

PHIL 1006
Philosophy and Cultural Diversity
Spring 2014

Instructor: Naomi Scheman

TA:

The word 'philosophy' means lots of different things, depending on the context. Our context is an academic department in the U.S. in 2013, and in that context philosophy is both a discipline and a 2500-year-long conversation. Part of the "disciplining" of philosophy is deciding who is and who is not properly a part of that conversation, and what the participants can and cannot properly talk about. The central texts that make up the conversation form the "canon" of the discipline. Most contemporary professional philosophers would agree that the core canon includes, at least, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant. They lived from the 5th century B.C.E. to the 18th century; they all lived in what is today Europe, and they were all male. Many others form part of the canon, mostly by having engaged, directly or indirectly, in conversation with these nine on topics that, in general terms, they set.

'Philosophy' also refers more broadly to sets of questions and (more or less tentative) answers about what human beings are fundamentally like; how such things as thinking, feeling, sensing, desiring, and acting are related; how we ought to behave toward other humans and other living and non-living things; what the sources of authority and respect are and what claims they have on us; how it is that we appreciate beautiful or moving natural things or works of art; and what are the scope and limits of our knowledge about all these and other things. In this sense every culture and all individuals philosophize: three-year-olds start doing it when they ask "why?" and don't give up when they get an answer that seems to satisfy the grown-ups. One aim of this course is to broaden the disciplined conversation by bringing into it voices that have been "disciplined out"—some of them in books and essays we will read, and some of them our own. We will pay particular attention to the cultural and historical contexts within which the different authors wrote, thinking both about how those contexts shaped their writings and how their writings helped to shape their—and our—cultures.

We are all in various ways not the sorts of people the canonical authors had in mind. We are often told that these works, along with other masterpieces of Western culture, are our heritage, that we all have the right to claim them, and that we should do so—both because they are truly wonderful, and because they are the foundation of the society in which we live in the U.S.—as native-born, immigrant, or temporary resident. They *are*, I think, wonderful, and they have certainly played a major role in shaping deep and pervasive features of life in the U.S.—but neither our claim to them, nor their claim on us, is simple or straightforward, nor is it the same for all of us. We will explore the complexities of these claims, as we read and discuss several works from the philosophical canon in dialogue with works by people none of whom are solely of European ancestry, some of whom are not men, and all of whom—like all of us—live or lived in the United States within the last century. Learning how to have these conversations across lines of various sorts of differences, including differences in power and privilege, is even more pressing after the attacks of September 2001 and in light of the U.S. government's continuing responses to those attacks and ensuing

events. Questions about authority, obedience and disobedience, anger, the nature and sources of rights, as well as about the ways in which we are connected to each other and how we decide what really matters and why, have all taken on new urgency. A guiding idea of the course is that canonical philosophers have something to contribute to the conversations that we—the diverse people who are here and now, in the U.S. in the 21st century—need to be having with each other about issues that concern us all.

The course has five sections, each of which will take three weeks and pairs a selection of 20thC U.S. texts with one canonical text, along with Big Questions to which all texts attempt to respond. After each of the first four sections you will be given a choice of topics on which to write a 400-word paper. There will be a take-home mid-term, which will consist of a 1000-word paper, to be submitted and then revised, and a take-home final consisting of two 600-word papers. There is opportunity on the Moodle for you to start and continue discussions, picking up on lectures and class and section discussions or starting new topics related to the readings and issues of the course. You are urged to follow and to participate.

Philosophy is more than a set of texts; it is an activity. You will, of course, be learning about what others have written; and you will be learning how to read their words carefully, sympathetically, and critically. But you will also, and as importantly, be working on thinking for yourself about the questions they have written about, on formulating your own views about important matters, and on arguing clearly and persuasively for those views both orally and in writing. (See Assignments, below, for more details.)

TEXTS

available at the University Bookstore or on the course Moodle

Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates* (Moodle)
 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Moodle)
 Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*
 René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Moodle)
 Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*
 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*
 John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Moodle)
 Winona LaDuke, *Recovering the Sacred*
 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Moodle)

Additional readings, marked with an asterisk (*), are also available on the class Moodle.

You should bring the readings for the day with you to class, and should also make notes as you read. For readings on Moodle that might require printing them out.

SYLLABUS

Section I: "Says who?": Government, laws, conscience, and morality

BIG QUESTIONS

These questions should guide your reading, and they will shape our discussions.

1. How do you decide questions of right and wrong? What if your own conscience differs from what you have been taught and what those closest to you believe? What if your family traditions are very different from the expectations of contemporary mainstream U.S. society? What do you appeal to when you argue with a family member or a friend about some moral issue?
2. What obligations do we have to the government and its laws? What grounds those obligations? Does anything override them? Does the government (or the nation more generally) have to earn our loyalty? What if it fails to do so? Is the use of violence by individuals against the state ever justified? If so, when and why? If not, why not?

22 Jan. Introduction

24 Jan. Plato, *Euthyphro*

29 Jan. *Apology* and *Crito*

31 Jan. James Baldwin, "A Talk to Teachers" *

5 Feb. Malcolm X, "Program of the Organization of Afro-American Unity" *

7 Feb. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" * and letter from white clergy that prompted MLK's letter *, "Beyond Viet Nam" *, and "I Have a Dream" (played in class)

1st 400-word paper topics posted

Section II: Getting personal: Character, virtue, friendship, and anger

BIG QUESTIONS

1. Is anger ever a good thing? Does it make sense to talk about when and how we *ought* to be angry? Is it ever wrong *not* to be angry? Is it important to express anger? When and why should we let go of anger? Does anger have a constructive role to play in personal relationships? In politics?
2. Why and how is friendship important to us? What do we owe our friends? What does friendship have to do with virtue? How would a true friend respond to our doing, or thinking about doing, something wrong?

12 Feb. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, pp. 36–109

1st 400-word paper due

14 Feb. *Sister Outsider*, pp. 110–175

19 Feb. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I & II (“Book” numbers may not correspond to how other editions divide the text; if you are using a different edition, refer to these numbers, which appear in the margins of all editions: 1094a–1109b)

21 Feb. *Ethics*, Books III & IV (1110a–1128b)

26 Feb. *Ethics*, Books VIII & IX (1155a–1172a)

28 Feb. David Mura, “Strangers in the Village” *
Mitsuye Yamada, “Invisibility Is an Unnatural Disaster” *
María Lugones, “Hard-to-Handle Anger”*

2nd 400-word paper topics posted
Mid-term paper topics posted

Section III: Figuring things out: Mind and body; dreams and reason;

self, others, and identity

BIG QUESTIONS

1. How do we best acquire knowledge? Whom and what should we trust? When and how should we rely on our senses? On our imagination? On our dreams? On experts? What does it mean for someone to be an expert?
2. What is a “true self,” and how do we discover it? What can stand in the way of that discovery? What can help? What kind of thing is a “self”? For example, is it singular and unified, or might it be in some sense multiple and contradictory? Is there a sense in which we are different people in relation to different individuals or groups that are important to us? What are some of the reasons that group identities (or “labels”) matter to us? What’s going on when someone is accused of not being a “real” member of some group?

5 Mar. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 1

2nd 400-word paper due

7 Mar. *Meditations*, 2

12 Mar. *Meditations*, 4 and 6

Mid-term papers due

14 Mar. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, **Introductions** (3rd edition: at the beginning of the book, unpaginated—p. 15; 4th edition: at the beginning and end of the book, pp. 3–13 and pp. 231–263); **Interview** at the end (3rd edition: pp. 227–246; 4th edition: pp. 267–284); and **Sections 1 and 2** (pp. 23–45 in both editions) (The introductions and interview do not appear in the 1st and 2nd editions; if you are using one of those editions, please let us know in advance and we will post those sections on the Moodle. Also note that the page numbers of the Sections are different in those editions; go by section numbers.)

17–21 Mar. **SPRING BREAK:** Read Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*. The book is short and will hopefully stimulate thought and conversation—with whomever you are hanging out with. We will also be discussing it in relation to other readings during the rest of the term.

26 Mar. *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Sections 3–6 (pp. 47–97)

28 Mar. *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Section 7 (pp. 99–113)
Linda Martín Alcoff, “Mestizo Identity” *

3rd 400-word paper topics posted

Section IV: Owning and claiming parts of the earth: What makes it possible to do that? What does doing that make possible?

BIG QUESTIONS

1. Why do we need a government that tells us what we have to and cannot do, and punishes us if we disobey? What would it be like if we didn't have a government? What does it mean for a group of people to be a *nation*? Why does it matter? How does a nation come to have sovereignty over its territory? Where does that authority come from? What makes it legitimate? What makes it legitimate for a group of people to claim the right to self-determination, including the right to break away from the nation they are part of?
2. What is the point of questioning things as basic as owning property and having a government? What if our questioning leads to thinking that things like that aren't legitimate? What about (many) American Indians, from whose perspective neither the practice of owning parts of the earth nor the U.S. government's claim of sovereignty over them is legitimate? What are the consequences of recognizing such deep cultural differences among the wide variety of indigenous peoples, people who have lived in the U.S. for generations, and more recent immigrants? What forms of assimilation are appropriately required? Who decides?

2 Apr. John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Ch. I–IV

Mid-term papers returned
3rd 400-word paper due

4 Apr. *Treatise*, Ch. V

9 Apr. *Treatise*, Ch. VI & VII

11 Apr. *Treatise*, Ch. VIII & IX

16 Apr. Winona LaDuke, *Recovering the Sacred*, pp. 11–112

Revised mid-term papers due

18 Apr. *Recovering the Sacred*, pp. 113–210

4th 400-word paper topics posted

Section V: “Says who?” again: Limits on the law and on the discourse of morality

BIG QUESTIONS

1. What is freedom of speech and why does it matter? What sorts of interest do we have in *other people's* freedom of speech? What is academic freedom, and how does it relate to other sorts of rights?
2. What should we say about a situation in which everyone has, in a formal sense, equal rights, but because of social and economic inequalities, some people's exercise of those rights means
 - a. that public opinion is disproportionately shaped by those with economic power (for example, the role money plays in U.S. electoral campaigns)? or
 - b. that *other* people cannot exercise *their* rights (for example, when one group says and publishes things that create a climate of fear in which another group is afraid to speak out)?
3. Is it ever (morally) wrong for group A to believe, and to encourage others to believe, that what group B does is immoral? On what grounds might someone make such a charge? Does it make sense to talk of beliefs as being immoral?

23 Apr. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Editor's introduction & Ch. I

4th 400-word paper due

25 Apr. *On Liberty*, Ch. II & III

30 Apr. *On Liberty*, Ch. IV & V

Final paper topics posted

2 May LaDuke, *Recovering the Sacred*, pp. 113-129

7 May *Recovering the Sacred*, pp. 167-190

9 May On-line discussions of an issue of current interest and controversy—chosen in class: links will be posted on our Moodle, and students will be encouraged to find additional sites

Final papers due

ASSIGNMENTS

Attending class and discussion section is required, as is doing the reading. The only way to learn philosophy is by doing it; the first step is showing up prepared.

You will work in **study groups** of three to five and will need to make time to work together outside of class. Your graded work will be individual, though you are urged to work together—sharing ideas, especially when you disagree, and reading and commenting on drafts of each other’s work. Just as you need to credit words or ideas from the reading in your written work, you should credit the contributions of members of your study group or others whose words and ideas you use.

1. On Friday after each of the first four sections questions will be emailed to you and posted on the class Moodle. You will write an **approximately 400-word response** to one of those questions—giving your own opinion and arguing for it with reference to at least some of the readings. Responses are **due on the following Wednesday**. Each response counts for 10% of your grade. (Total: 40 %)

2. You will write an **approximately 1000 word midterm paper** on one of a list of topics that will be emailed to you and posted on the class Moodle by **Friday, 28 February**. The paper will be due on **Wednesday, 12 March** and will be returned by **Wednesday, 2 April** with comments, a provisional grade, and suggestions for revision. You will revise the paper and hand in your revision, along with the original paper, by **Wednesday, 16 April**. The grade on your revised paper will count for 30% of your grade for the course.

3. You will write **two approximately 600-word (each) final papers**, on topics chosen from a list that will be emailed to you and posted on the class website by **Wednesday, 30 April**. The papers will be due on **Friday, 9 May**. Each paper will count for 15% of your grade (Total: 30%)

All papers should be submitted by 4:30 PM on the day that they are due, in your TA’s mailbox.

Writing is an important part of this class, and improving your writing skills should be a large part of your work. Having members of your study group read and discuss your papers can be very helpful, and you can—and are urged to—get assistance from Student Writing Support: <http://writing.umn.edu/sws/index.html>

5. **Absences and late papers:** Attendance will be taken in lecture and in discussion section, and each absence will count for 1 point. A late one-page paper will count for 2 points for each day it is late. Each day the draft of the mid-term paper is late will count for 4 points, and each day the revised version of the midterm paper or the final paper is late will count for 3 points. We

assume that in the course of the term various problems will come up that will give you a legitimate reason to be absent or late with an assignment (sickness, family emergency, stalled car, missed bus, etc.); for this reason, you may accumulate up to 8 points without any consequences for your grade, nor do you need to provide any explanation. Beyond 8 points your grade may be affected, except in extraordinary circumstances. In the event of a late paper, you should always let your TA know ahead of time.

6. **Extra-credit opportunities:** Above average **participation** can raise your final grade by up to one-half letter (e.g., from B to B+). Opportunities for participation include discussions in class, in discussion section, or on the Moodle. We will also give credit for **improvement** in your work through the semester. Thus, we might deviate from the percentages noted for each assignment, but only if doing so will raise your grade.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

1. Disability accommodation

If you have a disability that you think might affect your work in this class, you should contact the Disability Services Office (230 McNamara) if you haven't already done so, for suggestions for accommodation. Please let one of us know as soon as possible so that we can work with you to help you do your best in the class.

2. Grading

A = achievement outstanding relative to the level needed to meet requirements

B = achievement significantly above the level needed to meet requirements

C = achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect

D = achievement worthy of credit though it fails to meet fully the requirements

S = achievement equivalent to a C- or better

F (or N) = failure (or no credit); either completed work at a level of achievement not worthy of credit, or work not completed and no agreement between the instructor and student that the student would be given an I

I = Incomplete: given at the discretion of the instructor when due to extraordinary circumstances the student is unable to complete the work of the course on time. Must be arranged in advance and requires a written agreement concerning when the required work will be submitted.

3. Academic dishonesty

Academic dishonesty in any portion of the academic work for a course may be grounds for awarding a grade of F or N for the entire course.

In the case of this course, what counts as academic dishonesty is handing in writing that is not your own; but its being your own does not mean that you cannot receive

help with it—from your study group, the instructor or TA, or Student Writing Support. You are encouraged to ask for—and to give—such help. There are basically two guidelines: (1) Give credit for specific words (quoting) and ideas (paraphrasing), whether they come from books or directly from other people; and (2) Recognize the difference between someone’s helping you—so that you come to understand something better than you did before—and someone’s doing the work for you—so that you hand in something you do not fully understand. The latter is called academic dishonesty; the former (when appropriately acknowledged) is called learning. If you have any questions about how to interpret this policy, ask the TA or instructor.

4. Workload expectation

One credit is equivalent to an average of three hours of work per week over the course of the term. This is a four-credit course, so you should expect to spend an average of 12 hours a week working on it. Since lectures and discussion sections meet for about 4 hours a week, you should expect to spend an additional eight hours a week on reading, writing, and discussion related to this class. Hanging out with your study group—or other people—talking about ideas that come up in the reading or class meetings *does* count as work: one of the best Student Learning Outcomes for this class is that you pick up the habit of philosophizing (if you don’t have it already) and that you enjoy it.

REFLECTION ON LIBERAL EDUCATION (instead of “Student Learning Outcomes”)

Carolyn A. (Bidly) Martin
President of Amherst College

College is for the development of intelligence in its multiple forms. College is the opportunity for achievement, measured against high standards. College is preparation for the complexities of a world that needs rigorous analyses of its problems and synthetic approaches to solving them. College is for learning how to think clearly, write beautifully, and put quantitative skills to use in the work of discovery. College is for the cultivation of enjoyment, in forms that go beyond entertainment or distraction, stimulating our capacity to create joy for ourselves and others. College is for leave-taking, of home and of limiting assumptions, for becoming self-directed, while socially responsible.

College is for finding a calling, or many callings, including the calls of friendship and love. It is for the hard work of experimentation, failure, reflection, and growth. It is about the gains we make and the losses that come with them. In an age of sound bites and indignation, college is for those who are brave enough to put at risk what they think they know in recognition of the responsibility we have to one another and to those still to come.

The Chronicle of Higher Education
“Commentary”
22 April 2013

