

PHIL 233F/01 – BODIES AND EXPERIENCES (FYS)

Online-only

Instructor: Dr. Alessandra Buccella (abuccella@wesleyan.edu; +1 412-8774806)

Meeting with me: on Zoom or on the phone, by appointment. Don't be shy about asking me for an appointment of just reaching out spontaneously: I am here for you!

This class meets: Mon./Wed., 1 – 2.20 PM, on Zoom. Meeting ID: 932 8710 9219

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 (mostly) 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, and that things are often way more complicated than they look.

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 bias.
- Use different means of expression to approach philosophical questions in novel ways.

Readings:

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

WARNING: Potentially sensitive topics. Sometimes, we will touch on topics that might cause distress or be emotionally demanding. 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 be prepared to discuss it critically.
- Attend the online meetings. Be on time, don't leave early unless it is an emergency. If you can't participate in a meeting or have technical issues, please notify me.
- Actively contribute to the discussions. This can be done in many ways; you don't have to speak up if you don't feel comfortable doing it. It is OK if you prefer to just listen, but make sure you share your thoughts with me at some point.
- 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. If you feel in any way unwelcome or uncomfortable, or think that another student might be feeling this way, please talk to me.

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

Online meetings:

The meetings will consist of an about 50-minute-long lecture and some time for discussion. You should *always* have a question ready to ask during discussion.

Assignments and grading:

Attendance: 15% (you are allowed one unjustified absence)

Argument analysis #1: 10%

Argument analysis #2: 20%

Mid-term: 25%

Final project: 30%

Argument analysis exercises:

These will be two quite short writing exercises in which you identify and reconstruct the main argumentative structure of a selected reading. While in the first one you will only summarize the main argument, in the second you will be asked to provide an objection to the main argument, and to revise your work in light of my feedback.

Midterm and peer-review session:

The midterm exam will consist in an essay on a topic provided by the instructor, to be completed by class start time on 10/14 (see schedule). During the 10/14 meeting, you will exchange essays with a classmate and give comments on their work. By the end of week 9 (see schedule below), you will revise your midterm essay in light of my feedback as well as the feedback received during peer review.

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' paper, but it doesn't need to be. Acceptable projects may include posters, artworks, podcasts, short videos, and more: be creative!

*** You can start working on your project at any point, but talk to me first. ***

Extensions, attendance, and late assignment policy:

- Extensions will be granted **only** in very serious circumstances. If you need an extension on an assignment, email me to discuss it.
- If you submit your assignments 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).

Special circumstances due to COVID-19 pandemic

If you experience any problems keeping up with the course or attending online meetings due to coronavirus-related illness (yours or of a relative) or other circumstances (e.g. you are a healthcare or other kind of essential worker), we will find a way to accommodate you. **YOU ARE NOT ALONE.**

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 and/or plagiarism will not be tolerated, as they are violations of the Honor Code that, as a student at Wesleyan, you have agreed to follow and respect. Please refer to the corresponding section in the Student Handbook for more information.

Disabilities and different styles of learning:

Students with disabilities who would like to request ADA/504 reasonable accommodations are expected to self-disclose to Accessibility Services and meet with a staff member in the office. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the student's disability in the context of their academic and nonacademic plans, to review documentation of the disability and, at their request, to assist with arranging appropriate accommodations with instructors and other University offices as needed.

For more information, please visit wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/disabilities or contact the office at accessibility@wesleyan.edu to make an appointment. Students who have, or suspect they may have, a disability for which they would like to request reasonable accommodations, can contact Accessibility Services at any time to discuss their needs.

Miscellaneous:

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

Webcams: You are invited – though *not* required – to have a working webcam and to keep it on during the whole duration of the online meetings.

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

1. You *must* make an appointment to talk with me.
2. Prepare in advance the specific questions you have for me: that will save us both some time.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

Week 1 – Introduction: Are we our body?

08/31: J. Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*, First night.

09/02: J. Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*, Second & Third nights.

Week 2 – But what *are* bodies?

09/07: L. Antony, “The Mental and the Physical” (up to p. 563).

09/09: B. Montero, “The Body Problem”.

Week 3 – Bodily awareness /1

09/14: F. de Vignemont, “Bodily awareness”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (sec. 1).

09/16: F. de Vignemont, “Bodily awareness”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (sec. 2).

Week 4 – Bodily awareness/2

09/21: F. de Vignemont, “Bodily awareness”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (sec. 5).

09/23: Arguments and Argument-structure 101.

Week 5 – Agency, movement, and beauty

09/28: C. T. Nguyen, “The Aesthetics of Agency”.

09/30: P. Brand & M. Brand, “The Beauty of the Game”.

Week 6 – The body in space and time

10/05: I. M. Young, “Throwing like a Girl” (*skip* sections 2 & 3).

10/07: T. Elcombe, “Philosophers Can’t Jump: Reflection on Living Time and Space in Basketball” + D. A. Wallace & J. M. Wallace, “She Got Game”.

Week 7 – Midterm week

10/12: Mid-term essay topic posted.

10/14: Midterm peer review session.

Week 8 – Bodies, identity, and oppression

10/19: I.M. Young, “Five faces of Oppression”.

10/21: J. Medina, “Identity Trouble: Disidentification and the Problem of Difference”.

Week 9 – Race

10/26: C. Mills, “But What Are You *Really?*’ The Metaphysics of Race”.

10/28: J. Baldwin, “My Dungeon Shook” (from *The Fire Next Time*) + B. Jackson Jr., “Hoop Dreams, Blacktop Realities”.

Optional: Watch documentaries “I am not your Negro” (2017) and “Hoop Dreams” (1994).

** Deadline for revisions to midterm essay **

Week 10 – Gender

11/02: A. Cudd, “Enforced pregnancy, Rape, and the Image of Woman”.

11/04: V. Ivy, “Trans*formative Experiences”.

Week 11 – Queer experience

11/09: S. Ahmed, “Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology”.¹

11/11: A. MacLachlan, “Closet Doors and Stage Lights: on the Goods of Out”.

Week 12 – Bodies and food

11/16: Q. R. Kukla, “Shame, Seduction, and Character in Food Messaging”.

¹ WARNING: This text is quite hard. Don’t be intimidated and try your best. Read the piece with the goal of understanding Ahmed’s analogy between being oriented in space and time and being oriented towards certain people and objects in virtue of our sexuality.

11/18: T. Isaacs, "Food insecurity: Dieting as Ideology, as Oppression, and as Privilege".

Optional: M. Eller, "On Fat Oppression".

Week 13&14 – Disabled bodies

11/23: E. Barnes, "Disability, Minority, and Difference".

12/02: S. Tremain, "On the government of disability".