

PHIL 0080 – INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

Bodies and Experiences

Instructor: Alessandra Buccella – alb319@pitt.edu

Meetings: Tue./Thu., 6.00 – 7.15 PM, Room: TBA

Office hours: time: TBA, CL 1009B

Course description:

Philosophers study the world with their minds. But who says that they should only discuss about ‘mental’ stuff such as concepts, rationality, or logic? This course is about *bodies*, and about the *experiences* that we have in virtue of those bodies. We will explore a variety of contemporary philosophical topics that have bodies and experiences their center. These include the experience of skilled movement when we dance or play a sport, having a physical disability, or being shamed for our body size. We will discuss the ways we experience race, gender, sex, and sexual orientation. We will learn what makes a question distinctly philosophical and what methods philosophers follow to answer it. But most importantly, we will learn to be ok with the fact that there might be no true answer at all.

At the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Recognize and articulate claims and implications of a variety of philosophical views;
- Distinguish and compare views regarding issues such as the nature of race and gender, personal identity, the relationship between mind and body, the aesthetic value of movement, etc.
- Have a sense of the historical background of certain contemporary philosophical debates;
- Discuss and evaluate philosophical theses in light of personal experiences, making assumptions explicit and revealing biases;
- Use different means of expression to approach philosophical questions in novel ways;

Readings:

All the required readings are on the Blackboard page of the course. You are responsible for downloading/printing them and reading them carefully before each class.

WARNING: Potentially triggering topics. Sometimes, we will touch on topics that might cause distress or be emotionally triggering. I will issue ‘trigger warnings’ in advance, but if you don’t feel comfortable reading about or discussing a topic, please let me know and I will do my best to accommodate you.

What you need to do to succeed in this course:

- Do the readings. It isn't a lot of material, so I expect you to read it carefully and come to class prepared.
- Come to all of the meetings, be on time, don't leave early unless it is an emergency. If you must miss a portion of a class for a non-emergency, please notify me in advance.
- Actively contribute to the in-class discussions. This can be done in many ways; you don't have to raise your hand and speak if you don't feel comfortable doing it.
- Complete the assignments on time (for my extension policy, see below).
- Respect the teacher and your classmates. Hateful or discriminatory speech/behavior will NOT be tolerated.

SELF-CARE IS VERY IMPORTANT IN COLLEGE: BE KIND TO YOURSELF!

Assignments and grading:

Attendance: 10%

Discussion questions: 15%

Presentation: 20%

Mid-term: 25%

Final project: 30%

Presentations:

You will give a short presentation (15-20 minutes) on one of the readings. Presentations must be prepared in groups of 2-3 students and must include either a PowerPoint or a printed handout. Presenting at least once is mandatory and counts towards 20% of the final grade. Needless to say: if you need help, come to my office hours!

Discussion questions:

You are required to come to every class with a discussion question ready to share with the group. This must be well-articulated, and it must touch on something you found problematic, convincing, or unconvincing in the reading (mere clarificatory questions don't count!). Be prepared to expand on your question and explain/defend your position.

The week you are presenting, you are exempted from bringing a discussion question.

If your discussion question isn't shared in class, you must write it down and give it/email it to me by the end of the day.

Final projects:

With the final project, you have the opportunity to revisit a topic discussed in class and to create something original that expresses your views on it. This can of course be done in the form of a 'traditional' essay, but it doesn't need to be. Acceptable projects may include posters,

artworks, podcasts, short videos, and more.

You can start working on your project as soon as you'd like, but come talk to me first!

Extensions, attendance, and late assignment policy:

- If you have to skip class, please email me at least 24h in advance.
- I grant extensions only in well-documented exceptional circumstances. Please, email me at least 48hrs before the regular deadline.
- If you deliver your project late and you didn't ask for an extension, your grade will be docked 1/3 a letter grade (i.e. A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) per day (including weekends and holidays).

Religious Commitments

If you think your religious commitments may impact your course work, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can discuss the best strategy for accommodating your needs.

Cheating and Plagiarism:

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.)

Disabilities and different styles of learning:

Please don't hesitate to let me know (privately or publicly, that's up to you) the learning style that best suits you: I will do my best to accommodate you.

If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, you need to notify both me and Disability Resources and Services no later than the second week of term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call (412) 648-7890 to schedule an appointment. The Office is located in 140 William Pitt Union.

Miscellaneous:

Communications: You are expected to read e-mail sent your University account (username@pitt.edu) on a regular basis. This includes checking the Blackboard page for the course.

Technology: Laptops, tablets, or smartphones are allowed, but only to complete in-class assignments following the instructor's directions.

Project feedback: I will be happy to look at your final projects before the due date, but I have

some conditions:

1. You *must* come to office hours (or make an appointment) to talk.
2. Prepare in advance the specific questions you have for me: that will save us both some time.
3. The project-draft you ask my feedback on must be your *best work*: there's little point in commenting scattered notes.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

Week 1 – Introduction: Are we our body?

Tue. 01/07: J. Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*, First & Second Night.

Thu. 01/09: J. Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*, Third Night.

Week 2 – The ‘Mind – Body problem’

Tue. 01/14: L. Antony, “The Mental and the Physical”.

Thu. 01/16: B. Montero, “The Body Problem”.

Week 3 – Bodily awareness /1

Tue. 01/21: F. de Vignemont, “Bodily awareness”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (section 1).

Thu. 01/23: F. de Vignemont, “Bodily awareness”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (section 2).

Week 4 – Bodily awareness/2

Tue. 01/28: F. de Vignemont, “Bodily awareness”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (section 5).

Thu. 01/30: J. L. Bermudéz, “The phenomenology of bodily awareness”.

Week 5 – The body in space and time

Tue. 02/04: “The dancing philosopher”, in S. Bakewell, *At the Existentialist Café*.

Thu. 02/06: T. Elcombe, “Philosophers Can’t Jump: Reflection on Living Time and Space in Basketball”.

Week 6 – Movement and Beauty

Tue. 02/11: B. Montero, “The Aesthetic Experience of Expert Movement”.

Thu. 02/13: P. Brand & M. Brand, “The Beauty of the Game”.

Week 7 – Review and In-class mid-term

Tue. 02/18: Pre-mid-term review.

Thu. 02/20: In-class mid-term.

Week 8 – Gender & Sexuality/1

Tue. 02/25: I. M. Young, “Throwing like a Girl”.

Thu. 02/27: S. Haslanger, “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?”

Week 9 – Gender & Sexuality/2

Tue. 03/03: T. M. Bettcher, “Trans Women and the Meaning of ‘Woman’”.

Thu. 03/05: R. McKinnon, “Trans*formative Experiences”.

**** Tue. 03/10 & Thu. 03/12: NO CLASS (Spring Break) ****

Week 10 – Queer experience

Tue. 03/17: S. Ahmed, “Sexual Orientation”, in *Queer Phenomenology*.

Thu. 03/19: S. Ahmed, “Sexual Orientation”, in *Queer Phenomenology* – (continued).

Week 11 – Race

Tue. 03/24: C. Mills, “But What Are You *Really*?” The Metaphysics of Race”.

Thu. 03/26: Q. Spencer, “Racial realism II: Are folk races real?”

Optional: J. Baldwin, “My Dungeon Shook — Letter to my Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of Emancipation”, in *The Fire Next Time*.

Week 12 – Bodies and Food

Tue. 03/31: M. Eller, “On Fat Oppression” OR A. Eaton, “Taste in Bodies and Fat Oppression”.

Thu. 04/02: T. Isaacs, “Food insecurity: Dieting as Ideology, as Oppression, and as Privilege”.

Week 13 – Disabled bodies

Tue. 04/07: E. Barnes, “Disability, Minority, and Difference”.

Thu. 04/09: S. Tremain, “On the government of disability”.

Week 14 – Concluding thoughts: Identity and Advocacy

Tue. 04/14: J. Medina, “Disidentification and the Problem of Difference”.

Thu. 04/16: L. Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others”.

**** Final projects due: Saturday, 04/25, 11.59 PM ****



Barbara Montero



Frederique de Vignemont



Charles Mills



Elizabeth Barnes



Iris Marion Young



John Perry



Jose Luis Bermudez



Linda Alcoff



Jose Medina



Louise Antony



Maurice Merleau-Ponty



Myles Brand



Peg Brand



Quayshawn Spencer



Rachel McKinnon



Sally Haslanger



Sara Ahmed



Sarah Bakewell



Tim Elcombe



Tracy Isaacs



Talia Mae Bettcher