

PHIL 0080: PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY

Fall 2017

Instructor

Robert Howton

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Office Hours

Mo 9–10 A.M., Tu 10–11 A.M.,

and by appt.

1028-A CL

Course Website

CourseWeb

(courseweb.pitt.edu)

Lectures

MoWe 10–10:50 A.M.,

G24 CL

Section Leaders

Suzie Love

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Shivam Patel

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Philosophy, literally the “love of wisdom”, is challenging in ways that other intellectual disciplines are not. Learning philosophy is not just a matter of learning about the opinions of classic and contemporary philosophers; it requires critical reflection and reassessment of one’s own, often deeply held opinions. In other words, *learning* philosophy requires *doing* philosophy.

This course is an introduction to doing philosophy. It will introduce you to some basic questions, methods, and positions in philosophy, beginning with one of the most significant and perennial philosophical questions: is truth objective? From there, we will move on to issues concerning mind and human nature. We will discuss free will, how we make choices, the relation between identity and human nature, and how we should think about well-being for humans. Finally, we will look at issues concerning ethics and society, including authority, disobedience, toleration, and our obligations to others.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course fulfills the General Education Requirement in Philosophy. It will emphasize close reading, analysis, and evaluation of classic and contemporary works of philosophy, with the aim of establishing a broad understanding of a range of philosophical questions and cultivating the skills necessary for appreciating these and other topics in contemporary philosophy. The successful student will demonstrate the ability:

- to state and articulate, verbally and in writing, philosophical ideas and questions,
- to read and critically assess philosophical literature,
- to identify the elements of an argument and assess it for soundness and validity, and
- to apply these skills to novel cases.

The key to success in this course is to keep up with the assigned readings and to attend and participate regularly in class activities. *If you keep up with the course you will not be assigned anything for which you are unprepared.*

COURSE COMPONENTS

The course has *two* components: twice-weekly lectures led by me and weekly (or twice-weekly for writing section students) recitation sections led by your section leader. Both components are *mandatory*, and will moreover be crucial for your success in this course. The point of the lecture is to introduce you to the theories, concepts, and problems that make up the content of the course. The recitations are there for you to discuss and interrogate those ideas, as they arise both in lecture and in the required readings for the course, through conversation with your fellow students and the section leader.

Attending recitation sections is important for any large lecture course of this kind, but it is especially important for philosophy. That's because philosophy is a discursive enterprise: progress in understanding and evaluating philosophical ideas is most effectively made through interpersonal discussion, where you can test, correct, and improve your understanding of those ideas. Large lectures do not allow for this sort of discussion. This is what the recitation sections are designed to facilitate, so you will be doing yourself a major disservice if you elect not to attend.

N.B. My lectures will be accompanied by a slide show presentation, which I will typically post to CourseWeb before (probably right before) the first lecture of the unit. If you want to take notes on the slides during lecture, you are encouraged to bring a laptop (but also to resist the urge to distract yourself with frivolous internet ephemera), or else to consult the slides after class.

EVALUATION

Recitation Section Students will be expected to write **two term tests** and **two term papers**. *Writing Section Students* will additionally be expected to **outline** and **revise** their term papers in light of

comments from me and from their peers. Additionally, Section Leaders will administer a series of **reading quizzes** covering the reading assigned for that meeting. (There will be at least 10 quizzes given, though Section Leaders reserve the right to give more, in which case the top 10 quizzes will count toward the student's final grade.) With the exception of University excused absences, which must be supported by official documentation, students are expected to attend all other recitations and lectures. Finally, to promote in-class participation, students will alternate as **lead discussants** and **lead questioners** for the reading(s) assigned for that week. The role of the lead discussant is to *present* and *act as primary advocate* for the position articulated in the assigned reading, presenting the position in class and answering questions about it from the lead questioner, her peers, and the section leader. Lead discussants and lead questioners are highly encouraged to meet with their section leader prior to presenting in recitation section.

Final grades will be determined according to the following rubric:

Recitation Section Students		Writing Section Students	
Term Paper 1	15%	Term Paper 1	10%
Term Paper 2	25%	Term Paper 2	15%
Term Test 1	20%	Revisions 1,2	10% each
Term Test 2	25%	Term Test 1	20%
Lead Discussant/Questioner	5%	Term Test 2	20%
Participation	10%	Lead Discussant/Questioner	5%
Total	100%	Participation	10%
		Total	100%

Students must complete all assignments in order to pass the course.

IMPORTANT DATES

Term tests will be administered during lecture meetings, reading quizzes during recitations; term papers are due by midnight (i.e. no later than 11:59 P.M.) on the assigned due date.

Dates subject to change.

DATE	ALL SECTIONS	WRITING SECTIONS
9/27	Term Paper 1 Posted	
10/11	Term Paper 1 Due	
10/18	Term Test 1	
10/25		Term Paper 1 Revisions Due
11/6	Term Paper 2 Posted	
11/20	Term Paper 2 Due	
12/4		Term Paper 2 Revisions Due
12/6	Term Test 2	

COURSE MATERIALS

All course materials will be posted on CourseWeb. Students looking for additional material are encouraged to consult the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (plato.stanford.edu).

DISABILITIES AND DIFFERENT STYLES OF LEARNING

Education is a pluralistic enterprise: there are several and often incompatible styles of learning. If you believe there is an alternative approach to this material that would better suit your style of learning, do not hesitate to bring it up with me. If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both me and Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890 or (412) 383-7355 (TTY) as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

A NOTE ON ACADEMIC HONESTY

The goal of this course is to promote and assess *your* satisfaction of the above-stated course objectives. Cheating/plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students suspected of violating the University of Pittsburgh Policy on Academic Integrity, noted below, will be required to participate in the outlined procedural process as initiated by the instructor. A minimum sanction of a zero score for the quiz, exam or paper will be imposed.

(For the full Academic Integrity policy, go to www.provost.pitt.edu/info/ai1.html.)

EMAIL POLICY

Allow me two business days to respond to emails. Please do not email me with questions of philosophical substance—that is what lecture, recitation, and office hours are for—and please consult this syllabus before asking questions about course policy.

Required Boilerplate. Each student is issued a University e-mail address (username@pitt.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. The University provides an e-mail forwarding service that allows students to read their e-mail via other service providers (e.g., Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo). Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their pitt.edu address to another address do so at their own risk. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications sent to their University e-mail address. To forward e-mail sent to your University account, go to <http://accounts.pitt.edu>, log into your account, click on Edit Forwarding Addresses, and follow the instructions on the page. Be sure to log out of your account when you have finished. (For the full E-mail Communication Policy, go to www.bc.pitt.edu/policies/policy/09/09-10-01.html.)

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

Schedule, topics, and assignment due dates are subject to change.

8/28 *Introduction: Syllabus & Course Basics*

For More 📖 Monroe & Elizabeth Beardsley, “What is Philosophy?”

UNIT 1 *What Can We Know? Science, Skepticism, & “Alternative Facts”*

8/30, 9/6 1.1 *Is Truth Objective? The Case of Science*

Prep 🎧 Hi-Phi Nation, “The Ashes of Truth”

Discuss 📖 Samir Okasha, “Scientific Change and Scientific Revolutions”

For More 📖 Thomas Kuhn, “Postscript–1969”

9/11, 9/13 1.2 *Can We Know Causal Connections? Two Problems of Induction*

Prep 🎥 Wi-Phi, “Hume’s Skepticism and Induction”, Parts 1 & 2

Discuss 📖 Goodman, “The New Riddle of Induction” (selections)

For More 📖 Salmon, “An Encounter With David Hume”

🎥 Wi-Phi, “The Puzzle of Grue”

9/18, 9/20 1.3 *Can Faith Be Reconciled With Reason? Part 1: Anselm’s “Ontological Argument”*

Prep 🎧 History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps, “Anselm’s Ontological Argument”

Discuss 📖 Anselm, “Proslogion”


📖 Gaunilo, “A Reply on Behalf of the Fool”

For More 📖 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Ontological Arguments”

9/25, 9/27 1.4 *Can Faith Be Reconciled With Reason? Part 2: Willing to Believe* **Term Paper 1 Posted**


Prep 🎥 Wi-Phi, “Pascal’s Wager”


Discuss 📖 William James, “The Will to Believe”

For More  Wi-Phi, “The Will to Believe”

UNIT 2 *Who Are We? Mind & Human Nature*

10/2, 10/4 2.1 *Is What We Do Up to Us?*

Prep  Ted Chiang, “What’s Expected of Us”

Discuss  Susan Wolf, “The Importance of Free Will”


For More  Wi-Phi, “The Problem of Free Will”

10/10, 10/11 2.2 *How Do We Make Hard Choices?*


Term Paper 1 Due


Prep  Ruth Chang, “How to Make Hard Choices”

Discuss  L.A. Paul, “What You Can’t Expect When You’re Expecting”

For More  Philosophy in 15 Minutes, “L.A. Paul”

10/16, 10/18 2.3 *Might You And I Be Essentially Different? Part 1: Race, Gender, and Implicit Bias*

Prep  Invisibilia, “The Culture Inside”

Discuss  Charles Mills, “But What Are You Really?”


For More  Judith Butler, “Your Behavior Creates Your Gender”

10/23, 10/25 *No Assignments*

Review, Term Test 1

10/30, 11/1 2.4 *Might You And I Be Essentially Different? Part 2: Disability and Well-Being*

Prep  Examined Life, “Judith Butler & Sunaura Taylor”

Discuss  Elizabeth Barnes, selections from *The Minority Body*

For More  The UnMute Podcast, “Elizabeth Barnes on Disability and Well-Being”

UNIT 3 *What Ought We to Do? Ethics & Society*

11/6, 11/8 3.1 *What Gives One Person The Right To Rule Over Another?*

Term Paper 2 Posted

Prep 🎥 The School of Life, “Thomas Hobbes”

🎥 The School of Life, “John Locke”

Discuss 📖 W.E.B. Dubois, “Of the Ruling of Men”

For More 🎥 The School of Life, “Karl Marx”

11/13, 11/15 3.2 *When, If Ever, Should We Disobey?*

Prep 🎥 Martin Luther King, Jr. on Just vs. Unjust Laws

🎥 Angela Davis on Violence & Revolution

Discuss 📖 Plato, *Crito*

📖 Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter From a Birmingham Jail”

For More 📖 Hannah Arendt, “Reflections on Violence”

11/20, 11/27 3.3 *Must We Tolerate Intolerance?*

Term Paper 2 Due

Prep 🎥 Vice, “Charlottesville: Race and Terror”

Discuss 📖 John Horton, “Three (Apparent) Paradoxes of Toleration”

📖 Teresa Bejan, “You don’t have to be nice . . .”

For More 🎥 The Open Mind, “Teresa Bejan on Tolerating Intolerance”

11/29, 12/4 3.4 *What Do We Owe to Others?*

Prep 🎧 This American Life, “It’s Working Out Very Nicely”

Discuss 📖 Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”

For More 📖 Nel Noddings, “An Ethic of Caring”

12/6 *No Assignments*

Term Test 2