clara should do to make her beliefs consistent.
2. Return graded Descartes quizzes. Review quizzes together as a class.
3. Use the quiz review to reintroduce the method of “slowly refining” ones beliefs. Explain that slowly refining one’s beliefs involves three important tasks:
   a. working to make your beliefs more consistent (cite Clara example).
   b. working to come to hold better justified beliefs.
   c. working to come to hold better informed beliefs.
Emphasize that these have been the goals we’ve been working toward when discussing the Omelas story and its connection to the smartphone case and other real-world cases.
4. Break students up into groups. Working together each student should fill out a ‘Factors, Reasons, and All-things-considered Judgments’ handout for the Smartphone case. Then they should discuss in their groups the following questions:
   i. How is the smartphone case similar to the Omelas case?
   ii. How is the smartphone case different (if at all) from the Omelas case?
   iii. How does your judgment about the smartphone case differ (if at all) from your judgment about the Omelas case?
   iv. What justifies this difference in judgment (if there is one)?

Homework:
1. Finish answering i-iv.
2. Read the background article on smartphone production (“In China Human costs are built into an I-Pad”). Take notes on the article.
3. Study for Omelas Quiz next class.
Handout: Factors, Reasons, and All-things-considered Judgments

What are the morally relevant factors in the practice you have chosen?:

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After having weighed these reasons, what is your all-things-considered judgment? Explain.

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The New York Times

In China, Human Costs Are Built Into an iPad
By CHARLES DUHIGG and DAVID BARBOZA

The explosion ripped through Building A5 on a Friday evening last May, an eruption of fire and noise that twisted metal pipes as if they were discarded straws.

When workers in the cafeteria ran outside, they saw black smoke pouring from shattered windows. It came from the area where employees polished thousands of iPad cases a day.

Two people were killed immediately, and over a dozen others hurt. As the injured were rushed into ambulances, one in particular stood out. His features had been smeared by the blast, scrubbed by heat and violence until a mat of red and black had replaced his mouth and nose.

“Are you Lai Xiaodong’s father?” a caller asked when the phone rang at Mr. Lai’s childhood home. Six months earlier, the 22-year-old had moved to Chengdu, in southwest China, to become one of the millions of human cogs powering the largest, fastest and most sophisticated manufacturing system on earth. That system has made it possible for Apple and hundreds of other companies to build devices almost as quickly as they can be dreamed up.

“He’s in trouble,” the caller told Mr. Lai’s father. “Get to the hospital as soon as possible.”

In the last decade, Apple has become one of the mightiest, richest and most successful companies in the world, in part by mastering global manufacturing. Apple and its high-technology peers — as well as dozens of other American industries — have achieved a pace of innovation nearly unmatched in modern history.

However, the workers assembling iPhones, iPads and other devices often labor in harsh conditions, according to employees inside those plants, worker advocates and documents published by companies themselves. Problems are as varied as onerous work environments and serious — sometimes deadly — safety problems.

Employees work excessive overtime, in some cases seven days a week, and live in crowded dorms. Some say they stand so long that their legs swell until they can hardly walk. Under-age workers have helped build Apple’s products, and the company’s suppliers have improperly disposed of hazardous waste and falsified records, according to company reports and advocacy groups that, within China, are often considered reliable, independent monitors.

More troubling, the groups say, is some suppliers’ disregard for workers’ health. Two years ago, 137 workers at an Apple supplier in eastern China were injured after they were ordered to use a poisonous chemical to clean iPhone screens. Within seven months last year, two explosions at iPad factories, including in Chengdu, killed four people and injured 77. Before those blasts, Apple had been alerted to hazardous conditions inside the Chengdu plant, according to a Chinese group that published that warning.
“If Apple was warned, and didn’t act, that’s reprehensible,” said Nicholas Ashford, a former chairman of the National Advisory Committee on Occupational Safety and Health, a group that advises the United States Labor Department. “But what’s morally repugnant in one country is accepted business practices in another, and companies take advantage of that.”

Apple is not the only electronics company doing business within a troubling supply system. Bleak working conditions have been documented at factories manufacturing products for Dell, Hewlett-Packard, I.B.M., Lenovo, Motorola, Nokia, Sony, Toshiba and others.

Current and former Apple executives, moreover, say the company has made significant strides in improving factories in recent years. Apple has a supplier code of conduct that details standards on labor issues, safety protections and other topics. The company has mounted a vigorous auditing campaign, and when abuses are discovered, Apple says, corrections are demanded.

And Apple’s annual supplier responsibility reports, in many cases, are the first to report abuses. This month, for the first time, the company released a list identifying many of its suppliers.

But significant problems remain. More than half of the suppliers audited by Apple have violated at least one aspect of the code of conduct every year since 2007, according to Apple’s reports, and in some instances have violated the law. While many violations involve working conditions, rather than safety hazards, troubling patterns persist.

“Apple never cared about anything other than increasing product quality and decreasing production cost,” said Li Mingqi, who until April worked in management at Foxconn Technology, one of Apple’s most important manufacturing partners. Mr. Li, who is suing Foxconn over his dismissal, helped manage the Chengdu factory where the explosion occurred.

“Workers’ welfare has nothing to do with their interests,” he said.

Some former Apple executives say there is an unresolved tension within the company: executives want to improve conditions within factories, but that dedication falters when it conflicts with crucial supplier relationships or the fast delivery of new products. Tuesday, Apple reported one of the most lucrative quarters of any corporation in history, with $13.06 billion in profits on $46.3 billion in sales. Its sales would have been even higher, executives said, if overseas factories had been able to produce more.

Executives at other corporations report similar internal pressures. This system may not be pretty, they argue, but a radical overhaul would slow innovation. Customers want amazing new electronics delivered every year.

“We’ve known about labor abuses in some factories for four years, and they’re still going on,” said one former Apple executive who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity because of confidentiality agreements. “Why? Because the system works for us. Suppliers would change everything tomorrow if Apple told them they didn’t have another choice.”

“If half of iPhones were malfunctioning, do you think Apple would let it go on for four years?” the executive asked.
Apple, in its published reports, has said it requires every discovered labor violation to be remedied, and suppliers that refuse are terminated. Privately, however, some former executives concede that finding new suppliers is time-consuming and costly. Foxconn is one of the few manufacturers in the world with the scale to build sufficient numbers of iPhones and iPads. So Apple is “not going to leave Foxconn and they’re not going to leave China,” said Heather White, a research fellow at Harvard and a former member of the Monitoring International Labor Standards committee at the National Academy of Sciences. “There’s a lot of rationalization.”

Apple was provided with extensive summaries of this article, but the company declined to comment. The reporting is based on interviews with more than three dozen current or former employees and contractors, including a half-dozen current or former executives with firsthand knowledge of Apple’s supplier responsibility group, as well as others within the technology industry.

In 2010, Steven P. Jobs discussed the company’s relationships with suppliers at an industry conference.

“I actually think Apple does one of the best jobs of any companies in our industry, and maybe in any industry, of understanding the working conditions in our supply chain,” said Mr. Jobs, who was Apple’s chief executive at the time and who died last October.

“I mean, you go to this place, and, it’s a factory, but, my gosh, I mean, they’ve got restaurants and movie theaters and hospitals and swimming pools, and I mean, for a factory, it’s a pretty nice factory.”

Others, including workers inside such plants, acknowledge the cafeterias and medical facilities, but insist conditions are punishing.

“We’re trying really hard to make things better,” said one former Apple executive. “But most people would still be really disturbed if they saw where their iPhone comes from.”

**The Road to Chengdu**

In the fall of 2010, about six months before the explosion in the iPad factory, Lai Xiaodong carefully wrapped his clothes around his college diploma, so it wouldn’t crease in his suitcase. He told friends he would no longer be around for their weekly poker games, and said goodbye to his teachers. He was leaving for Chengdu, a city of 12 million that was rapidly becoming one of the world’s most important manufacturing hubs.

Though painfully shy, Mr. Lai had surprised everyone by persuading a beautiful nursing student to become his girlfriend. She wanted to marry, she said, and so his goal was to earn enough money to buy an apartment.

Factories in Chengdu manufacture products for hundreds of companies. But Mr. Lai was focused on Foxconn Technology, China’s largest exporter and one of the nation’s biggest employers, with 1.2 million workers. The company has plants throughout China, and assembles an estimated 40 percent of the world’s consumer electronics, including for customers like Amazon, Dell, Hewlett-Packard, Nintendo, Nokia and Samsung.
Foxconn’s factory in Chengdu, Mr. Lai knew, was special. Inside, workers were building Apple’s latest, potentially greatest product: the iPad.

When Mr. Lai finally landed a job repairing machines at the plant, one of the first things he noticed were the almost blinding lights. Shifts ran 24 hours a day, and the factory was always bright. At any moment, there were thousands of workers standing on assembly lines or sitting in backless chairs, crouching next to large machinery, or jogging between loading bays. Some workers’ legs swelled so much they waddled. “It’s hard to stand all day,” said Zhao Sheng, a plant worker.

Banners on the walls warned the 120,000 employees: “Work hard on the job today or work hard to find a job tomorrow.” Apple’s supplier code of conduct dictates that, except in unusual circumstances, employees are not supposed to work more than 60 hours a week. But at Foxconn, some worked more, according to interviews, workers’ pay stubs and surveys by outside groups. Mr. Lai was soon spending 12 hours a day, six days a week inside the factory, according to his paychecks. Employees who arrived late were sometimes required to write confession letters and copy quotations. There were “continuous shifts,” when workers were told to work two stretches in a row, according to interviews.

Mr. Lai’s college degree enabled him to earn a salary of around $22 a day, including overtime — more than many others. When his days ended, he would retreat to a small bedroom just big enough for a mattress, wardrobe and a desk where he obsessively played an online game called Fight the Landlord, said his girlfriend, Luo Xiaohong.

Those accommodations were better than many of the company’s dorms, where 70,000 Foxconn workers lived, at times stuffed 20 people to a three-room apartment, employees said. Last year, a dispute over paychecks set off a riot in one of the dormitories, and workers started throwing bottles, trash cans and flaming paper from their windows, according to witnesses. Two hundred police officers wrestled with workers, arresting eight. Afterward, trash cans were removed, and piles of rubbish — and rodents — became a problem. Mr. Lai felt lucky to have a place of his own.

Foxconn, in a statement, disputed workers’ accounts of continuous shifts, extended overtime, crowded living accommodations and the causes of the riot. The company said that its operations adhered to customers’ codes of conduct, industry standards and national laws. “Conditions at Foxconn are anything but harsh,” the company wrote. Foxconn also said that it had never been cited by a customer or government for under-age or overworked employees or toxic exposures.

“All assembly line employees are given regular breaks, including one-hour lunch breaks,” the company wrote, and only 5 percent of assembly line workers are required to stand to carry out their tasks. Work stations have been designed to ergonomic standards, and employees have opportunities for job rotation and promotion, the statement said.

“Foxconn has a very good safety record,” the company wrote. “Foxconn has come a long way in our efforts to lead our industry in China in areas such as workplace conditions and the care and treatment of our employees.”
Apple’s Code of Conduct

In 2005, some of Apple’s top executives gathered inside their Cupertino, Calif., headquarters for a special meeting. Other companies had created codes of conduct to police their suppliers. It was time, Apple decided, to follow suit. The code Apple published that year demands “that working conditions in Apple’s supply chain are safe, that workers are treated with respect and dignity, and that manufacturing processes are environmentally responsible.”

But the next year, a British newspaper, The Mail on Sunday, secretly visited a Foxconn factory in Shenzhen, China, where iPods were manufactured, and reported on workers’ long hours, push-ups meted out as punishment and crowded dorms. Executives in Cupertino were shocked. “Apple is filled with really good people who had no idea this was going on,” a former employee said. “We wanted it changed, immediately.”

Apple audited that factory, the company’s first such inspection, and ordered improvements. Executives also undertook a series of initiatives that included an annual audit report, first published in 2007. By last year, Apple had inspected 396 facilities — including the company’s direct suppliers, as well as many of those suppliers’ suppliers — one of the largest such programs within the electronics industry.

Those audits have found consistent violations of Apple’s code of conduct, according to summaries published by the company. In 2007, for instance, Apple conducted over three dozen audits, two-thirds of which indicated that employees regularly worked more than 60 hours a week. In addition, there were six “core violations,” the most serious kind, including hiring 15-year-olds as well as falsifying records.

Over the next three years, Apple conducted 312 audits, and every year, about half or more showed evidence of large numbers of employees laboring more than six days a week as well as working extended overtime. Some workers received less than minimum wage or had pay withheld as punishment. Apple found 70 core violations over that period, including cases of involuntary labor, under-age workers, record falsifications, improper disposal of hazardous waste and over a hundred workers injured by toxic chemical exposures.

Last year, the company conducted 229 audits. There were slight improvements in some categories and the detected rate of core violations declined. However, within 93 facilities, at least half of workers exceeded the 60-hours-a-week work limit. At a similar number, employees worked more than six days a week. There were incidents of discrimination, improper safety precautions, failure to pay required overtime rates and other violations. That year, four employees were killed and 77 injured in workplace explosions.

“If you see the same pattern of problems, year after year, that means the company’s ignoring the issue rather than solving it,” said one former Apple executive with firsthand knowledge of the supplier responsibility group. “Noncompliance is tolerated, as long as the suppliers promise to try harder next time. If we meant business, core violations would disappear.”

Apple says that when an audit reveals a violation, the company requires suppliers to address the problem within 90 days and make changes to prevent a recurrence. “If a supplier is unwilling to change, we terminate our relationship,” the company says on its Web site.
The seriousness of that threat, however, is unclear. Apple has found violations in hundreds of audits, but fewer than 15 suppliers have been terminated for transgressions since 2007, according to former Apple executives.

“Once the deal is set and Foxconn becomes an authorized Apple supplier, Apple will no longer give any attention to worker conditions or anything that is irrelevant to its products,” said Mr. Li, the former Foxconn manager. Mr. Li spent seven years with Foxconn in Shenzhen and Chengdu and was forced out in April after he objected to a relocation to Chengdu, he said. Foxconn disputed his comments, and said “both Foxconn and Apple take the welfare of our employees very seriously.”

Apple’s efforts have spurred some changes. Facilities that were reaudited “showed continued performance improvements and better working conditions,” the company wrote in its 2011 supplier responsibility progress report. In addition, the number of audited facilities has grown every year, and some executives say those expanding efforts obscure year-to-year improvements.

Apple also has trained over a million workers about their rights and methods for injury and disease prevention. A few years ago, after auditors insisted on interviewing low-level factory employees, they discovered that some had been forced to pay onerous “recruitment fees” — which Apple classifies as involuntary labor. As of last year, the company had forced suppliers to reimburse more than $6.7 million in such charges.

“Apple is a leader in preventing under-age labor,” said Dionne Harrison of Impactt, a firm paid by Apple to help prevent and respond to child labor among its suppliers. “They’re doing as much as they possibly can.”

Other consultants disagree.

“We’ve spent years telling Apple there are serious problems and recommending changes,” said a consultant at BSR — also known as Business for Social Responsibility — which has been twice retained by Apple to provide advice on labor issues. “They don’t want to pre-empt problems, they just want to avoid embarrassments.”

‘We Could Have Saved Lives’

In 2006, BSR, along with a division of the World Bank and other groups, initiated a project to improve working conditions in factories building cellphones and other devices in China and elsewhere. The groups and companies pledged to test various ideas. Foxconn agreed to participate.

For four months, BSR and another group negotiated with Foxconn regarding a pilot program to create worker “hotlines,” so that employees could report abusive conditions, seek mental counseling and discuss workplace problems. Apple was not a participant in the project, but was briefed on it, according to the BSR consultant, who had detailed knowledge.

As negotiations proceeded, Foxconn’s requirements for participation kept changing. First Foxconn asked to shift from installing new hotlines to evaluating existing hotlines. Then Foxconn insisted that mental health counseling be excluded. Foxconn asked participants to sign
agreements saying they would not disclose what they observed, and then rewrote those agreements multiple times. Finally, an agreement was struck, and the project was scheduled to begin in January 2008. A day before the start, Foxconn demanded more changes, until it was clear the project would not proceed, according to the consultant and a 2008 summary by BSR that did not name Foxconn.

The next year, a Foxconn employee fell or jumped from an apartment building after losing an iPhone prototype. Over the next two years, at least 18 other Foxconn workers attempted suicide or fell from buildings in manners that suggested suicide attempts. In 2010, two years after the pilot program fell apart and after multiple suicide attempts, Foxconn created a dedicated mental health hotline and began offering free psychological counseling.

“We could have saved lives, and we asked Apple to pressure Foxconn, but they wouldn’t do it,” said the BSR consultant, who asked not to be identified because of confidentiality agreements. “Companies like H.P. and Intel and Nike push their suppliers. But Apple wants to keep an arm’s length, and Foxconn is their most important manufacturer, so they refuse to push.”

BSR, in a written statement, said the views of that consultant were not those of the company.

“My BSR colleagues and I view Apple as a company that is making a highly serious effort to ensure that labor conditions in its supply chain meet the expectations of applicable laws, the company’s standards and the expectations of consumers,” wrote Aron Cramer, BSR’s president. Mr. Cramer added that asking Apple to pressure Foxconn would have been inconsistent with the purpose of the pilot program, and there were multiple reasons the pilot program did not proceed.

Foxconn, in a statement, said it acted quickly and comprehensively to address suicides, and “the record has shown that those measures have been successful.”

A Demanding Client

Every month, officials at companies from around the world trek to Cupertino or invite Apple executives to visit their foreign factories, all in pursuit of a goal: becoming a supplier.

When news arrives that Apple is interested in a particular product or service, small celebrations often erupt. Whiskey is drunk. Karaoke is sung.

Then, Apple’s requests start.

Apple typically asks suppliers to specify how much every part costs, how many workers are needed and the size of their salaries. Executives want to know every financial detail. Afterward, Apple calculates how much it will pay for a part. Most suppliers are allowed only the slimmest of profits.

So suppliers often try to cut corners, replace expensive chemicals with less costly alternatives, or push their employees to work faster and longer, according to people at those companies.
“The only way you make money working for Apple is figuring out how to do things more efficiently or cheaper,” said an executive at one company that helped bring the iPad to market. “And then they’ll come back the next year, and force a 10 percent price cut.”

In January 2010, workers at a Chinese factory owned by Wintek, an Apple manufacturing partner, went on strike over a variety of issues, including widespread rumors that workers were being exposed to toxins. Investigations by news organizations revealed that over a hundred employees had been injured by n-hexane, a toxic chemical that can cause nerve damage and paralysis.

Employees said they had been ordered to use n-hexane to clean iPhone screens because it evaporated almost three times as fast as rubbing alcohol. Faster evaporation meant workers could clean more screens each minute.

Apple commented on the Wintek injuries a year later. In its supplier responsibility report, Apple said it had “required Wintek to stop using n-hexane” and that “Apple has verified that all affected workers have been treated successfully, and we continue to monitor their medical reports until full recuperation.” Apple also said it required Wintek to fix the ventilation system.

That same month, a New York Times reporter interviewed a dozen injured Wintek workers who said they had never been contacted by Apple or its intermediaries, and that Wintek had pressured them to resign and take cash settlements that would absolve the company of liability. After those interviews, Wintek pledged to provide more compensation to the injured workers and Apple sent a representative to speak with some of them.

Six months later, trade publications reported that Apple significantly cut prices paid to Wintek.

“‘You can set all the rules you want, but they’re meaningless if you don’t give suppliers enough profit to treat workers well,’” said one former Apple executive with firsthand knowledge of the supplier responsibility group. “‘If you squeeze margins, you’re forcing them to cut safety.’”

Wintek is still one of Apple’s most important suppliers. Wintek, in a statement, declined to comment except to say that after the episode, the company took “ample measures” to address the situation and “is committed to ensuring employee welfare and creating a safe and healthy work environment.”

Many major technology companies have worked with factories where conditions are troubling. However, independent monitors and suppliers say some act differently. Executives at multiple suppliers, in interviews, said that Hewlett-Packard and others allowed them slightly more profits and other allowances if they were used to improve worker conditions.

“Our suppliers are very open with us,” said Zoe McMahon, an executive in Hewlett-Packard’s supply chain social and environmental responsibility program. “They let us know when they are struggling to meet our expectations, and that influences our decisions.”
The Explosion

On the afternoon of the blast at the iPad plant, Lai Xiaodong telephoned his girlfriend, as he did every day. They had hoped to see each other that evening, but Mr. Lai’s manager said he had to work overtime, he told her.

He had been promoted quickly at Foxconn, and after just a few months was in charge of a team that maintained the machines that polished iPad cases. The sanding area was loud and hazy with aluminum dust. Workers wore masks and earplugs, but no matter how many times they showered, they were recognizable by the slight aluminum sparkle in their hair and at the corners of their eyes.

Just two weeks before the explosion, an advocacy group in Hong Kong published a report warning of unsafe conditions at the Chengdu plant, including problems with aluminum dust. The group, Students and Scholars Against Corporate Misbehavior, or Sacom, had videotaped workers covered with tiny aluminum particles. “Occupational health and safety issues in Chengdu are alarming,” the report read. “Workers also highlight the problem of poor ventilation and inadequate personal protective equipment.”

A copy of that report was sent to Apple. “There was no response,” said Debby Chan Sze Wan of the group. “A few months later I went to Cupertino, and went into the Apple lobby, but no one would meet with me. I’ve never heard from anyone from Apple at all.”

The morning of the explosion, Mr. Lai rode his bicycle to work. The iPad had gone on sale just weeks earlier, and workers were told thousands of cases needed to be polished each day. The factory was frantic, employees said. Rows of machines buffed cases as masked employees pushed buttons. Large air ducts hovered over each station, but they could not keep up with the three lines of machines polishing nonstop. Aluminum dust was everywhere.

Dust is a known safety hazard. In 2003, an aluminum dust explosion in Indiana destroyed a wheel factory and killed a worker. In 2008, agricultural dust inside a sugar factory in Georgia caused an explosion that killed 14.

Two hours into Mr. Lai’s second shift, the building started to shake, as if an earthquake was under way. There was a series of blasts, plant workers said.

Then the screams began.

When Mr. Lai’s colleagues ran outside, dark smoke was mixing with a light rain, according to cellphone videos. The toll would eventually count four dead, 18 injured.

At the hospital, Mr. Lai’s girlfriend saw that his skin was almost completely burned away. “I recognized him from his legs, otherwise I wouldn’t know who that person was,” she said.

Eventually, his family arrived. Over 90 percent of his body had been seared. “My mom ran away from the room at the first sight of him. I cried. Nobody could stand it,” his brother said. When his mother eventually returned, she tried to avoid touching her son, for fear that it would cause pain.
“If I had known,” she said, “I would have grabbed his arm, I would have touched him.”

“He was very tough,” she said. “He held on for two days.”

After Mr. Lai died, Foxconn workers drove to Mr. Lai’s hometown and delivered a box of ashes. The company later wired a check for about $150,000.

Foxconn, in a statement, said that at the time of the explosion the Chengdu plant was in compliance with all relevant laws and regulations, and “after ensuring that the families of the deceased employees were given the support they required, we ensured that all of the injured employees were given the highest quality medical care.” After the explosion, the company added, Foxconn immediately halted work in all polishing workshops, and later improved ventilation and dust disposal, and adopted technologies to enhance worker safety.

In its most recent supplier responsibility report, Apple wrote that after the explosion, the company contacted “the foremost experts in process safety” and assembled a team to investigate and make recommendations to prevent future accidents.

In December, however, seven months after the blast that killed Mr. Lai, another iPad factory exploded, this one in Shanghai. Once again, aluminum dust was the cause, according to interviews and Apple’s most recent supplier responsibility report. That blast injured 59 workers, with 23 hospitalized.

“It is gross negligence, after an explosion occurs, not to realize that every factory should be inspected,” said Nicholas Ashford, the occupational safety expert, who is now at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. “If it were terribly difficult to deal with aluminum dust, I would understand. But do you know how easy dust is to control? It’s called ventilation. We solved this problem over a century ago.”

In its most recent supplier responsibility report, Apple wrote that while the explosions both involved combustible aluminum dust, the causes were different. The company declined, however, to provide details. The report added that Apple had now audited all suppliers polishing aluminum products and had put stronger precautions in place. All suppliers have initiated required countermeasures, except one, which remains shut down, the report said.

For Mr. Lai’s family, questions remain. “We’re really not sure why he died,” said Mr. Lai’s mother, standing beside a shrine she built near their home. “We don’t understand what happened.”

**Hitting the Apple Lottery**

Every year, as rumors about Apple’s forthcoming products start to emerge, trade publications and Web sites begin speculating about which suppliers are likely to win the Apple lottery. Getting a contract from Apple can lift a company’s value by millions because of the implied endorsement of manufacturing quality. But few companies openly brag about the work: Apple generally requires suppliers to sign contracts promising they will not divulge anything, including the partnership.
That lack of transparency gives Apple an edge at keeping its plans secret. But it also has been a barrier to improving working conditions, according to advocates and former Apple executives.

This month, after numerous requests by advocacy and news organizations, including The New York Times, Apple released the names of 156 of its suppliers. In the report accompanying that list, Apple said they “account for more than 97 percent of what we pay to suppliers to manufacture our products.”

However, the company has not revealed the names of hundreds of other companies that do not directly contract with Apple, but supply the suppliers. The company’s supplier list does not disclose where factories are, and many are hard to find. And independent monitoring organizations say when they have tried to inspect Apple’s suppliers, they have been barred from entry — on Apple’s orders, they have been told.

“We’ve had this conversation hundreds of times,” said a former executive in Apple’s supplier responsibility group. “There is a genuine, companywide commitment to the code of conduct. But taking it to the next level and creating real change conflicts with secrecy and business goals, and so there’s only so far we can go.” Former Apple employees say they were generally prohibited from engaging with most outside groups.

“There’s a real culture of secrecy here that influences everything,” the former executive said.

Some other technology companies operate differently.

“We talk to a lot of outsiders,” said Gary Niekerk, director of corporate citizenship at Intel. “The world’s complex, and unless we’re dialoguing with outside groups, we miss a lot.”

Given Apple’s prominence and leadership in global manufacturing, if the company were to radically change its ways, it could overhaul how business is done. “Every company wants to be Apple,” said Sasha Lezhnev at the Enough Project, a group focused on corporate accountability. “If they committed to building a conflict-free iPhone, it would transform technology.”

But ultimately, say former Apple executives, there are few real outside pressures for change. Apple is one of the most admired brands. In a national survey conducted by The New York Times in November, 56 percent of respondents said they couldn’t think of anything negative about Apple. Fourteen percent said the worst thing about the company was that its products were too expensive. Just 2 percent mentioned overseas labor practices.

People like Ms. White of Harvard say that until consumers demand better conditions in overseas factories — as they did for companies like Nike and Gap, which today have overhauled conditions among suppliers — or regulators act, there is little impetus for radical change. Some Apple insiders agree.

“You can either manufacture in comfortable, worker-friendly factories, or you can reinvent the product every year, and make it better and faster and cheaper, which requires factories that seem harsh by American standards,” said a current Apple executive.

“And right now, customers care more about a new iPhone than working conditions in China.”
Lesson 26: Omelas Reading Quiz

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Explain the meaning of the word “absurd”.
2. Review the major lessons learned in connection with *Omelas*.

Materials:
*Omelas* reading quiz, *Omelas* essay prompt, Nagel “The Absurd” reading (Note: Students will only be reading the introduction and Part I of “The Absurd” so you only need to print the first 4 pages of the article PDF for them. The teacher(s) need to read the entire essay, especially for lesson 29).

Anticipatory Set:
- Someone gives a complicated speech in favor of a law that has already passed.
- As you are being knighted your pants fall down.
- You declare your love over the phone to a recorded announcement.

*What makes these situations absurd situations?*

Procedure:
1. Review the AS. (Note: Nagel’s answer is that these situations are absurd because “they involve a conspicuous discrepancy between pretension or aspiration and reality”.) This will set the students up for the Nagel reading.
2. Ask for last-minute questions before the *Omelas* reading quiz.
3. Distribute the quiz.
4. When students are finished, they may begin work on the Nagel reading.
5. When all students are finished distribute the Omelas essay prompt and review it as a class.

Homework:
1. Read Part I of Thomas Nagel’s “The Absurd”
2. Write down 5 questions you have about the Nagel reading.
3. Begin the *Omelas* essay.
“The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas"
Reading Quiz

1. **Briefly** describe the story laid out by Ursula Le Guin in “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas”. (2 points)

2. Those citizens who decide to stay in Omelas cite two reasons for their decision. They stay (1) because they think it is senseless “to throw away the happiness of thousands for the chance of the happiness of one” and (2) because “even if the child could be released, it would not get much good of its freedom” since it has become “too degraded and imbecile to know any real joy.” **What reasons in favor of leaving should they have considered as well?** List at least 3 reasons. (5 points)

3. Explain what **moral dumbfounding is and provide an example of it.** (4 points)
4. List 2 specific human-rights issues related to the production of smartphones. (4 points)

5. What are 3 important differences between the smartphone case and the Omelas case? (5 points)
Is it acceptable for a group of people to receive a benefit when that benefit comes at the cost of suffering to others? Surely the resounding answer will be: *It depends*. But on what exactly does it depend? Here things get complicated . . .

The wonderful lives that the citizens of Omelas have come at a cost:

> If the child were brought up into the sunlight out of that vile place, if it were cleaned and fed and comforted, that would be a good thing indeed; but if it were done, in that day and hour all the prosperity and beauty and delight of Omelas would wither and be destroyed. Those are the terms.

Thus the benefits the citizens of Omelas receive are made possible only by the suffering of another.

In a similar way, we—as purchasers and users of smartphones—benefit from conditions that impose significant suffering on others. In our everyday technology-filled lives there is, just as in Omelas, a human cost to our enjoyment.

**YET** despite these similarities, there are also, undoubtedly, subtle differences between the situation that the citizens of Omelas find themselves in when deciding whether to “walk away” and the situation we find ourselves in when deciding whether to buy a smartphone.

In recognition of this, your tasks in this essay are to:

- **Present your conclusion in the Omelas case** (e.g., *It is not* acceptable to remain in Omelas while the child is tortured—i.e., *You should walk away*) and support this conclusion with *reasons*. (2-3 paragraphs)
- **Then present your conclusion in the smartphone case** (e.g., *It is* acceptable to own a smartphone despite the human rights violations associated with its production) and support this conclusion with *reasons*. (2-3 paragraphs)
- **Then compare your two judgments. If your responses in the two cases are rather different**, then explain why you think this difference is justified. If your responses are rather similar, then explain why this similarity in judgment is justified despite certain differences between the two cases. (3-4 paragraphs)
Contents:

“The Absurd” by Thomas Nagel
Lesson Plan Day 27: Nagel Introduction
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“Nagel on Justification” Handout
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Lesson Plan Day 30: Nagel Reading Quiz
Final Paper Prompt
The Absurd

Thomas Nagel


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The former stands as valid only if we can find criteria for assigning a different logical form to ‘allegedly’ than to ‘compulsively’. In this case, the criteria exist: ‘compulsively’ is a predicate, ‘allegedly’ a sentence adverb. But in countless other cases, counterexamples are not so easily dismissed. Such an example, bearing on the inference in question, is

Otto closed the door partway
Therefore Otto closed the door

It seems clear to me that better data are needed before progress can be made in this area; we need much more refined linguistic classifications of adverbial constructions than are presently available, if our evidence concerning validity is to be good enough to permit a richer logical theory. In the meantime, Montague’s account stands: there is no reason to think a more refined theory, if it can be produced, should not be obtainable within the framework he has given us.

RICHMOND H. THOMASON

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THE ABSURD *

MOST people feel on occasion that life is absurd, and some feel it vividly and continually. Yet the reasons usually offered in defense of this conviction are patently inadequate: they could not really explain why life is absurd. Why then do they provide a natural expression for the sense that it is?

Consider some examples. It is often remarked that nothing we do now will matter in a million years. But if that is true, then by the same token, nothing that will be the case in a million years matters now. In particular, it does not matter now that in a million years nothing we do now will matter. Moreover, even if what we did now were going to matter in a million years, how could that keep our present concerns from being absurd? If their mattering now is not enough to accomplish that, how would it help if they mattered a million years from now?

Whether what we do now will matter in a million years could make the crucial difference only if its mattering in a million years depended on its mattering, period. But then to deny that whatever

* To be presented in an APA symposium on The Meaning of Life, December 29, 1971. Co-symposiasts will be Rogers Albritton and William Richardson; neither of their papers are available at this time.
happens now will matter in a million years is to beg the question against its mattering, period; for in that sense one cannot know that it will not matter in a million years whether (for example) someone now is happy or miserable, without knowing that it does not matter, period.

What we say to convey the absurdity of our lives often has to do with space or time: we are tiny specks in the infinite vastness of the universe; our lives are mere instants even on a geological time scale, let alone a cosmic one; we will all be dead any minute. But of course none of these evident facts can be what makes life absurd, if it is absurd. For suppose we lived forever; would not a life that is absurd if it lasts seventy years be infinitely absurd if it lasted through eternity? And if our lives are absurd given our present size, why would they be any less absurd if we filled the universe (either because we were larger or because the universe was smaller)? Reflection on our minuteness and brevity appears to be intimately connected with the sense that life is meaningless; but it is not clear what the connection is.

Another inadequate argument is that because we are going to die, all chains of justification must leave off in mid-air: one studies and works to earn money to pay for clothing, housing, entertainment, food, to sustain oneself from year to year, perhaps to support a family and pursue a career—but to what final end? All of it is an elaborate journey leading nowhere. (One will also have some effect on other people’s lives, but that simply reproduces the problem, for they will die too.)

There are several replies to this argument. First, life does not consist of a sequence of activities each of which has as its purpose some later member of the sequence. Chains of justification come repeatedly to an end within life, and whether the process as a whole can be justified has no bearing on the finality of these end-points. No further justification is needed to make it reasonable to take aspirin for a headache, attend an exhibit of the work of a painter one admires, or stop a child from putting his hand on a hot stove. No larger context or further purpose is needed to prevent these acts from being pointless.

Even if someone wished to supply a further justification for pursuing all the things in life that are commonly regarded as self-justifying, that justification would have to end somewhere too. If nothing can justify unless it is justified in terms of something outside itself, which is also justified, then an infinite regress results, and no chain of justification can be complete. Moreover, if a finite chain of reasons cannot justify anything, what could be accomplished by
an infinite chain, each link of which must be justified by something outside itself?

Since justifications must come to an end somewhere, nothing is gained by denying that they end where they appear to, within life—or by trying to subsume the multiple, often trivial ordinary justifications of action under a single, controlling life scheme. We can be satisfied more easily than that. In fact, through its misrepresentation of the process of justification, the argument makes a vacuous demand. It insists that the reasons available within life are incomplete, but suggests thereby that all reasons that come to an end are incomplete. This makes it impossible to supply any reasons at all.

The standard arguments for absurdity appear therefore to fail as arguments. Yet I believe they attempt to express something that is difficult to state, but fundamentally correct.

II

In ordinary life a situation is absurd when it includes a conspicuous discrepancy between pretension or aspiration and reality: someone gives a complicated speech in support of a motion that has already been passed; a notorious criminal is made president of a major philanthropic foundation; you declare your love over the telephone to a recorded announcement; as you are being knighted, your pants fall down.

When a person finds himself in an absurd situation, he will usually attempt to change it, by modifying his aspirations, or by trying to bring reality into better accord with them, or by removing himself from the situation entirely. We are not always willing or able to extricate ourselves from a position whose absurdity has become clear to us. Nevertheless, it is usually possible to imagine some change that would remove the absurdity—whether or not we can or will implement it. The sense that life as a whole is absurd arises when we perceive, perhaps dimly, an inflated pretension or aspiration which is inseparable from the continuation of human life and which makes its absurdity inescapable, short of escape from life itself.

Many people's lives are absurd, temporarily or permanently, for conventional reasons having to do with their particular ambitions, circumstances, and personal relations. If there is a philosophical sense of absurdity, however, it must arise from the perception of something universal—some respect in which pretension and reality inevitably clash for us all. This condition is supplied, I shall argue, by the collision between the seriousness with which we take our lives and the perpetual possibility of regarding everything about which we are serious as arbitrary, or open to doubt.
THE ABSURD

We cannot live human lives without energy and attention, nor without making choices which show that we take some things more seriously than others. Yet we have always available a point of view outside the particular form of our lives, from which the seriousness appears gratuitous. These two inescapable viewpoints collide in us, and that is what makes life absurd. It is absurd because we ignore the doubts that we know cannot be settled, continuing to live with nearly undiminished seriousness in spite of them.

This analysis requires defense in two respects: first as regards the unavoidability of seriousness; second as regards the inescapability of doubt.

We take ourselves seriously whether we lead serious lives or not and whether we are concerned primarily with fame, pleasure, virtue, luxury, triumph, beauty, justice, knowledge, salvation, or mere survival. If we take other people seriously and devote ourselves to them, that only multiplies the problem. Human life is full of effort, plans, calculation, success and failure: we pursue our lives, with varying degrees of sloth and energy.

It would be different if we could not step back and reflect on the process, but were merely led from impulse to impulse without self-consciousness. But human beings do not act solely on impulse. They are prudent, they reflect, they weigh consequences, they ask whether what they are doing is worth while. Not only are their lives full of particular choices that hang together in larger activities with temporal structure: they also decide in the broadest terms what to pursue and what to avoid, what the priorities among their various aims should be, and what kind of people they want to be or become. Some men are faced with such choices by the large decisions they make from time to time; some merely by reflection on the course their lives are taking as the product of countless small decisions. They decide whom to marry, what profession to follow, whether to join the Country Club, or the Resistance; or they may just wonder why they go on being salesmen or academics or taxi drivers, and then stop thinking about it after a certain period of inconclusive reflection.

Although they may be motivated from act to act by those immediate needs with which life presents them, they allow the process to continue by adhering to the general system of habits and the form of life in which such motives have their place—or perhaps only by clinging to life itself. They spend enormous quantities of energy, risk, and calculation on the details. Think of how an ordinary individual sweats over his appearance, his health, his sex life, his emotional honesty, his social utility, his self-knowledge, the quality
of his ties with family, colleagues, and friends, how well he does his job, whether he understands the world and what is going on in it. Leading a human life is a full-time occupation, to which everyone devotes decades of intense concern.

This fact is so obvious that it is hard to find it extraordinary and important. Each of us lives his own life—lives with himself twenty-four hours a day. What else is he supposed to do—live someone else's life? Yet humans have the special capacity to step back and survey themselves, and the lives to which they are committed, with that detached amazement which comes from watching an ant struggle up a heap of sand. Without developing the illusion that they are able to escape from their highly specific and idiosyncratic position, they can view it sub specie aeternitatis—and the view is at once sobering and comical.

The crucial backward step is not taken by asking for still another justification in the chain, and failing to get it. The objections to that line of attack have already been stated; justifications come to an end. But this is precisely what provides universal doubt with its object. We step back to find that the whole system of justification and criticism, which controls our choices and supports our claims to rationality, rests on responses and habits that we never question, that we should not know how to defend without circularity, and to which we shall continue to adhere even after they are called into question.

The things we do or want without reasons, and without requiring reasons—the things that define what is a reason for us and what is not—are the starting points of our skepticism. We see ourselves from outside, and all the contingency and specificity of our aims and pursuits become clear. Yet when we take this view and recognize what we do as arbitrary, it does not disengage us from life, and there lies our absurdity: not in the fact that such an external view can be taken of us, but in the fact that we ourselves can take it, without ceasing to be the persons whose ultimate concerns are so coolly regarded.

III

One may try to escape the position by seeking broader ultimate concerns, from which it is impossible to step back—the idea being that absurdity results because what we take seriously is something small and insignificant and individual. Those seeking to supply their lives with meaning usually envision a role or function in something larger than themselves. They therefore seek fulfillment in service to society, the state, the revolution, the progress of history, the advance of science, or religion and the glory of God.
But a role in some larger enterprise cannot confer significance unless that enterprise is itself significant. And its significance must come back to what we can understand, or it will not even appear to give us what we are seeking. If we learned that we were being raised to provide food for other creatures fond of human flesh, who planned to turn us into cutlets before we got too stringy—even if we learned that the human race had been developed by animal breeders precisely for this purpose—that would still not give our lives meaning, for two reasons. First, we would still be in the dark as to the significance of the lives of those other beings; second, although we might acknowledge that this culinary role would make our lives meaningful to them, it is not clear how it would make them meaningful to us.

Admittedly, the usual form of service to a higher being is different from this. One is supposed to behold and partake of the glory of God, for example, in a way in which chickens do not share in the glory of coq au vin. The same is true of service to a state, a movement, or a revolution. People can come to feel, when they are part of something bigger, that it is part of them too. They worry less about what is peculiar to themselves, but identify enough with the larger enterprise to find their role in it fulfilling.

However, any such larger purpose can be put in doubt in the same way that the aims of an individual life can be, and for the same reasons. It is as legitimate to find ultimate justification there as to find it earlier, among the details of individual life. But this does not alter the fact that justifications come to an end when we are content to have them end—when we do not find it necessary to look any further. If we can step back from the purposes of individual life and doubt their point, we can step back also from the progress of human history, or of science, or the success of a society, or the kingdom, power, and glory of God,¹ and put all these things into question in the same way. What seems to us to confer meaning, justification, significance, does so in virtue of the fact that we need no more reasons after a certain point.

What makes doubt inescapable with regard to the limited aims of individual life also makes it inescapable with regard to any larger purpose that encourages the sense that life is meaningful. Once the fundamental doubt has begun, it cannot be laid to rest.

Camus maintains in *The Myth of Sisyphus* that the absurd arises because the world fails to meet our demands for meaning. This suggests that the world might satisfy those demands if it were different. But now we can see that this is not the case. There does

not appear to be any conceivable world (containing us) about which unsettling doubts could not arise. Consequently the absurdity of our situation derives not from a collision between our expectations and the world, but from a collision within ourselves.

IV

It may be objected that the standpoint from which these doubts are supposed to be felt does not exist—that if we take the recommended backward step we will land on thin air, without any basis for judgment about the natural responses we are supposed to be surveying. If we retain our usual standards of what is important, then questions about the significance of what we are doing with our lives will be answerable in the usual way. But if we do not, then those questions can mean nothing to us, since there is no longer any content to the idea of what matters, and hence no content to the idea that nothing does.

But this objection misconceives the nature of the backward step. It is not supposed to give us an understanding of what is really important, so that we see by contrast that our lives are insignificant. We never, in the course of these reflections, abandon the ordinary standards that guide our lives. We merely observe them in operation, and recognize that if they are called into question we can justify them only by reference to themselves, uselessly. We adhere to them because of the way we are put together; what seems to us important or serious or valuable would not seem so if we were differently constituted.

In ordinary life, to be sure, we do not judge a situation absurd unless we have in mind some standards of seriousness, significance, or harmony with which the absurd can be contrasted. This contrast is not implied by the philosophical judgment of absurdity, and that might be thought to make the concept unsuitable for the expression of such judgments. This is not so, however, for the philosophical judgment depends on another contrast which makes it a natural extension from more ordinary cases. It departs from them only in contrasting the pretensions of life with a larger context in which no standards can be discovered, rather than with a context from which alternative, overriding standards may be applied.

V

In this respect, as in others, philosophical perception of the absurd resembles epistemological skepticism. In both cases the final, philosophical doubt is not contrasted with any unchallenged certainties, though it is arrived at by extrapolation from examples of doubt within the system of evidence or justification, where a contrast with other certainties is implied. In both cases our limitedness
joins with a capacity to transcend those limitations in thought (thus seeing them as limitations, and as inescapable).

Skepticism begins when we include ourselves in the world about which we claim knowledge. We notice that certain types of evidence convince us, that we are content to allow justifications of belief to come to an end at certain points, that we feel we know many things even without knowing or having grounds for believing the denial of others which, if true, would make what we claim to know false.

For example, I know that I am looking at a piece of paper, although I have no adequate grounds to claim I know that I am not dreaming; and if I am dreaming then I am not looking at a piece of paper. Here an ordinary conception of how appearance may diverge from reality is employed to show that we take our world largely for granted; the certainty that we are not dreaming cannot be justified except circularly, in terms of those very appearances which are being put in doubt. It is somewhat far-fetched to suggest I may be dreaming; but the possibility is only illustrative. It reveals that our claims to knowledge depend on our not feeling it necessary to exclude certain incompatible alternatives, and the dreaming possibility or the total-hallucination possibility are just representatives for limitless possibilities most of which we cannot even conceive.4

Once we have taken the backward step to an abstract view of our whole system of beliefs, evidence, and justification, and seen that it works only, despite its pretensions, by taking the world largely for granted, we are not in a position to contrast all these appearances with an alternative reality. We cannot shed our ordinary responses, and if we could it would leave us with no means of conceiving a reality of any kind.

It is the same in the practical domain. We do not step outside our lives to a new vantage point from which we see what is really, objectively significant. We continue to take life largely for granted while seeing that all our decisions and certainties are possible only because there is a great deal we do not bother to rule out.

Both epistemological skepticism and a sense of the absurd can be reached via initial doubts posed within systems of evidence and justification that we accept, and can be stated without violence to our ordinary concepts. We can ask not only why we should believe there is a floor under us, but also why we should believe the evidence of our senses at all—and at some point the frameable questions will

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4 I am aware that skepticism about the external world is widely thought to have been refuted, but I have remained convinced of its irrefutability since being exposed at Berkeley to Thompson Clarke's largely unpublished ideas on the subject.
have outlasted the answers. Similarly, we can ask not only why we should take aspirin, but why we should take trouble over our own comfort at all. The fact that we shall take the aspirin without waiting for an answer to this last question does not show that it is an unreal question. We shall also continue to believe there is a floor under us without waiting for an answer to the other question. In both cases it is this unsupported natural confidence that generates skeptical doubts; so it cannot be used to settle them.

Philosophical skepticism does not cause us to abandon our ordinary beliefs, but it lends them a peculiar flavor. After acknowledging that their truth is incompatible with possibilities that we have no grounds for believing do not obtain—apart from grounds in those very beliefs which we have called into question—we return to our familiar convictions with a certain irony and resignation. Unable to abandon the natural responses on which they depend, we take them back, like a spouse who has run off with someone else and then decided to return; but we regard them differently (not that the new attitude is necessarily inferior to the old, in either case).

The same situation obtains after we have put in question the seriousness with which we take our lives and human life in general and have looked at ourselves without presuppositions. We then return to our lives, as we must, but our seriousness is laced with irony. Not that irony enables us to escape the absurd. It is useless to mutter: "Life is meaningless; life is meaningless..." as an accompaniment to everything we do. In continuing to live and work and strive, we take ourselves seriously in action no matter what we say.

What sustains us, in belief as in action, is not reason or justification, but something more basic than these—for we go on in the same way even after we are convinced that the reasons have given out. If we tried to rely entirely on reason, and pressed it hard, our lives and beliefs would collapse—a form of madness that may actually occur if the inertial force of taking the world and life for granted is somehow lost. If we lose our grip on that, reason will not give it back to us.

As Hume says in a famous passage of the Treatise: "Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterates all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hours' amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther" (Book 1, Part 4, Section 7; Selby-Bigge, p. 269).
VI

In viewing ourselves from a perspective broader than we can occupy in the flesh, we become spectators of our own lives. We cannot do very much as pure spectators of our own lives, so we continue to lead them, and devote ourselves to what we are able at the same time to view as no more than a curiosity, like the ritual of an alien religion.

This explains why the sense of absurdity finds its natural expression in those bad arguments with which the discussion began. Reference to our small size and short lifespan and to the fact that all of mankind will eventually vanish without a trace are metaphors for the backward step which permits us to regard ourselves from without and to find the particular form of our lives curious and slightly surprising. By feigning a nebula's-eye view, we illustrate the capacity to see ourselves without presuppositions, as arbitrary, idiosyncratic, highly specific occupants of the world, one of countless possible forms of life.

Before turning to the question whether the absurdity of our lives is something to be regretted and if possible escaped, let me consider what would have to be given up in order to avoid it.

Why is the life of a mouse not absurd? The orbit of the moon is not absurd either, but that involves no strivings or aims at all. A mouse, however, has to work to stay alive. Yet he is not absurd, because he lacks the capacities for self-consciousness and self-transcendence that would enable him to see that he is only a mouse. If that did happen, his life would become absurd, since self-awareness would not make him cease to be a mouse and would not enable him to rise above his mousy strivings. Bringing his new-found self-consciousness with him, he would have to return to his meagre yet frantic life, full of doubts that he was unable to answer, but also full of purposes that he was unable to abandon.

Given that the transcendental step is natural to us humans, can we avoid absurdity by refusing to take that step and remaining entirely within our sublunar lives? Well, we cannot refuse consciously, for to do that we would have to be aware of the viewpoint we were refusing to adopt. The only way to avoid the relevant self-consciousness would be either never to attain it or to forget it—neither of which can be achieved by the will.

On the other hand, it is possible to expend effort on an attempt to destroy the other component of the absurd—abandoning one's earthly, individual, human life in order to identify as completely as possible with that universal viewpoint from which human life
seems arbitrary and trivial. (This appears to be the ideal of certain Oriental religions.) If one succeeds, then one will not have to drag the superior awareness through a strenuous mundane life, and absurdity will be diminished.

However, insofar as this self-etiolation is the result of effort, will-power, asceticism, and so forth, it requires that one take oneself seriously as an individual—that one be willing to take considerable trouble to avoid being creaturely and absurd. Thus one may undermine the aim of unworldliness by pursuing it too vigorously. Still, if someone simply allowed his individual, animal nature to drift and respond to impulse, without making the pursuit of its needs a central conscious aim, then he might, at considerable dissociative cost, achieve a life that was less absurd than most. It would not be a meaningful life either, of course; but it would not involve the engagement of a transcendent awareness in the assiduous pursuit of mundane goals. And that is the main condition of absurdity—the dragooning of an unconvincing transcendent consciousness into the service of an immanent, limited enterprise like a human life.

The final escape is suicide; but before adopting any hasty solutions, it would be wise to consider carefully whether the absurdity of our existence truly presents us with a problem, to which some solution must be found—a way of dealing with prima facie disaster. That is certainly the attitude with which Camus approaches the issue, and it gains support from the fact that we are all eager to escape from absurd situations on a smaller scale.

Camus—not on uniformly good grounds—rejects suicide and the other solutions he regards as escapist. What he recommends is defiance or scorn. We can salvage our dignity, he appears to believe, by shaking a fist at the world which is deaf to our pleas, and continuing to live in spite of it. This will not make our lives un-absurd, but it will lend them a certain nobility.4

This seems to me romantic and slightly self-pitying. Our absurdity warrants neither that much distress nor that much defiance. At the risk of falling into romanticism by a different route, I would argue that absurdity is one of the most human things about us: a manifestation of our most advanced and interesting characteristics. Like

4 "Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn" (The Myth of Sisyphus, Vintage edition, p.90).
skepticism in epistemology, it is possible only because we possess a
certain kind of insight—the capacity to transcend ourselves in
thought.

If a sense of the absurd is a way of perceiving our true situation
(even though the situation is not absurd until the perception
arises), then what reason can we have to resent or escape it? Like
the capacity for epistemological skepticism, it results from the
ability to understand our human limitations. It need not be a matter
for agony unless we make it so. Nor need it evoke a defiant contempt
of fate that allows us to feel brave or proud. Such dramatics, even
if carried on in private, betray a failure to appreciate the cosmic
unimportance of the situation. If sub specie aeternitatis there is no
reason to believe that anything matters, then that doesn’t matter
either, and we can approach our absurd lives with irony instead of
heroism or despair.

THOMAS NAGEL
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NOTES AND NEWS
Columbia University has awarded its Nicholas Murray Butler Medal in
Silver to Albert Hofstadter of the University of California at Santa Cruz.
This award is given annually to “that graduate of Columbia University
who has, during the year preceding, shown the most competence in philoso-
phy or in educational theory, practice and administration.” It was pre-
sented at an informal ceremony on Sunday, October 17, at University
House, Santa Cruz, by W. Theodore de Bary, Columbia’s executive vice
president for academic affairs and provost. Professor Hofstadter, who was a
member of Columbia’s faculty for 17 years, is cited for two of his more
recent books, Truth in Art and Agony and Epitaph.

The College of DuPage and Loyola University, Department of Philosophy,
are once again holding a Colloquium on the Teaching of Philosophy at
the Illinois State Philosophical Convention the day prior to the convening
of the convention, November 4th, in Edwardsville, Illinois, on the campus
of Southern Illinois University. The keynote speaker will be Willis Moore
of Southern Illinois University. Also participating will be Morris Eames,
Southern Illinois University; Keith Yandell, University of Wisconsin;
John Economos, University of Illinois, Chicago; and Robert Lechner, the
editor of Philosophy Today. John Oastler of College of DuPage and Rich-
ard Wesley of Loyola University, Department of Philosophy, are in charge
of the program.
Lesson 27: Nagel Introduction

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Explain Nagel’s primary aim in Part I of “The Absurd”.
2. Understand Nagel’s objections to the Million Years Argument.

Materials:
Nagel reading, “Nagel’s Argument against the Million Years Argument” handout, board, marker.

Anticipatory Set:
What is Nagel trying to do in part I of “The Absurd”?

Procedure:
1. Review the AS. Emphasize that Nagel is trying to show that certain arguments which people commonly offer for the absurdity of life are bad arguments. This still leaves open the question of whether or not Nagel himself thinks life is absurd (as will become clear later, Nagel actually thinks life is absurd).
2. Break students up into groups to discuss the first argument Nagel addresses (the Million Years argument).
   - In groups, students should re-read the first 3 paragraphs of the Nagel reading.
   - Then they should answer the following question: Why does Nagel think it is wrong to think that life is absurd because “nothing we do now will matter in a million years”?
   - Once they have some sense of what Nagel’s objection is they should compare their answers to those of other groups and then refine their answers accordingly.
3. Reconvene as a class and go over the objection together making sure everyone is on the same page.
4. To finalize students’ understanding of the argument, distribute and review the handout called “Nagel’s Argument against the Million Years Argument.”

Homework:
1. Continue working on the Omelas Essay (due next class).
2. Express Nagel’s objection to the million years argument in your own words.
Nagel’s Argument against the ‘Million Years’ Argument

The relevant Text:

Most people feel on occasion that life is absurd. . .Yet the reasons usually offered in defense of this conviction are patently inadequate: they could not really explain why life is absurd. Consider some examples, it is often remarked that nothing we do now will matter in a million years. But if that is true, then. . .nothing that will be the case in a million years matters now. In particular, it does not matter now that in a million years nothing we do now will matter.

Summary:

People often say the following:

Nothing we do now is important because what we do now will not matter in a million years

But Nagel thinks that people who say this are confused. They think they have a good argument for the conclusion that life is absurd, but they actually do not. To grasp this, consider the following imaginary conversation between Nagel and Susan.

Susan: It is pointless for me to try to be happy.
Nagel: Why?
Susan: Because my happiness will not matter at all a million years from now.
Nagel: Why do you think that?
Susan: Because nothing that happens now will be important in a million years.
Nagel: OK, but if that’s true then it is also true that what happens in a million years is not important now in the present.
Susan: So what. What’s your point?
Nagel: My point is that then you shouldn’t care at all about the fact that a million years from now your current happiness won’t be important. That fact is not important now at all.
Susan: I see.
Nagel: What you really should think about, Susan, is whether your happiness is important now, not whether it will be important in a million years. You are asking yourself the wrong question.
Lesson 28: Nagel Continued

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Understand Nagel’s objections to the Justification Argument.
2. Explain the connection between justifications, reasons, and intrinsic values.

Materials:
Nagel reading, “Nagel on Justification” handout, board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
Define instrumental value and intrinsic value. Provide an example of each.

Procedure:
1. Collect the Omelas essays while students work on the AS.
2. Review the AS.
3. Break students up into groups to discuss the second argument Nagel addresses (the Justification Argument).
   • In groups, students should re-read the Nagel text starting from the paragraph that begins “Another inadequate argument. . .” until the end of Part I.
   • Then they should answer the following question: Why does Nagel think it is wrong to conclude that your life “is an elaborate journey leading nowhere”? 
   • Once students in each group have some sense of what Nagel’s objection is they should then compare their answers to those of other groups and then refine their answers accordingly.
4. Reconvene as a class and go over Nagel’s objection to the Justification Argument together making sure everyone is on the same page.
5. Distribute the “Nagel on Justification” handout and review it together as a class.

Homework:
1. Answer the question asked at the end of the “Nagel on Justification” handout.
Nagel on Justification

Recall our definition of justification from earlier in the semester:

Justification: Both actions and beliefs can be justified. To determine whether a belief or action is justified you need to reflect on it critically and examine whether there are good, defensible reasons for taking that action or for holding that belief. Reasons for belief and action are drawn from your experience of the world as well as your other beliefs. Generally, when we take someone’s belief or action to be justified, we do not criticize her for having that belief or for doing that action.

To this we can now add Nagel’s important insight that:

Justifications must come to an end somewhere. (718)

Nagel talks about this feature of justification in the following passage:

Life does not consist of a sequence of activities each of which has its purpose some later member of the sequence. Chains of justification come repeatedly to an end within life . . . No further justification is needed to make it reasonable to take aspirin for a headache, attend an exhibit of the work of a painter one admires, or stop a child from putting his hand on a hot stove. No larger context or further purpose is needed to prevent these acts from being pointless. (717)

In this passage Nagel emphasizes the connection between justification and the fact that we take some things to be intrinsically good or bad. Recall our earlier discussion of intrinsic value vs. instrumental value:

Instrumental Value vs. Intrinsic Value: Something has intrinsic value, when we value it simply for its own sake. Something has instrumental value when we value it, not for its own sake, but rather because it helps us to get something else that we do value for its own sake. In other words, something has instrumental value when it serves as a means to some end that we value for its own sake. Money, for example, has only instrumental value. No one wants money just for the sake of having money. Rather, people want money because money lets you buy things that you do value for their own sake. Love, or wisdom, or pleasure are, in contrast, things which we value for their own sake and so have intrinsic value.

It makes sense that the process of justifying an action should involve the identification of intrinsic values given what we have already said about reasons:

Reasons are used to explain and justify our actions to other people. Thus, something can be a reason only if it is a consideration that other people see as having weight in
the relevant way. If you want to explain why you went to dinner a good reason would be ‘because I was hungry’ since other people will clearly recognize the importance of needing to eat when one is hungry. In contrast, the answer ‘because the sky was cloudy’ is not a good reason since other people will fail to see why this fact is important or relevant to the trip to the restaurant.

Since intrinsic values like love, friendship, pleasure, etc. are generally taken by people to be things that it is good to try to get they generally provide very satisfying reasons.

Moreover, since intrinsic values are things that are valued for their own sake they provide the sort of “stopping point” in justification that Nagel is talking about. Things that are instrumentally good must be justified in terms of the intrinsic goods that they help achieve. But intrinsic goods provide their own justification and so are often the natural stopping points of justification.

**Now a question for you:**

**How can this understanding of what a justification is be used to challenge the following argument?**

*Because we are going to die, all chains of justification must leave off in mid-air: one studies and works to earn money to pay for clothing, housing, entertainment, food, to sustain oneself from year to year, perhaps to support a family and pursue a career—but to what final end? All of it is an elaborate journey leading nowhere.*
Lesson 29: Nagel Wrap-Up

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Explain what Nagel means by the “crucial backward step”.
2. Understand why Nagel thinks that life is absurd.

Materials:
Nagel reading, board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
No one is perfect: Describe one way in which you wish you were different.

Procedure:
1. Review the AS. Use the AS to introduce Nagel’s notion of the “crucial backwards step” involved in reflection. We are able (unlike other animals) to be discontented with ourselves because we can “step back” and reflect on ourselves and our values.
2. Explain to the class Nagel’s Argument from Part II (which they did not read) for why life is absurd
   - Note 1: Nagel’s argument takes up all of section II, but the core of it is found on page 720. What students should come away with is an understanding of the “crucial backwards step” described by Nagel on p. 720 and of the skepticism about our intrinsic values that this backwards step leads to.
   - Note 2: Many students find it helpful if you draw a diagram to represent the “crucial backwards step” on the board.
3. Break students up into groups. In groups they should work together to write up a 5-8 sentence long summary of Nagel’s argument in their own words.

Homework:
1. What do you think of Nagel’s argument for the absurdity of life?
2. Study for the Nagel reading quiz next class.
Lesson 30: Nagel Reading Quiz

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Review the main points covered in the Nagel unit.

Materials:
Nagel Reading Quiz, Final Paper Prompt, Frankfurt reading, board, marker.

Anticipatory Set:
Any last minute questions about Nagel?

Procedure:
1. Go over any last minute questions that students might have.
2. Distribute the quiz.
3. As students finish you may distribute to them the Frankfurt reading which they should then begin.
4. When all students are done, pass out the Final Paper Prompt. Go over the prompt together as a class.
5. If there is extra time you may break students up into groups to begin discussing their views about the argument presented on the final paper prompt.

Homework:
1. Read Frankfurt reading.
2. Answer the reading questions listed at the end of the Frankfurt reading (do not confuse these with the group discussion questions listed along the side—those will be discussed in class).
Nagel Reading Quiz

1. “Life is pointless because nothing we do now will matter in a million years”. Why does Nagel think that this is a BAD argument? (5 points)

2. “Life is pointless because given that we are going to die, all chains of justification must leave off in mid-air: one studies and works to earn money to pay for clothing, housing, entertainment, food, to sustain oneself from year to year, perhaps to support a family and pursue a career—but to what final end? All of it is an elaborate journey leading nowhere.” Why does Nagel think that this is a BAD argument? (5 points)

3. Why do INTINSIC VALUES make for good justificatory reasons? (5 points)
4. What makes a situation **ABSURD**? (For example, why is a situation in which “you declare your love over the telephone to a recorded announcement” or a situation in which “as you are being knighted, your pants fall down” an absurd situation?) (3 points)

5. Why does Nagel think that it is possible for us to regard everything that we are serious about as open to doubt? How is this connected to what Nagel calls the “crucial backward step”? (2 points)
Final Paper Prompt

“I am firmly persuaded that a great deal of consciousness, every sort of consciousness, in fact, is a disease. I stick to that.” (from Notes from the Underground by Fyodor Dostoyevsky)

Due Date of the Final Paper: ____________________________

Skeptical Suzy’s Conclusion: If I try to live my life in a self-reflective way I will eventually end up losing my sense of who I am altogether because I will be filled with so much doubt. I should, therefore, not strive to be a reflective person. I should, instead, simply live my life unreflectively and be content with the beliefs and values and goals I already find myself holding.

Skeptical Suzy’s Argument for this Conclusion: If I want to try to be a self-reflective person in my everyday life, then I must be sure that my beliefs are beliefs that I hold because I think they are true, and not simply because other people have told me they are true. And I must, similarly, make sure that the values that I act on when I make decisions are really my own values and are not placed in me by outside influences (parents, media, etc.).

However, in order to tell whether the beliefs and values I currently hold are really my own or not I must reflect on those beliefs and values. I must look at them under the “microscope of philosophy” and examine whether I actually have good reasons to think that my beliefs and values are correct. Only once I have determined that a certain belief or value of mine is backed by good and solid reasons can I be satisfied with it as a self-reflective person.

However, given the highly complex (perhaps even never-ending) nature of reflection, I will never reach a point where I can be truly confident that I have good reasons for believing what I believe or for valuing what I value. Every conclusion I might reach is, upon further reflection, always shown to be open to doubt. Take, for example, my current belief that it is just to punish someone who has committed a crime. Do I have good reasons for holding this belief? Well, to answer this question I must raise and answer all sorts of other questions:

What is a crime? Must someone be responsible for a crime in order for him to be justly punished for it? If so, what makes someone responsible for a crime? Perhaps it requires that he intended to commit the crime. But what counts or does not count as an intention to commit a crime? And is intending to commit a crime enough to make someone responsible for it? Must he also have freely chosen to intend to commit the crime? For example, what about someone who was led to commit the crime because he grew up in a horrible environment and had abusive parents? Did such a person really freely choose to commit the crime? Would punishing such a person really be just? Moreover, what is justice? What makes an action just rather than unjust? And by what criterion can I determine when an action is just or unjust? For that matter, how can I even be sure that the answers I provide to these questions are the correct ones and that I haven’t made some mistake somewhere in my reasoning?
If reflecting on my belief that it is just to punish people for their crimes requires me to reflect on all of these questions and many more, then reflecting on my beliefs and values seems like a hopeless task. There is no reasonable way that it could ever come to an end! Reflection, therefore, does not allow me to actually tell whether I have good reasons to believe what I believe or to value what I value. Reflection can only lead me into further confusing, self-doubt, and uncertainty about my values and beliefs. But if am in doubt about everything that I used to value or believe, then I am in doubt about who I am. Reflection, therefore, tends to lead to a loss of one’s identity.

Given this, it is better simply never to try to be a self-reflective person. Instead you should just live your life unreflectively. At least this way you will be able to preserve a solid sense of self.

**Paper Instructions:** There are two main tasks you need to accomplish in this paper. First, you need to state Skeptical Suzy’s argument in your own words. Then you need to agree or disagree with it. Here are these two tasks spelled out more explicitly:

1. **What is Skeptical Suzy’s argument?** Provide a clear and concise statement of her argument in your own words. It will help you with step (2) if you make some effort to break-down her argument into distinct steps (which you might number for convenience). Each one of these steps is a premise in the argument.

2. **Is Skeptical Suzy’s argument sound or unsound?** If you think that it is sound then you must argue that each of the premises it relies on are true. If you think it is unsound then you must argue that it relies on at least one premise that is false. You will need to explain in depth why you take these premises to be true/false.

   Note: When agreeing or disagreeing with Suzy’s argument be sure to provide good reasons for why you think it is a good or bad argument. Part of this will involve considering potential challenges or objections to what you are saying. If you think that there is a way that someone could challenge what you are saying, then you should make that clear and you should try to respond to this challenge.

In addition to this you should have a clear introductory paragraph that outlines the purpose of the paper and indicates whether you think that Skeptical Suzy’s argument is good or bad. You need not have a concluding paragraph but you may.

**Other requirements:** The paper should be typed (12-pt Times New Roman font) and should be at least 5 pages (double-spaced). Good luck!
Frankfurt + Course
Wrap-Up Unit

Contents:

Selections from “Taking Ourselves Seriously” by Harry Frankfurt (including reading & discussion questions)
Lesson Plan Day 31: Frankfurt Part I
Lesson Plan Day 32: Frankfurt Part II
Lesson Plan Day 33: Final Paper Workshop
Lesson Plan Day 34: Final Exam Review
Final Exam Study Guide
Final Exam
Part I
(1) I suppose some of you must have noticed that human beings have a tendency to be heavily preoccupied with thinking about themselves... We put very considerable effort into trying to get clear about what we are really like, trying to figure out what we are actually up to, and trying to decide whether anything can be done about this. The strong likelihood is that no other animal worries about such matters. Indeed, we humans seem to be the only things around that are even capable of taking themselves seriously...

(2) Taking ourselves seriously means that we are not prepared to accept ourselves just as we come. We want our thoughts, our feelings, our choices, and our behavior to make sense. We are not satisfied to think that our ideas are formed haphazardly, or that our actions are driven by... mindless decisions... We want to get things right.

(3) It is reason and love... that we expect to equip us most effectively to accomplish this. Our lives are naturally pervaded, therefore, by an anxious concern to recognize what they demand and to appreciate where they lead... Among my aims in these lectures is to explore the roles of reason and of love in our active lives...

Part II
(4) What is it about human beings that makes it possible for us to take ourselves seriously? At bottom it is something more primitive... than either our capacity for reason or our capacity to love. It is our peculiar knack of separating from the immediate content and flow of our own consciousness and introducing a sort of division within our minds. This... puts in place an elementary reflexive structure, which enables us to focus our attention directly upon ourselves...

(5) We are unique (probably) in being able simultaneously to be engaged in whatever is going on in our conscious minds, to detach ourselves from it, and to observe it—as it were—from a distance. We are then in a position to form reflexive or higher-order responses to it. For instance, we may approve of what we notice ourselves feeling, or we may disapprove; we may want to remain the sort of person we observe ourselves to be, or we may want to be different... This has implications of two radically opposed kinds.

(6) On the one hand, it generates a profound threat to our well-being. The inner division that we introduce impairs our capacity for untroubled spontaneity. This is not merely a matter of spoiling our fun. It exposes us to psychological and spiritual disorders that

Group Discussion Questions
Paragraph 1—How does Frankfurt’s claim that people take themselves seriously relate to Nagel’s claim that “most people feel on occasion that life is absurd”. Are these two claims at odds with each other, or are they really just two sides of the same coin?

Paragraph 2—Of the other authors we read works from this semester (Russell, Nietzsche, Fromm, Descartes, Le Guin, Nagel) which ones expressed dissatisfaction with their ideas or the ideas of others being formed haphazardly?

Paragraph 4-5—Here Frankfurt is describing in more detail what Nagel calls “the crucial backward step” that we, as human beings, are capable of in thought.

Describe an instance where you have taken this crucial backward step and reflected on your own thoughts. You may, as Frankfurt suggests, want to consider an instance where you approved or disapproved, upon reflection, of some feature of yourself (e.g., you noticed that you were being selfish and disapproved of this).

Paragraph 6—How do Frankfurt’s observations in this paragraph connect up to Nietzsche’s skepticism about the value of
are nearly impossible to avoid. These are not only painful; they can be seriously disabling. Facing ourselves, in the way that internal separation enables us to do, frequently leaves us distressed by what we see, as well as bewildered and insecure concerning who we are . . .

(7) On the other hand, however, this very capacity to divide and to objectify ourselves . . . creates for us the possibility of going beyond simply wanting various things, and of coming instead to care about them, to regard them as important to ourselves, and to love them. The same structural configuration that makes us vulnerable to disturbing and potentially crippling disabilities also immeasurably enhances our lives by offering us . . . opportunities for . . . love . . .

Part III

(8) Love is not a voluntary matter. . . We cannot bring ourselves to love, or to stop loving, by an act of will alone—that is, merely by choosing to do so. And sometimes we cannot affect it by any means whatsoever. . . [Moreover,] love does not require a response by the lover to any real or imagined value in what he loves. Parents do not ordinarily love their children so much, for example, because they perceive that their children possess exceptional value. In fact, it is the other way around: the children seem to the parents to be valuable, and they are valuable to the parents, only because the parents love them. Parents have been known to love—quite genuinely—children that they themselves recognize as lacking any particular inherent merit . . .

(9) Love is not a conclusion. It is not an outcome of reasoning, or a consequence of reasons. It creates reasons . . .

(10) We care about many things only for their instrumental value. They are intermediate goals for us, which we pursue as means to other things. Conceivably, a person’s goals might all be intermediate: whatever he wants, he wants just for the sake of another thing; and he wants that other thing just in order to obtain something else; and so on. That sort of life could certainly keep a person busy. However, running endlessly from one thing to another, with no conclusive destinations, could not provide any full satisfaction because it would provide no sense of genuine achievement. We need final ends*, whose value is not merely instrumental. I believe that our final ends are provided and legitimated by love. *Final Ends = Intrinsic Values

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Paragraph 7—What are some of the other ways that our ability to reflect enhances our lives? Recall what Russell has to say regarding this question in “The Value of Philosophy” (e.g., He says that our ability to reflect is what allows us to be impartial).

Paragraph 8—What point is Frankfurt trying to make with his child example? Is it the value of the child that gives rise to the love of the parent? Or is it the love of the parent that gives rise to the value of the child?

Do you agree with Frankfurt’s conclusion??

Paragraph 9—Review: What counts as a reason and what role do reasons play in our decision-making process?

Paragraph 10—Frankfurt makes a very interesting claim here. He says that intrinsic values (e.g., friendship, hope, wisdom, etc.) are intrinsically valuable because we love those things.

Is this in conflict with Nagel’s view that ultimately we are unable to explain why things like friendship and wisdom are intrinsically valuable?
TAKING OURSELVES SERIOUSLY
By Harry Frankfurt

Reading Questions:

1. What does Frankfurt mean when he says that human beings take themselves seriously? (paragraphs 1-2)

2. How does our ability to “introduce a sort of division within our minds” make it possible for us to take ourselves seriously? (paragraphs 4-5)

3. What are the two implications (one positive, one negative) of reflection that Frankfurt notes? (paragraphs 6-7)

4. What point is Frankfurt trying to make with his child example? According to him, is it the value of the child that gives rise to the love of the parent? Or is it the love of the parent that gives rise to the value of the child? (paragraph 8)

5. What connection does Frankfurt draw between love and reasons? (paragraph 9)

6. Why would a person who only has instrumental goals never be fully satisfied according to Frankfurt? (paragraph 10)

7. What does Frankfurt mean when he says: “I believe that our final ends are provided and legitimated by love.” (paragraph 10)
Lesson 31: Frankfurt Part I

Objectives:

As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:

1. Understand any mistakes made on the Nagel quiz.
2. Grasp the main points of the Frankfurt reading.
3. Delve deeper into the argument from the final paper prompt.

Materials:

Graded Nagel Quizzes, Frankfurt reading, board, marker.

Anticipatory Set:

What is the hidden assumption in the following argument?

1. Every person has a right to life.
2. So the fetus has a right to life.

Procedure:

1. Review the AS. (The answer is: Fetuses are persons.)
2. Return and review the graded Nagel quizzes.
3. Break students up into groups. Have them share and discuss their answers to the 7 reading questions at the end of the Frankfurt reading. When students are done, review their answers to these questions as a class.
4. Switch the student groups around for variety. Now have them discuss Skeptical Suzy’s argument on the final paper prompt. Students should focus at this point on making sure they understand Suzy’s argument.

Homework:

1. Answer the Big 4 Questions for the Frankfurt reading.
2. Continue work on the final essay.
Lesson 32: Frankfurt Part II

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Connect the Frankfurt reading up to other readings from the semester.
2. Begin to form their own criticisms of Skeptical Suzy’s argument.

Materials:
Frankfurt reading, board, marker.

Anticipatory Set:
Are these normative or descriptive claims?
- Mandie believes that all children are obnoxious.
- Marcus dislikes hazlenuts.
- Jackson Pollock paintings are over-rated.
- Philosophy class is less boring than Spanish class.

Procedure:
1. Review the AS. (The answers, in order, are: D,D,N,N)
2. Break students up into groups. Have them discuss together the Group Discussion Questions listed to the right of the Frankfurt reading. When students are done, one student from each group should rotate to another group to share the answers of his/her group with this new group.
3. Reconvene as a class. Ask students if they have any further questions about the Frankfurt reading. Discuss as a class whatever questions they might have.
4. Form the students into new small groups to continue their discussion of the Skeptical Suzy final paper prompt. Students should focus at this point on thinking about how they might criticize Skeptical Suzy’s argument.

Homework:
1. Bring a draft/outline of your final paper to class next time.
Lesson 33: Final Paper Workshop

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Explain to their peers their basic criticism(s) of Skeptical Suzy’s argument.
2. Come away with a solid understanding of what they need to do in the next week to write a good final paper.

Materials:
Board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
Are the following arguments valid? Sound?
1. If you get a paper scratch, you’re going to die.
2. Lorenzo got a paper scratch.
3. So Lorenzo is going to die.
1. People who have an ancestral history of cancer are more likely to get cancer.
2. Marta has an ancestral history of cancer.
3. Marta is going to get cancer.

Procedure:
1. Review the AS. (The first argument is valid but not sound, the second argument is invalid and so also unsound).
2. Hand out the final exam study guide. Announce that next class will be spent reviewing for the final exam.
3. Break students up into small groups to continue their discussion of Skeptical Suzy’s argument. By now students should have worked out a concrete objection to Suzy’s argument which they should share with their peers and get feedback from them on.
4. While this small group work is going on the teacher should circulate to take a look at the students’ drafts of the final paper to give them feedback.
5. Any remaining time may be spent by reviewing the vocabulary terms listed on the final exam study guide as a class.

Homework:
1. Work on final paper.
2. Review for the final exam.
Lesson 34: Final Exam Review

Objectives:
As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:
1. Review all of the readings from the semester.
2. Explain all of the key terms and concepts on the final exam review sheet.

Materials:
Final exam study guide, 1 spare copy of every article we have read this semester (Russell, Fromm, Nietzsche, Descartes, Le Guin, Nagel, Frankfurt), board, marker

Anticipatory Set:
Will you study more than an hour for the final exam next class?
(a) What is your all-things-considered answer to this question?
(b) What pro-tanto reasons did you weigh to arrive at this answer?

Procedure:
1. Review the AS.
2. Distribute the final exam study guide. Then review any questions students have about the vocab terms or key concepts listed on the final exam study guide.
3. Break students up into small groups of 2-3.
   • Each group should choose one of the readings from the semester (make sure each group has a different reading).
   • Students should then in their group review the chosen reading and create a group summary of the main points that the author makes in that reading.
     (Note: If a group chooses the Le Guin article, make sure they discuss it in connection with the smartphone discussion).
4. When each group has completed its summary, the groups should take turns presenting their summaries to the class. This will serve as a review of the readings for the whole class.

Homework:
1. Complete the final paper.
2. Study for the final exam.
Final Exam Study Guide

Exam Format:

- 6 vocabulary questions, of which you must answer 5.
- 6 short-answer questions about core concepts, of which you must answer 5.
- 5 quotations drawn from various authors we’ve read, of which you must analyze 4 (you should also be able to identify the author of the quotation).

What You Should Study:

Terms

justification, reflection, reasons, pro-tanto reasons, all-things-considered judgments, consistent, inconsistent, contradiction, normative claim, descriptive claim, instrumental value, intrinsic value, premise, conclusion, argument, suppressed premise, hidden assumption, valid, sound.

✓ You should be able to define each of these terms.
✓ You should be able to provide an example to illustrate each of them.

Core Concepts

Impartiality (this concept was discussed by Russell)

Skepticism (we discussed this concept in connection with Nietzsche)

The “slow refinement” method (this was proposed as an alternative to Descartes’ method)

Moral dumbfounding (this concept was introduced during the Omelas unit)

The connection between intrinsic values and justification (discussed by Nagel & Frankfurt)

The “crucial backwards step” (discussed by Nagel and further described by Frankfurt)

✓ You should be able to write 4-5 sentences about each of these concepts as it connects to the context in which we learned it.

Authors

Russell, Nietzsche, Fromm, Descartes, Le Guin, Nagel, Frankfurt

✓ You should be able to identify quotes from all of these others.
✓ You should be familiar enough with their views to be able to say something accurate and intelligent about these quotes.
Final Exam

Section I: Vocabulary

Directions—Please answer 5 out of the following 6 questions.

(1) What is the difference between instrumental value and intrinsic value? Provide an example of one thing that has both instrumental and intrinsic value.

(2) What is the difference between a normative claim and a descriptive claim? Provide at least one example of each.

(3) How can you tell when a group of claims are inconsistent? Provide an example of (at least) two claims that are inconsistent with each other.

(4) What is a suppressed premise? Provide an example of an argument that has a suppressed premise.
(5) When is an argument valid? When is an argument sound? Provide an example of an argument that is valid but not sound.

(6) What are pro-tanto reasons? What is an all-things-considered judgment? Provide an example of an all-things-considered judgment made after considering conflicting pro-tanto reasons.

Section II: Core Concepts

Directions—Please answer 5 of the following 6 short-answer prompts (your answers should be roughly 3-5 sentences long).

1. What is impartiality and how does philosophical reflection help us to achieve it?

2. Of the authors we read this semester, identify one that held a skeptical position on some issue. State what his/her view was and explain why it counts as a skeptical view.
3. Explain what **moral dumbfounding** is and provide an example of it from your life.

4. Why are **intrinsic values** so well suited to provide us with ultimate **reasons** in chains of justification?

5. What is the **slow-refinement method** and how did you employ it when considering the similarities and differences between Omelas and the smartphone case?

6. What is the “**crucial backwards step**” that humans are capable of and what sorts of problems and benefits result from it?
Section III: Quotations

Directions—Please address 4 of the following 5 quotes. For whichever 4 you choose, you need to (a) identify the author of the quote and (b) explain in your own words what the author is saying in that quote.

(1) “It is exclusively among the goods of the mind that the value of philosophy is to be found; and only those who are not indifferent to these goods can be persuaded that the study of philosophy is not a waste of time.”

(2) “[R]unning endlessly from one thing to another, with no conclusive destinations, could not provide any full satisfaction because it would provide no sense of genuine achievement. We need final ends, whose value is not merely instrumental. I believe that our final ends are provided and legitimated by love.”

(3) “Life does not consist of a sequence of activities each of which has as its purpose some later member of the sequence. Chains of justification come repeatedly to an end within life.”

(4) “The right to express our thoughts, however, means something only if we are able to have thoughts of our own; freedom from external authority is a lasting gain only if the inner psychological conditions are such that we are able to establish our own individuality.”

(5) “[B]ut as for the opinions which up to that time I had embraced, I thought that I could not do better than resolve at once to sweep them wholly away, that I might afterwards be in a position to admit either others more correct, or even perhaps the same when they had undergone the scrutiny of reason.”