

PHIL 355: Philosophy and the Science of Human Nature

Time: MW 11:30-1:00

Location: CKB219

Instructor: Michael Brownstein, msb@njit.edu

Office Hours: MW 10:15-11:30 or by appointment in 312 Cullimore

Course Description

This course focuses on four topics which philosophers have thought about for thousands of years: morality, virtue, happiness and love. In recent years, scientists have begun to examine these same subjects, bringing to bear on them the modern tools of their trade (experimental studies, statistical analysis, etc.). This course has three aims: (1) to use any tools we can in order to understand something about these really really important questions; (2) to examine the very methodological promiscuity assumed in (1); and (3) to re-examine our beliefs and maybe even change our lives a little in light of what we learn.

Required Texts

None. All readings found on the course homepage on Moodle

All podcasts can be found here: http://philosophybites.com/past_programmes.html

All videos can be found here: <http://www.ted.com/talks>

Grading

The scale this course uses is as follows:

A= 100%-90%	D=69%-60%
B= 89%-80%	F=59% - 0%
C=79% -70%	

Note: pluses and minuses will be given (e.g. 92% = A-) except for in final grades, which will not use minuses, as per NJIT's bizarre policies.

Requirements

Weekly writing (40%)

Students are required to post **2 questions about each reading** on the Moodle discussion board **prior to the beginning of each week** (e.g. 3 readings = 6 questions). These questions must be well-formulated. They should be detailed, clearly written, and **indicative of careful reading**.

Students are also required to **answer 1 question** posed by another student for each week. Answers are **due before the beginning of the following week** (e.g. if you are answering a question about the Week 1 reading, your answer must be on Moodle before the start of Week 2). Answers must be robust, thoughtful, clear and detailed. They should be 500-1000 words. You may answer any question you'd like, but **you may not answer a question that already has 2 responses**. Finally, you **may skip 2 weeks of questions and answers** (so you will need 8 sets of questions and 8 answers by the end of the semester).

Questions and answers must be carefully edited and proofread. When writing AND REVISING your work, keep the following advice from David Foster Wallace in mind: "If you are used to whipping off papers the

night before they're due, running them quickly through the computer's Spellchecker, handing them in full of high-school errors and sentences that make no sense and having the professor accept them 'because the ideas are good' or something, please be informed that I draw no distinction between the quality of one's ideas and the quality of those ideas' verbal expression, and I will not accept sloppy, rough-draftish, or semiliterate college writing. Again, I am absolutely not kidding."

Short essays must be properly formatted and cited. IF YOU PLAGIARIZE A PAPER, YOU WILL FAIL THE COURSE. For information on NJIT's academic integrity policy, see <http://www.njit.edu/academics/integrity.php>

Tests (40%)

There will be a **mid-term and a final**. Each test will consist of short essay questions based upon the main readings from the syllabus. A pool of potential questions will be distributed prior to each test and all questions on the test will be taken from this pool.

Participation, Attendance, and Quality of Failure (20%)

Active and informed participation in class discussions counts for a relatively large portion of your final grade in this course. If you are afraid of speaking in public, push yourself to try. If you are terribly afraid of speaking in public, please talk with me about it privately before the course begins. Note that asking questions in class—no matter how simple or well-informed the question is—counts as "active and informed participation." So, ASK THE QUESTIONS IN YOUR HEAD, EVEN IF YOU THINK EVERYONE ELSE KNOWS THE ANSWER. (HINT: THEY DON'T.)

Regular class attendance is also expected and counts toward this portion of your grade.

Quality of failure refers to the degree to which you propose ideas and arguments which may be ultimately false or unconvincing, but which represent **genuine effort at thinking hard about the course material**. Bad experience makes good judgment. To do well in this course, you need to be willing to take risks and be willing to fail. When you take a risk and fail—by proposing a different way to look at things, taking a stand for an unpopular view, or arguing for something unintuitive—tell yourself, "this is how I learn."

Class Schedule

W 1.23 – Introductions (no assigned work)

Section I: Morality

Week 1: Moral theories

M 1.28: Selections from Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* and Mill, *Utilitarianism*

W 1.30: Selections from Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*

Week 2: Moral thought experiments

M 2.4: Thomson, J. "The Trolley Problem"

W 2.6: Thomson, cont'd

Week 3: Your brain on morality

M 2.11: Greene, J. "The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul"

W 2.13: Rosen, "The brain on the stand"

Extra credit: read "Neurolaw and Neuroprediction: Potential Promises and Perils" and write a 2-3 pg. response

Week 4: Where we were, where we are

M 2.18: Bloom, "The moral life of babies"

W 2.20: Slovic, "If I Look at the Mass I Will Never Act?: Psychic Numbing and Genocide"

Section II: Virtue

Week 5: Virtue ethics

NO CLASS: lectures for this week are on Moodle

M 2.25: Selections from Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

W 2.27: Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics"

Week 6: Situationism

M 3.4: Milgram, S. "Behavioral Study of Obedience,"

W 3.6: Doris, J. "Persons, Situations and Virtue Ethics"

Week 7: Traits, character and weakness of will

M 3.11: Ariely, "Procrastination" and Owens et al., "Overcoming Procrastination: the Effect of Implementation Intentions"

W 3.13: Midterm

Extra credit: read Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character" and write a 2-3 pg. response

Spring Break + M3.25 and W3.27

No class

Section III: Happiness

Week 8: Well-being and Happiness

4.1: Kesebir and Diener, "In Pursuit of Happiness: Empirical Answers to Philosophical Questions"

4.3: Haybron, "Happiness" (selections)

Week 9: Affective Forecasting

4.8: Wilson and Gilbert, "Affective Forecasting" and Koo et al, "It's a Wonderful Life"

4.10: Gilbert et al., "The Surprising Power of Neighborly Advice" and Wilson et al., "How happy was I, anyway?"

Week 10: Subjective and Objective Happiness

4.15: Nussbaum, M. "Who is the Happy Warrior? Philosophy Poses Questions to Psychology"

4.17: Tiberius, "Cultural Differences and Philosophical Accounts of Well-Being"

Section IV: Love and Sex

Week 11: Evolution and Sex

4.22: Berglund and Rosenqvist, "Selective Males and Ardent Females in Pipefishes" and Jones et al., "Effects of Menstrual Cycle Phase on Face Preference"

4.24: Lloyd, "Evolutionary Explanations of Female Sexuality"

Week 12: Sex and Marriage

4.29: Willoughby et al, "Differing relationship outcomes when sex happens before, on, or after first dates"

5.1: TBD

5.6: Final