

Philosophy of Disability

PHIL 4991 – Fall 2013

Tuesdays/Thursdays, 1.00 – 2:20 p.m., Crabtree M3

Dr. Jane Dryden

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Office Hours: Mon. and Tues. 2:30-4:30 (except for Tues., Sept. 17 and Dec.3),
and by appointment.

Course Description:

The key question of this course is how our thinking and assumptions might be changed if we consider disability as a central human experience. Disability Studies is an interdisciplinary field that has emerged in the last few decades out of the growth of disability rights activism. The course will not attempt to cover all the key debates of Disability Studies as a whole, but will serve as a philosophical introduction to some of its concerns: social versus medical models of disability; definitions of impairment and disability; and disability as identity and how it interacts with other identities. It will also investigate philosophy's treatment of intellectual disability in particular, in the context of philosophy's traditional valorization of reason.

Required Texts:

Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body*, (Routledge, 1996)

Licia Carlson, *The Faces of Intellectual Disability: Philosophical Reflections* (Indiana, 2009)

(Additional materials will be available on Moodle)

Grading:

Reading participation questions	20%
Discussion leading (10% first time; 15% second time)	25%
Initial reflection paper	10%
Short analytical paper	15%
Final project:	
- Proposal	5%
- Project	20%
- Closing reflection	5%

Requirements:

Reading

- Every class will have both a "main text" assigned and "extra bits." I expect you all to have read (and done your best with) the main text. The "extra bits" are highly recommended: at least have a glance through, and if you are leading discussion that day, incorporate them into your comments.

Reading participation questions (10 x 2% each = 20%)

- You may earn up to 20% by bringing in questions/comments about the readings – either the main texts or the "extra bits."
- These can be handed in to me after class (so you have them handy during discussion).

- Depending on how thoughtful and thorough the questions/comments are, you may earn up to 2% per set of questions/comments. (Don't just write "I liked this bit," or "I hated this bit!" -- *Why* did you like it? *Why* did you hate it?). Think about how new readings might have interesting connections to things we've already read or discussed.

Discussion leading:

- You will be asked to lead discussion for about 20 minutes about the day's reading.
- Discussion leading dates will be scheduled **Thurs. Sept. 5**, to begin on **Thurs. Sept. 12**.
- You will have a chance to lead discussion twice. The first time you do it will be worth 10% of your final grade, and the second time (i.e., after you've had some practice) will be worth 15%. (In the event that you are not able to present twice, due to some unforeseen circumstance, your one time will be worth the full 25%. You may not deliberately opt to only present once.)
- There may be some days with more than one presenter; in this situation, please coordinate with each other to focus on different topics within the day's readings. (I can also help make some suggestions here).
- Discussion leading will be graded on
 - (a) the clarity and organization of the material you present (including how well you focus on the key issues in the reading).
 - (b) the quality and thoughtfulness of discussion questions.
 - (c) how well you have organized your time and materials.
- You should prepare a 1-2 page handout of the main points that you see in the reading, the main questions you might want to focus on, and possibly a few key quotations you may want to highlight.
- Please consider accessibility during your presentation: most especially, do not rush.
- You will not be graded on how well the discussion actually *goes*. HAVING SAID THAT, please be supportive of your peers while they present, and do your best to contribute to their discussions!

Initial reflection paper (worth 10%):

- Due Thursday, September 12
- 1000-1200 words (4-5 pages)
- Heading into this course, what are your expectations? What are you hoping to learn in this class? Your paper should touch on some (though not all!!) the following questions:
 - o What experiences have you had with disability?
 - o What cultural and social assumptions does society seem to have about disability? About disabled people?
 - o What cultural, social, or intellectual assumptions do we make about what counts as "normal" or "abnormal"? About what counts as "healthy"?
 - o What are your experiences with the language around disability, impairment, etc.? How does the language we use for disability relate to assumptions and norms around the treatment of people?
 - o How has "disability" been treated in other courses (whether in philosophy or elsewhere)? How has been left out? How has it been included?
 - o What is the role of the disability rights movement in discussing disability? What do you make of the phrase "Nothing About Us Without Us"?

- What is the role of science and technology with respect to disability? What assumptions might we have about the role of science and/or technology?
 - What is the role of disability in pop culture? In art?
 - What else do you want to share at this point?
- The paper will be graded on:
 - (a) Clear organization of your ideas, and a clear flow through the material. (Note: I expect that as you start working on this, your ideas may be all over the place! Part of the challenge of this assignment is to begin to put them in some sort of order.)
 - (b) The thoughtfulness and depth of your reflection. I invite you to reflect not just on *what* you think, but on why you think you think it. :)
 - (c) Clarity and precision in your language. Try not to be vague. If you want to write about something that you feel confused about, use clear language to express your confusion.
 - The purpose of the paper is (a) to give you a chance to start thinking about the issues of the course; (b) to give me a chance to figure out where everyone is coming from, so that I know how to balance and focus our time together; (c) to give me a chance to give you some early feedback on your writing style and capabilities.

Short analytical paper (worth 15%):

- Due Tuesday, October 8
- 1200-1500 words (5-7 pages)
- A specific list of topics will be posted on Moodle.
- The purpose of this paper is to give you a chance, in a focused way, to analyze an argument presented thus far in the course. You will be expected to clearly present the argument (no straw men!), consider possible objections, and respond.

Final project (Proposal – 5%; Project itself – 20%; Closing reflection – 5%)

Proposal:

- Proposal due Tuesday, October 22. This proposal is mandatory for your project. If you hand in your proposal earlier, I will return it earlier – I encourage you to submit it early if possible, to give yourself as much time as possible to work on your project.
- Please provide, on 1 - 1.5 page(s):
 - Your name(s) (You may choose to work alone, or with one or two more people.)
 - Your working title (not required to be your final title, but something that gives an idea of what you're going to be doing)
 - 250-300 words on what you'll be doing. (See possible options below)
 - A list of text(s) you'll be using to ground your work.
- These are never easy to write. But just do it. It will be graded out of 5%; a late proposal will receive 0. I will not accept a final project without receiving a proposal, however, so you must submit one even if it will be late. (If you want to revise your topic after handing in your proposal, please speak to me.)
- I will give you feedback on your proposal to ensure your project is suitable for the course, and also to indicate ways to make it better (if I think of any!).
- If you have collaborators, you only need to submit one proposal; you will all receive the same grade.

Project:

- Project due Tuesday, November 26.
- You have several options here.
 - o A research paper, on some topic related to philosophy of disability or disability theory.
 - o A philosophy paper, relating material from this class to something else in philosophy.
 - o A course outline/syllabus for a course in any discipline that integrates disability studies/disability theory/disability perspectives. This should be fairly heavily annotated, and include assignments, readings, and an accessibility statement.
 - o An assessment of existing institutional structures and/or policies. (Note: If you want to include surveys or interviews as part of this assessment, speak to me as early as possible, in case anything might require Research Ethics Board approval). This should include a report about the result of the assessment.
 - o A website, on some topic related to the course. This should include fairly detailed annotation.
 - o Other (speak to me as early as possible about your idea.)
- The project will be graded on:
 - (a) The connection and appropriateness of the project to the course, reflecting the level of critical thinking and communication skills suitable for a 4th year seminar.
 - (b) The clarity and precision of the written communication.
 - (c) The good use of resources, both from the course and from elsewhere.
 - (d) The clarity of argument. In papers, this is sort of obvious. In things like a website or syllabus, I want you to explain why you've chosen to include or focus on certain things over others. Why are these things important?
- If you have collaborators, you only need to submit one project. You will all receive the same grade.

Closing reflection:

- Due Tuesday, December 3.
- 500-750 words (2-3 pages)
- Please respond to some or all of the following questions: What did you learn while working on your project? What were challenges or obstacles that you encountered? What strategies did you develop? What surprised you? What would you most want to communicate to someone else about what you learned?
- If you have collaborators, you each need to submit your own closing reflection. You will get your own separate grade on this.
- The reflection will be graded on its thoughtfulness and clarity.

Lateness Policy for Papers and Projects:

- Don't hand in things late. You'll be busier later. If you *must* hand something in late, drop me a line, and we'll figure out a plan. Some things (such as the Proposal and the Project) really shouldn't be late.
- If you have something coming up, and need an extension, please talk to me before the paper is due.

- I will accept outlines and questions about papers and projects over email; I do not read drafts by email. If you would like to go through your draft with me, please come to my office hours or make an appointment.

General Class Information:

- If you have something coming up, and need an extension, please talk to me before the paper is due.
- The themes and questions of the class will be developed from week to week. If you miss a class, you are responsible for what you missed. Please contact your classmates for notes and assignments. If you are confused about anything, then email me.
- If you use a laptop for note-taking in class, please be courteous to your fellow students and do not have anything distracting on your screen. Recent research has shown that multitasking on a laptop has a negative effect both you and students around you, even if you're not aware of it: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/parenting/back-to-school/laptops-in-class-lowers-students-grades-canadian-study/article13759430/> For reasons of accessibility, a laptop ban is not a good idea, but it's not an excuse for Facebook or instant messaging. If you are easily prone to temptation, there are many browser add-ons that can help control the urge to surf the Internet.
- Please let me know if there is anything I can do to make the course more accessible to you, or if there is anything that it is useful for me to know about your learning style or life circumstances which may affect your performance in the course (I don't want to be nosy – just a heads up is useful!). The course is intended to be challenging, but the structure of the course itself should not be a barrier to your learning.
- Formal accommodations for disabilities of any kind (including learning disabilities, ADHD, depression, health conditions) should be arranged through the Wellness Centre or the Meighen Centre as soon as possible in the semester (Information is available at <http://www.mta.ca/disability/index.html>).

General Advice:

- Please take advantage of my office hours if you have any questions or concerns about the course. Often a twenty minute conversation can clear up a lot of misunderstanding and alleviate much angst. I am happy to respond to email, but in-person conversation can often be more helpful.
- Save all Moodle readings to your hard drive, and ideally at least one other place. Technological glitches occur, and it's best to be prepared.
- On a similar note, make sure to back up your work. Save it to a USB stick or external hard drive. Do not only have one copy of what you are doing. (Gmail accounts are good for this: Gmail rarely goes down, and has a lot of storage space. Dropbox.com is also very handy.)

Reading Schedule: *(Please note this schedule is subject to revision. Changes will be announced in class.)*

Week	Date	Main text/topic	Extra bits	Presentation
1	Sept. 3 Sept. 5	Introduction – overview of the course, topic, questions Harriet McBryde Johnson, “Unspeakable Conversations” (Moodle); Titchkosky, “Disability Studies: The Old and the New” (Moodle)		
2	Sept. 10 Sept. 12 Initial Reflection paper due	Wendell, Introduction (and finish up discussion of Titchkosky) Wendell, Ch. 1 – defining disability	Kleege, “Blindness and Visual Culture: An Eyewitness Account” SEP entry: “Disability: Definitions, Models, Experience”	
3	Sept. 17 Sept. 19	Wendell, Ch 2 – Social Construction of Disability Wendell, Ch. 3 – Disability as Difference	Tremain, “On the Government of Disability” Berubé, “Term Paper”; Overboe, “Difference in itself” [optional]	
4	Sept. 24 Sept. 26	Wendell, Ch. 4 – Flight from the rejected body Wendell, Ch. 5 – Cognitive & Social authority of medicine		
5	Oct. 1 Oct. 3	Wendell, Ch. 6 – Disability and Feminist Ethics Wendell, Ch. 7 – Feminism, Disability & Transcendence of the body	SEP entry: “Feminist Perspectives on Disability”	

6	Oct. 8 Short analytical paper due Oct. 10	[TBA, depending on class interest/needs – Garland-Thomson?] Carlson - Introduction	[Have a scan through PhilPapers to see the philosophical terrain]	
7	Oct. 15 Oct. 17	Carlson – Ch. 1 Carlson – Ch. 2	Peruse Living Archives on Eugenics in Western Canada	
8	Oct. 22 Proposal due Oct. 24	Hacking, “Making up People” (Moodle) Carlson – Ch 3, Analytic Interlude		
9	Oct. 29 Oct. 31	Carlson – Ch. 4 Carlson – Ch. 5		
10	Nov. 5 Nov. 7	Carlson – Ch. 6 Carlson - Conclusion		
11	Nov. 12 No classes Nov. 14	Tobin Siebers – “What Can Disability Studies Learn From the Culture Wars?” [Moodle]	Jim Ferris – “Poems with Disabilities” and “Facts of Life”; Eli Clare “What do your tremors feel like?”	
12	Nov. 19 Nov. 21	Alison Kafer – excerpts from <i>Feminist Queer Crip</i> Kafer cont’d.		
13	Nov. 26 Project due Nov. 28	Discussion about everyone’s projects. Discussion and review.		
	Dec. 3	Closing reflection due		