

PHI 1500: Major Issues in Philosophy

Baruch College, Fall 2018

section: MNFA, room: TBA

time: Fridays, 2:30-5:30pm

course website: bit.ly/phi1500f18

instructor: Lauren R. Alpert

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office: TBA

office hours: Friday, 5:30-6:30pm (or end of class, when possible)

This course will introduce you to the basic methods and some influential topics of (Western) philosophy, a discipline that aims to call anything and everything into question. We will examine the beliefs and assumptions we hold about the world, our society, and ourselves. You'll explore new alternatives for making sense of the world and acting within it, armed with new terminology and insights into how these helpful philosophical concepts emerged and evolved throughout intellectual history.

PHI 1500 satisfies the Flexible Core Individual & Society requirement (and your thirst for knowledge).

course objectives

Students will:

- learn concepts developed by philosophers to help us make sense of the world we live in
- learn how thinkers have historically been divided in their perspectives on perennial questions
- practice adopting perspectives other than one's own and interpreting others' arguments charitably, to better understand sites of enduring interpersonal disagreement
- cultivate reading comprehension, interpretation, critical thinking & reasoning skills
- improve the clarity & persuasiveness of written & spoken arguments, and develop confidence in expressing oneself through these media

course topics & theme questions

metaphilosophy: *What is philosophy?*

Why should we bother studying it? How does one organize one's thoughts into persuasive philosophical arguments?

epistemology: *How do we acquire our beliefs?*

What's the difference between believing and knowing?

Can we trust our senses to help us learn the truth?

Is science the only way to discover the truth?

philosophy of mind: *What is the relationship between our minds and our bodies? How do recent developments in cognitive science inform this question?*

metaphysics: *Do we have free will?*

If we don't, can we be held morally responsible for our actions?

Is the problem actually that we are too free?

social/political philosophy:

Are humans naturally good, bad, or neither?

What kind of government is best suited to complement or to control human nature? How do we reform governments that aren't working as intended, or which have unintended negative consequences?

philosophy of race/gender: *Do the labels we apply to groups of people reflect natural differences or imagined ones? Do we have to get rid of these social categories in order to achieve justice?*

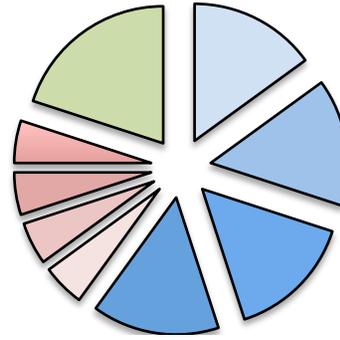
moral philosophy *When does someone deserve to be punished?*

When should they be forgiven?

requirements & grading

To complete this course, you will:

- **attend each class session** and **participate in class activities**
 - Recommended readings for each sessions are posted to the course website as PDFs. For more insight into these topics, see the “Further Readings”.
 - You don’t need to speak up in front of the whole class each session (though participating in discussions is highly recommended). However, *you should demonstrate an ongoing commitment to engaging seriously with the course material while you’re in the classroom* (e.g., responding to free-writing prompts, collaborating with classmates during small-group work).
- **write 4 reading responses to assigned texts**
 - Prompted by specific questions, you’ll practice expressing and organizing your thoughts in writing, in response to brief articles meant to complement the lecture topics & recommended readings.
 - These will be submitted online via Google Forms. They are due by the start of class time on the due date.
- **complete 4 take-home exams**
 - You’ll use the lecture slides to complete matching, fill-in-the-blank, multiple-choice, and short essay questions.
 - These are designed to be like problem sets, meant to help you master the material by applying and synthesizing principles and concepts discussed in class.
 - These will be submitted either in class on the due date or via email by the start of class time on the due date.
 - You may work with classmates on the exam; however, you will be assessed how well you demonstrate *your own ideas* and *your own understanding*.



Grades are calculated as follows

(using Baruch’s grading scale:
see bit.ly/baruchgrades)

- **take-home exams: 60%** (4 x 15% each)
- **reading responses: 20%** (4 x 5% each)
- **participation/attendance/conduct: 20%**

Extra Credit opportunities may be offered
at the instructor’s discretion.

policies

- **Check your email regularly for course updates.** I will email the class in the event of any changes to the course schedule.
- **Feel free to email me** if you have questions or concerns about the course. I will try to make expectations for essays, quizzes, and exams abundantly clear, so please read assignments thoroughly before emailing. **Please include “PHI 1500” in the subject line of your message.** I will do my best to respond promptly to emails.
- **Submitting quizzes or the debate report late will result in deductions from your grade:** 5% off if submitted *up to two calendar days* after the due date, 10% if *three days or more*.

classroom etiquette

- **Please arrive on time and ready to take notes.** If you arrive late, please do so quietly to avoid distracting classmates around you.
- **Eating and drinking are permitted .**
- **Laptops and tablets are permitted** for note-taking, unless it is distracting to you, me, or anyone around you. I reserve the right to ask you to put devices away, if I can tell that you’re abusing the right to use them to enhance your learning experience.
- If you print the readings or Powerpoint slides for your personal use, **print double-sided** and/or **multiple pages/slides per sheet.**
- **Please silence cell phones and keep them in your bag during class.**

attendance

- **Regular attendance is expected.** I will not take attendance each week; however, I will occasionally collect materials from in-class activities that will serve as a record of your attendance.
- Per Baruch policy, any student who misses more than 4 class sessions will be given a grade of 'WU' (Unofficial Withdrawal) – equivalent to an F in GPA calculations.
- **You are responsible for all course material**, including that covered in lectures you miss. Refer to the Powerpoint slides and consult your classmates about material covered in any lectures you're unable to attend. I recommend that you identify at least one classmate who you trust to take good notes and exchange contact information with them. If you ask a fellow student for help catching up, you should be willing to return the favor for that student on another occasion.

accessibility

- I strive to ensure that every student can succeed in this course. Though I've made an effort to design the course so as to provide equal access to the immense benefits of studying philosophy, it's very possible that some students will need additional accommodations for the best possible experience in this course. I encourage any student encountering difficulties in getting the most out of the course to come talk to me: together, we can develop some strategies for success.
- The Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (OSSD: VC 2-272, Vertical Campus) can provide "reasonable accommodations" for students who register for services. The OSSD provides an "Accommodation Letter" that informs your instructors what services you need, while maintaining confidentiality about the basis for accommodation. For information on the OSSD, see baruch.cuny.edu/studentaffairs/ossd/disabilityServices.htm.

conduct

- **You must respect the views of your classmates** during full-class and small-group discussions, no matter how drastically they may differ from your own. Disrespectful, disparaging, or hateful speech will not be tolerated. Please take care to ensure that your language conveys appreciation and support for your fellow students' efforts.
- **Harassment of any kind will not be tolerated.** All communications with your classmates and professor should be courteous and professional. Protip: If you sense that you ought to preface what you intend to say or do with an apology, that's probably a good indicator that what you were about to say is inappropriate for an academic context.
- There is **zero tolerance for cheating and/or plagiarism** in my course and at Baruch College. Confirmed instances of cheating/plagiarism will result in a zero for the assignment in question – and possibly for the entire course. Suspected instances will result in a hold on your grade for the course until the issue is resolved with the Dean's Office.

statement on representation in philosophy

The vast majority of texts traditionally taught in introductory philosophy courses are authored by white males. This reflects long-standing imbalances of power and privilege, which have denied members of other groups the opportunity to study philosophy or to have their philosophical work recognized and celebrated by academic institutions. However, many philosophers today are devoted to taking measures to address the historical exclusion of female and non-white authors from philosophy. This syllabus was made to ensure inclusion of authors from these traditionally-excluded groups, and also to cover topics that have been neglected for much of intellectual history. As a philosophy student, you can help to turn the tides of the profession by taking views seriously & thoughtfully no matter from whom they come, and also by believing in the legitimacy of your own perspective.

course schedule (next page): subject to change!

Session /Date	Topic(s)	Recommended Reading	Due	Further Reading
1 Aug. 31	METAPHILOSOPHY: Intro to Philosophy, Evaluating Arguments			
2 Sept. 7	EPISTEMOLOGY: Empiricism	Locke , John. <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> (excerpt) Hume , David. <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> (excerpts)		
3 Sept. 14	EPISTEMOLOGY: Skepticism	Russell , Bertrand. "Appearance and Reality" (from <i>Problems of Philosophy</i>) Descartes , René. <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> (excerpts from Meditations I & II)		Glass , David J., Hall , Ned. "A Brief History of the Hypothesis"
4 Sept. 21	EPISTEMOLOGY: Naturalism, Pragmatism, Social Epistemology	James , William. <i>What Is Pragmatism</i> (excerpts) Haack , Susan. "Clues to the Puzzle of Scientific Evidence" (excerpts)	Reading Response #1: Sosa , Ernest. "Getting It Right"	Antony , Louise. "The Socialization of Epistemology" (excerpts)
5 Sept. 28	PHIL. OF MIND: Dualism vs. Physicalism	Montero , Barbara G. <i>On the Philosophy of Mind</i> (excerpts) Correspondence between Descartes and Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia (excerpts) Ryle , Gilbert. "Descartes' Myth" (from <i>The Concept of Mind</i>)	Take Home Exam #1	Descartes , René. <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> (excerpts from Meditation VI)
6 Oct. 5	PHIL. OF MIND: Neuroscientific Discoveries & Implications	"Patricia Churchland on Eliminative Materialism" (video) Churchland , Patricia. "The Big Questions: Do We Have Free Will?" Strawson , Galen. "Your Move: The Maze of Free Will"		Kuhn , Thomas. <i>The Structure of Scientific Revolutions</i> (excerpts)
7 Oct. 12	METAPHYSICS/SOCIAL: Social Determinism, Radical Freedom	Milgram , Stanley. <i>Obedience to Authority</i> (excerpts) Sartre , Jean Paul. "Existentialism is a Humanism" (excerpts)	Reading Response #2: Irwin , William. "How to Live a Lie"	
8 Oct. 19	POLITICAL: Authoritarianism, Social Contract Theory	Plato . <i>The Republic</i> (excerpts) Hobbes , Thomas. <i>The Leviathan</i> (excerpts)	Take Home Exam #2	

Session /Date	Topic(s)	Recommended Reading	Due	Further Reading
9 Oct. 26	POLITICAL: Social Contract (cont.), Liberalism	Rousseau , Jean Jacques. "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality" Rawls , John. <i>A Theory of Justice</i> (excerpts)		Nussbaum , Martha. "Capabilities and Human Rights"
10 Nov. 2	POLITICAL: Critiques of Liberalism	Held , Virginia. "Non-Contractual Society: A Feminist View" Deneen , Patrick. <i>Why Liberalism Failed</i> (excerpts)	Reading Response #3: Brennan , Jason. "The Right to Vote..."	Douglass , Frederick. "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"
11 Nov. 9	SOCIAL: Social Constructivism, Anti-Essentialism	Mills , Charles. "'But What Are You Really?': The Metaphysics of Race" de Beauvoir , Simone. <i>The Second Sex</i> (excerpts) Young , Iris Marion. "Five Faces of Oppression"	Take Home Exam #3	Omi , Michael, & Winant , Howard. <i>Racial Formation in the United States...</i> (excerpts)
12 Nov. 16	SOCIAL/MORAL: Structural Injustice, Epistemic Injustice	Young , Iris Marion. "Political Responsibility & Structural Injustice" Fricker , Miranda. "Testimonial Injustice" (from <i>Epistemic Injustice</i>)		
November 23rd: NO CLASS - Happy Thanksgiving!				
13 Nov. 30	SOCIAL/MORAL: Spiritual Oppression, Material Oppression	Du Bois , W.E.B. "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" (from <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>) Fraser , Nancy. "A Feminism Where Leaning In Means Leaning On Others"		
14 Dec. 7	MORAL: Retributivism, Forgiveness	Shafer-Landau , Russ. "The Failure of Retributivism" (excerpts) Allais , Lucy. "Wiping the Slate Clean: The Heart of Forgiveness"	Reading Response #4: Lackey , Jennifer. "The Irrationality of Natural Life Sentences" Shepherd , Aaron Pratt. "For Veterans, A Path to Healing Moral Injury"	Davis , Angela. <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i> (excerpts)
Dec. 14	NO CLASS		Take Home Exam #4	

