



## Introducing Philosophy through *South Park and Philosophy: You Know, I Learned Something Today*

### Course Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the five major areas of Western philosophy—logic, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and political philosophy—through the popular culture medium of *South Park*. In doing so, articles from the book *South Park and Philosophy: You Know, I Learned Something Today* will be used as starting points for description, analysis, and discussion of a few of the basic philosophical views from these five areas. Also, at appropriate times throughout the course, the instructor may wish to utilize actual episodes from *South Park*.

### Course Procedure (One Possible Way to Proceed)

#### LOGIC

Since logic underpins all philosophical areas (as well as being an area of philosophy itself), it makes sense to begin the course with a brief logic primer where the student can digest a few of the basic principles of sound reasoning, including: (a) argument identification, formation, and analysis; (b) deductive vs. inductive reasoning; (c) truth, soundness, and cogency; (d) evidence for our beliefs; (e) fallacious reasoning. Philosophers are about the business of argumentation, primarily, so the instructor may begin the course with this logic material and use this chapter for emphasis:

*“The Chewbacca Defense...” by Robert Arp*

A lot of instructors use Plato’s dialogues to introduce philosophy and argumentation (I would do this). Socrates is usually the mouthpiece of Plato, trumpeting truth, justice, and goodness through rational dialogue. After the logic primer, and if Plato’s dialogues are presented—for example, Euthyphro, Apology, and Crito—the following chapters may be utilized as well:

*“Flatulence and Philosophy...” by William W. Young III*

*“The Philosophical Passion of the Jew...” by William Devlin*

#### EPISTEMOLOGY

Evidence for our beliefs is essential in providing justification for the truth of the claims we make. And our claims need to be true, as well as our conclusion has to follow from our premises, in order to put forward either sound (deductive) or cogent (inductive) arguments. Again, philosophers are about the business of argument identification, formation, and, above all, analysis and critique. Thus, evidence for our beliefs is essential to a philosopher’s work. Given the central place of evidence for philosophers, and given the fact that evidence was touched upon already above, the instructor may easily move from issues in logic to issues in epistemology, and use this chapter for emphasis:

*“You Know, I learned Something Today...” by Henry Jacoby*

The instructor may then contrast Jacoby’s argument with the more tempered position about beliefs put forward by Jeff Dueck. Dueck makes a little more room for the possibility of believing something without having sufficient evidence in his chapter:

*“Religious Pluralism and the Super Best Friends” by Jeffrey Dueck*

#### METAPHYSICS

In Dueck’s chapter, he mentions the existence of God. The instructor may then move into metaphysical issues by a discussion of the proofs for and against God’s existence (in the Judeo-Islamic-Christian sense of an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-good Supreme Being and creator of the world). When discussing the main argument against God’s existence utilized especially by the atheist—the problem of evil—the instructor may use this chapter for emphasis:

*“Cartmanland and the Problem of Evil,” by David Kyle Johnson*



The instructor may then delve more into the essence of evil, as well as speak about the importance of evil and Satan for Christian theology, by using Dale Jacquette's chapter:

*"Satan Lord of Darkness in South Park Cosmology," by Dale Jacquette*

A god-less, atheistic world view—where evil is all the more an accepted mainstay—and its consequences for our thinking and morality may then be explored by looking at the chapter on existentialism:

*"Oh My God! They Killed Kenny..." by Karin Fry*

Continuing with issues in metaphysics, the instructor may focus on issues in philosophy of mind using this chapter:

*"AWESOM-O and the Possibility of Artificial Intelligence" by Randall Jensen*

Then, personal identity and identity over time may be discussed with these chapters:

*"Raisins, Whores, and Boys..." by Ellen Miller*

*"Stan's Future Self and Evil Cartman..." by Shai Biderman*

## ETHICS

After a brief introduction to various ethical theories like deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics, an instructor may investigate a few practical ethical issues, such as:

The ethics of humor, using:

*"Is It Okay to Laugh at South Park?" by Catherine Yu*

*"Blasphemous Humor in South Park" by Kevin Murtagh*

*(Don't forget to read the Special Surprise Bonus and ALL of the Chef's Salty Ball-less Index thoroughly, to "get" the jokes)*

The ethics of blasphemy, using:

*"They Satirized My Prophet..." by David Koepsell*

Gay marriage, using:

*"You Can't Get Married..." by Jacob Held*

The ethics of meat-eating, using:

*"Just Don't Kill Baby Cows" by Cynthia McWilliams*

The ethics of cloning, using:

*"Four-Assed Monkeys..." Scott Calef*

## POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

After presenting some of the basics of political theory, an instructor may use the Introduction to show the value of pluralistic thinking in democratic republic, such as the United States. Then, this chapter may be used:

*"South Park and the Open Society..." by David Curtis and Gerald Erion*

The issue of public good and paternalism vs. private endeavor and liberalism may be discussed using:

*"The Invisible Gnomes and the Invisible Hand..." by Paul Cantor*

Then, discussion can turn toward the nature of law using this chapter:

*"Respect My Authorita..." by Mark White*

Then, the democratic system and the value of voting may be discussed using this chapter:

*"Vote or Die, Bitch..." by John Scott Gray*

Finally, the value of music for any society may be investigated with this chapter:

*"Aesthetic Value, Ethos, and Phil Collins..." by Per Broman*