

Philosophy of Emotions

Syllabus

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Overview

We will investigate questions in three main areas.

1. *Moral psychology*. What is an emotion? Is it a feeling? Is it a belief? Is it a perception? Is an emotion any one thing at all, or is it better conceived of as a process between several different things?
2. *Good life*. What is it for a person to go about their emotional life well? When is an emotion rational? When is it trustworthy? When is it apt? Are there moral obligations to feel certain emotions? What is it to have an emotion that is authentic, and what is it to be alienated from one's emotions?
3. *Love*. What is love? Is it an emotion? Is love something in our control, or is it something out of our control? What is the difference between loving someone and being in love with someone? Is it better for us to love, or should we protect ourselves from it?

Our goal, in part, will be to evaluate the leading philosophical answers to these questions. In part, though, too, it will be to clarify exactly where we stand on them, and thus to understand our own emotional lives better.

Texts

All texts will be available as PDFs on Canvas. If you would prefer hard copies, here are the texts that I think are most worth owning:

Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*
Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*

Course objectives

1. Learn to interpret texts charitably, i.e., in their strongest form.
2. Grow in intellectual courage, argumentative rigor, and curiosity.
3. Understand the leading philosophical theories on the central issues of the course.
4. Learn how to think more accurately and carefully about one's own emotions.

Class

Most often class will be used for collaborative inquiry. We will be thinking together in an effort to clarify confusing ideas and construct and evaluate arguments. I will not really be expecting you to memorize and regurgitate any material, and you will not really be required to accept anything on my authority. In contrast, I will be trying to make my own reasoning as transparent as possible, and I will expect you to challenge me on it when you think that it is mistaken or confused. “Thinking together,” then, is not just a nice thing to say or promise. It is meant as the foundation of all that we do.

In the past, I have used a large part of class to explain the reading. That is not how this course will go. Instead of explaining the reading *during* class, I will be explaining it mostly *before* class. This will happen in google doc lectures. I am using google docs so that the lectures are interactive. It allows you all to annotate the lectures, and thus for us to begin our inquiry together before we meet in class. I am making text-based lectures instead of video-based lectures for three main reasons. The first is that text-based lectures allow you to comprehend the material at your own pace (instead of having to comprehend it at the pace of the video). The second is that text-based lectures allow you to revisit certain parts of the material easily (instead of having to scroll through a video, which can be annoying). The third is that text-based lectures, when written in a google doc, allow the lectures to be interactive (whereas, with a video, there is not really a way for you to have a voice). I really think of them as conversations: I am prompting you to think about things in a certain way, and I am eager to have you respond to me and to each other in the margins.

So, this course is “flipped” in the sense that most of the core content will be delivered *before* class. This will allow us to maximize the time we spend on collaborative inquiry *during* class.

It will be helpful for you to think of class in terms of a workflow.

For most classes, there will be three components: (i) the reading; (ii) a google doc lecture, to be annotated by you; and (iii) the class itself.

Here’s the way to go about it.

First, do the reading. Give yourself uninterrupted time when you are most alert, and go slowly. Think along with the author, trying to identify the main claims and the main reasons in support of those claims. If you find that your eyes are merely passing over the words, without any thought actually happening, stop and come back to it later. Note: Reading philosophy is difficult, and you should be prepared to read the texts more than once. *You will often be confused*—that is okay! Try to figure out why you are confused, and come to our meetings prepared with questions to help you understand.

Second, read the google doc lecture for the class, and annotate it where you see fit. I say more about this below. The google doc lectures are meant to clarify the reading and prepare us for a productive meeting.

Third, attend class and participate. Be ready to talk about the reading and think together. I recommend doing something to get yourself into the proper mindset: go for a short walk before class, e.g., or get yourself a tea, or do five minutes of meditation—whatever is effective at preparing you to focus.

Often classes will end with us not having reached a final answer and so desiring to investigate further. In some cases, we will do that in the next class. In others, we will move on, and you are encouraged to continue the inquiry by making new annotations on the google doc lectures.

Note that it may happen that class is occasionally held on Zoom. You should be ready to adapt to that, if it becomes necessary.

Discussion. Philosophical discussion can go well or badly, depending on the behavior of the people doing it. Two common problems are talking too often and rambling. *If you find yourself talking too often, hold back and give others a chance to talk.* If, after a pause, no one volunteers, then you can fill the gap. *To avoid rambling, clarify your question or comment in your mind before speaking. Make it concise.* Finally, note that you can expect disagreement. This is good—it is often the source of progress and clarification—so long as it is civil. **Remember that the goal is not to sound smart or to win the argument.** The goal is to figure out the truth (or what is likely to be true, or what is definitely false), and this happens best when we are all open to revising our claims and admitting when we are wrong. We want to think together so that, *together*, we can reach a better and more considered view. Again, the goal is not to be the person who is correct or wins the argument. That is not important.

Preparation. In order to participate in class meaningfully, you should arrive having read and thought about the day's text. You should also have the text available so that, if I make reference to it, you can look at the appropriate passage. I recommend printing each reading out.

Devices. There are no laptops or phones allowed in class (with few exceptions – if you need to use a laptop or phone in class, come talk to me).

Evaluation

Evaluation will consist of seven components: (i) Scribe assignment (5%), (ii) Annotations (15%), (iii) Self-assessments (10%), (iv) Add/Subtract Support Groups (10%), (v) Class-facing assignment (5%), (vi) Quiz (5%), (vii) Phenomenology Papers (10%), (viii) Emotional Health Project (35%); (ix) Presentation (5%).

Scribe Assignment. The focus of class is discussion. It will be useful for us to remember the main moves of our discussions: the things that we have clarified, the problems that we have solved, the questions that are still lingering, the distinctions that we have drawn, the observations that we have made, and so on. The purpose of the Scribe Assignment (5%) is to produce a written record of our discussions. You will sign up on Canvas to act as a Scribe for one class. Your task will be to collaborate with one or two of your peers in producing a written record of the discussion during that class and then to post it to our main Scribe document. I will give further instructions in class.

Google Doc Annotations. Annotations (15%) are your adding comments to the google doc lectures. Each lecture will be available, at latest, the day prior to class. The annotation window is open from that time until midnight on the day of class. You need to make at least 1 thoughtful Annotation on *each* of the 12 google doc lectures (so, 12 overall). Make annotations either by (i) highlighting some

text and using the “Add a comment” function, or (ii) by replying to an annotation. Each annotation is worth 1%, for a maximum of 15% total, and there will be only 12 google doc lectures during the semester, so you must comment on all 12 google doc lectures to receive full credit, and I will randomly make the comments on three lectures worth 2%. The most common sorts of annotations are questions, objections, or responses to the questions or objections of other students, but really anything is welcome here, so long as it advances our understanding of the text. Please feel welcome to write casually (Annotations are not mini-essays!). No late Annotations will be accepted, and there will not be makeup opportunities for them.

Self-assessments. Participation increases learning. So, I want you all to participate: the more, the better. One way to do so is to contribute to our in-class discussions. However, this is not the only way, and grading participation based only on verbal, in-class participation can be exclusionary. So, we will use self-assessments to explore and communicate your engagement with the course in general. Four Self-assessments (10%) are due in the term. The highest you can assess yourself on each one is 3%, and the self-assessments in total will count for 10% of your final grade. Thus, you are able to receive full credit even without engaging at the highest level over the entire term. I typically give you whatever grade you have given yourself. Examples of engaging with the course include the following: contributing to class discussions; engaging with the contributions of others in a charitable manner; talking about course material with family, friends, or others who might be interested outside of class; learning from articles, podcasts, lectures, blogs, etc. and sharing your findings with others; being active on the course GroupMe; sharing your learning and research strategies, skills, and habits with other people in the course; creating and sharing zines, comics, poems, videos, paintings, podcasts, or other artistic objects; asking, answering, and reflecting on questions in the google doc lectures or other spaces; raising conversations on social media like Twitter or Facebook; sharing relevant news or examples with classmates; translating or simplifying course materials so they can be more accessible to people outside of the university or in other disciplines; suggesting and discussing with me ways to improve the course at any point in the term; and so on (this list is not exhaustive).

Emotion Phenomenology Papers. The purpose of the Emotion Phenomenology Papers (two papers, each 5%) is to increase your awareness of your own emotional life. Choose one instance of an emotion that you very recently have experienced or are currently experiencing, and describe what it is like to experience that emotion in as much detail as possible. This is what it means to give the *phenomenology* of something: it is to describe *what it is like* for you experience it. These papers are due on September 21 and October 5.

Add/Subtract Support Group Assignment. In class, we will wonder about different techniques that can improve our emotional lives. I will be providing regular opportunities for you to join an Add/Subtract Support Group that will experiment with adding or subtracting something from your lives to see how it affects your emotions (things like meditation, yoga, journaling, social media, etc.). You will be expected to join a group each time in class, and then before class ends email me and your groupmates a plan for how you will add or subtract the relevant thing from your life in the following week(s). You will then actually do that, as well as support the other members in your group (including outside of class) as they conduct the experiment in their own lives. You will join several

groups throughout the semester. At the end of the semester, I will ask you to give yourself a score out of 10 (10%) in accordance with how much and how well you participated in the Add/Subtract Support Group assignment.

Class-facing Assignment. The Class-facing assignment (5%) is to give you all increased ownership of the course. You have three options: (a) leading discussion for one day, (b) producing a one-page document on something that connects in interesting and important ways to our class material, or (c) producing a one-page reflection on our in-class discussion that advances our inquiry to new and exciting places.

(a) *Leading discussion option.* This is to give you all practice in guiding a philosophical discussion. The goal is guide us away from confusion and boredom and towards clarity and intellectual excitement. It is not really to lead us to some previously identified spot. So, it will require you to improvise. You will need to sign up for one of the designated classes, along with three or four of your peers. Your group will then be responsible for (a) sending me, at least before 12pm on the day of class, a sketch of what you want to focus on, and (b) guiding discussion during class. Note that you will be guiding discussion only during the “lingering questions” part of the designated classes. So, if you will be guiding discussion for an upcoming class, it will be *very* important for you to listen closely to the discussions in the previous few classes, so that you can then remind us of the lingering questions that we have had during those discussions and motivate our further inquiry into a selection of them of your choosing (or further inquiry into some lingering question that your group has that has not come up so far in discussion). Please see the further instructions in the Assignments document.

(b) *Connections option.* Often our course content will connect in important ways to other material, e.g., to some notion or concept from a discipline other than philosophy, to something in the news, to some social phenomenon, to some book or movie or podcast or whatever else. It will be interesting for everyone to know about that! This option is to give you the opportunity to write a one-page document that explains what this other material is and how it connects to our course content (most likely to our readings or to something that comes up in class discussion). Keep in mind that you are writing this for your peers. It is to educate your peers about this cool thing that connects to our course material. So, feel free to write it in a casual (but still clear and straightforward) style. This is not a mini-essay. It's sort of like a public service announcement: *Hey everyone, look at this really cool thing that connects to our course material! Isn't that interesting?* Note that you do not sign up for this option. You simply promise to do it at some point before the last week of the semester (though please, everyone, do not wait until the very end of the semester to do it!). Please see the further instructions in the Assignments document.

(c) *Reflection option.* Often our inquiry in class will not conclude, and there will be so many fun and exciting ways to continue it. You might find yourself after class still thinking about our discussion. This option is to give you the opportunity to write up your reflections on our discussion in a one-page document. The goal is to continue our in-class inquiry in whatever

direction you think is cool, exciting, fun, worthwhile, thought-provoking, useful, etc. Keep in mind that you are writing this for your peers. It is to invite your peers to join you in continuing to think about something. So, feel free to write it in a casual (but still clear and straightforward) style. This is not a mini-essay. It's sort of like a public service announcement: *Hey everyone, here's what I kept thinking about after class! What do you all think about it?* Note that you do not sign up for this option. You simply promise to do it at some point before the last week of the semester (though please, everyone, do not wait until the very end of the semester to do it!). Please see the further instructions in the Assignments document.

Quiz. There are certain concepts and arguments and objections early in the course that you all need to memorize. The quiz (5%) will be at the beginning of class on September 30, and it will cover the most foundational material (and only the most foundational material) from the Feeling Theory, Belief Theory, Perception Theory, and Process Theory. There will be eight questions. I will return the quizzes after class on October 3. If you miss a question, you have the option of writing me a short paragraph on that question, explaining why your original answer was wrong, identifying the correct answer, and explaining why that answer is the correct answer. You will submit these corrections on Canvas by October 7.

Emotional Health Project. In the Emotional Health Project (35%), you will do a series of reflections to increase your awareness of your emotions, wonder about what would improve your relationship to your emotions, and try out techniques to see if they help you. The first installment (5%) is due October 3. The second installment (5%) is due October 27. The third installment (5%) is due November 14. You are welcome to submit each reflection in written format or as a voice note. The fourth installment (20%) will require you either (a) in some way to relate your reflections so far for the project to a reading (or readings) from the course, in a highly careful and rigorous way; or (b) to do a project of your choice, in a highly careful and rigorous way, if you think something else would be more beneficial for you. I will give further instruction about each option later in the semester. The fourth installment is due December 8.

Presentation. Our final two classes will consist of simultaneous in-class poster Presentations (5%). I will say more about these later in the semester. Note that, to receive credit for the Presentation, you must send me some brainstorming notes on it by November 19, and you must attend the Peer Collaboration day in class on November 21.

Due dates. Scribe assignment: before midnight on the day of class. **Annotations:** before midnight on the day of class. **Self-assessments:** September 26, October 17, November 7, December 8. **Quiz:** in class on September 30, corrected answers by October 7. **Class-facing assignment:** if you choose to guide discussion, send your notes to me by email before 12pm on the day of class, then guide discussion during that class; if you choose the briefing document or post-class reflections document, link your one-page document on Canvas by November 18. **Phenomenology papers:** September 21, October 5. **Emotional Health Project:** first installment on October 3, second installment on October 27, third installment on November 14, fourth installment on December 8. **Add/Subtract Support Groups:** check in #1 due on October 17, check in #2 due on November 7, final report due on

December 8. **Presentation:** brainstorming notes to me by November 19, attend Peer Collaboration day in class on November 21, and then present in the penultimate class or the last class.

Late policy. Late submissions will be deducted 1/3 of a letter grade per day (weekends count as one day), unless you have contacted me prior to the due date or there is an emergency. Note that late submissions of Reading Questions and Annotations will not be accepted.

Grade conversion.

A:	93-100 (4.0)
A-:	90-92 (3.7)
B+:	87-89 (3.3)
B:	83-86 (3.0)
B-:	80-82 (2.7)
C+:	77-79 (2.3)
C:	74-76 (2.0)
C-:	70-73 (1.7)
D+:	67-69 (1.3)
D:	64-66 (1.0)
D-:	60-63 (0.7)
F:	59 or below (0.0)

How to succeed in this course. Do the readings twice before class: once quickly, solely to get a sense of things (this should take no longer than five minutes); once slowly, pausing where you are confused (this should take no longer than three hours). Mark your text while you read. Identify key claims (e.g., premises and conclusions of arguments), perhaps with a checkmark or by underlining them. Identify also questions that you have, perhaps with a question mark or the actual question written in the margins. Come to class prepared to be attentive (get good sleep, put away your cell phone, quiet your mind). You might very quickly review the reading right before class (this should take no longer than five minutes). During class, focus. I'll be doing my best to make all of my reasoning transparent. If something that I say seems wrong or confusing, I want to hear about it. So, please speak up. You might consider taking notes during class, but, if so, do so sparingly. Don't try to capture everything I say. Instead quickly jot down any important ideas that occur to you. The goal during class is to think together, and it is hard to do that while taking lots of notes. (Also, I'll be providing google doc lectures for most classes. You can think of these as a set of notes that communicate the main ideas from the readings. I make them in part because I want you to be free to think along with me during class. That really is the goal.) After class, stew on our discussion. Call it to mind while doing other things (e.g., walking around). Talk to your friends about it. Then, when you have something to add, add it as an annotation on the google doc lecture. Check the google doc lectures frequently to see what other people are saying, and respond to their contributions when you feel inclined. Other than all of that, do the assignments. It is a good rule to finish any significant writing assignment a few days before they are due, so that, after completing a first draft of it, you can set it aside, allowing your

mind to clear, then reviewing it once more with fresh eyes before submitting it, revising any mistakes that you find.

Contact

If you e-mail me, put the course code (3305) in the subject line; otherwise your e-mail may get lost. I will try to respond to e-mails within a day or two (no promises on weekends). Note that e-mail is not the right format for philosophical questions; please come to my office hours to discuss philosophical material, or e-mail me to set up a meeting. Also, my responses to your e-mails may be terse. Don't be offended. It's simply the effect of having lots of e-mails to respond to.

Disclaimer

I may change the details above at any point in the course. If I do so, I will always let you know via an announcement on Canvas, and I will always have the changes be in your favor.

Optional, useful philosophical resources

1. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (online). Useful as a starting point for research or to teach yourself the basics of some topic (a philosopher's Wikipedia, but more reliable).
2. Philpapers (online). A good collection of philosophy papers online.

Policies & university resources

Accessibility. Students with diverse learning styles are welcome in this course. Please feel free to approach me or the Disability Resource Center (www.northeastern.edu/drc) so that we can assist you in achieving academic success.

Writing help. If you want help with your writing, you are encouraged to contact the Northeastern writing center (www.northeastern.edu/writingcenter). I am also happy to consult with you about your writing in office hours or by appointment.

FACT (Faculty Advisor Communication Tool). I will be using this tool to alert advisors of any students who are having difficulty meeting the expectations for the course as described in the syllabus. This is intended to help students who may benefit from additional support. A fact report is not punitive in any way. It does not affect your grade and does not go on your transcript. It only alerts you and your advisor that you might need some additional support. If you think you might need extra help, please talk to me and/or your college advisor.

Plagiarism. Don't do it (it's *really* easy to catch). If you do, the university's disciplinary measures will be taken. If you have questions about what counts as plagiarism, visit www.northeastern.edu/osccr/academic-integrity-policy/ or talk to me. All submitted work must be

your own, and you should attribute the ideas and language of others properly, in accordance with university and course guidelines.

Counseling. You are very encouraged to prioritize your mental health. Northeastern offers you two main sources of confidential support: www.northeastern.edu/uahcs/counseling-services and www.studentlife.northeastern.edu/we-care/. Please feel welcome to use them however you may want or need.

Title IX. Title IX Policy prohibits sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship or domestic violence, and stalking. This applies to the entire Northeastern community, including students, faculty, and staff, of all genders and all sexualities. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, confidential support and guidance can be found at the University Health and Counseling Services (www.northeastern.edu/uahcs/) and the Center for Spiritual Dialogue and Service (www.northeastern.edu/spirituallife/). Violations can be reported *non-confidentially* to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office for Gender Equity and Compliance (titleix@northeastern.edu) or through NUPD (emergency: 617-373-3333; non-emergency: 617-373-2121). Reporting prohibited offenses to NUPD does not commit the victim / affected party to future legal action. Note that faculty (such as me) are considered “responsible employees” at Northeastern, meaning that they are required to report all allegations of sex- or gender-based discrimination to the Title IX Coordinator (in other words, I am not a confidential resource here). A complete list of reporting options and resources both on- and off-campus can be found at www.northeastern.edu/titleix.

Concerns about the course. You are encouraged to discuss concerns about the course with me. I am always interested in how to improve the learning environment. If you would like to discuss a concern about the course with someone else, you can contact Ronald Sandler, Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion. Information about formal academic appeals can be found at www.catalog.northeastern.edu/graduate/academic-policies-procedures/appeals/.