PHIL 700: Proseminar

University of Massachusetts Amherst
Spring 2024
Tuesdays, 4–6:30 pm, South College E301
Course Website: Canvas

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Course Description

This course is obligatory for first-year PhD students in Philosophy. We will explore core themes in philosophy of language, mind, science, and epistemology.

Course Assessments and Grading

Reading Responses
For each class, except those in which you give a presentation, draft a one page (500 words maximum) reflection piece that (i) develops at least one important criticism of a paper; (ii) isolates a point or idea in the paper as important, astute, worth developing; and (iii) presents a question you want greater clarity on or that has been bypassed within the dialectic. Send it to us and the other members of the class before midnight the night before the seminar. These pieces will not be formally graded. But you must turn in one prior to each of the other classes to receive a grade in the course.

Participation—10%

Presentations—40%
Each student will be responsible for four presentations. You'll present on one of the two main papers assigned for that week. Presenters will prepare a handout or powerpoint.

Each presentation and discussion block will be 55 minutes long. Presenters should prepare to talk for about 20 minutes, with the rest of that time being discussion.

Presentations should aim to briefly sketch the main points the author is making, and then attempt to critically engage with the paper in a couple ways. Presenters are encouraged to also bring up other issues regarding the reading.

First Paper (1000–1250 words)—20%

Second Paper (2000–2500 words)—30%

You can choose any topic in the course, including a topic that you did a presentation on. The paper should include both exposition of a theory, but also critical engagement. This can be, e.g., presenting novel considerations/evidence to support a theory, or theoretical modification or reconstruction of parts of a theory.

Class Format

We may not always stick to this, but a typical class meeting might break down as follows.

- Presentation & Discussion 1 (4–4:55)
- Break 1 (4:55–5:10)
- Presentation & Discussion 2 (5:10–6:05)
- General discussion / background regarding next week's reading (6:05–6:30)

Schedule

2/6: Introduction / Professionalization

Part 1. Philosophy of Language

2/13 Meaning: Descriptivist Theories

- Frege: Sense and Reference
- Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chapter vi

2/20 Direct Reference

- Kripke: Naming and Necessity, chs. 1–2
- Putnam: Is Semantics Possible?

2/27 Dimensions

- Chalmers and Jackson: Conceptual Analysis and Reductive Explanations
- Johnston and Leslie: Concepts, Analysis, Generics and the Canberra Plan

Part 2. Philosophy of Science

3/5 Positivism and its Problems

- Hempel, Empiricist Criteria of Cognitive Significance: Problems and Changes Kory
- Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, Ch. IX He

3/12 Operationalism in Psychology: Behaviorism and its Undoing

- Skinner, *Science and Human Behavior,* Ch. 3 Lauren
- Chomsky: Review of *Verbal Behavior* Min

3/26 Operationalism and other Reductionisms

- Block and Dworkin, IQ, Heritability, and Inequality, Part I Yuyan
- Fodor, Special Sciences Jake

Part 3. Philosophy of Mind

4/2 Mental States [FIRST PAPER DUE]
- Lewis, Psychophysical and Theoretical Identifications (Kory)
- Putnam, Philosophy and our mental life (He)

4/9 Folk Psychology
- Dennett: True Believers
- Fodor, Three Cheers for Propositional Attitudes

4/16 Content
- Frances Egan: Must Psychology Be Individualistic?
- Tyler Burge: Individualism and Psychology

Part 4. Epistemology

4/23 Internalism/Externalism
- BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, Chs. 1 and 5
- Goldman, What is Justified Belief?

4/30 The A Priori
- Carnap, Meaning Postulates; and Quine, Two Dogmas of Empiricism
- Boghossian, Analyticity Reconsidered

5/7 Naturalism
- Louise Antony: Quine as Feminist
- Boyd: Scientific Realism and Naturalistic Epistemology

UMass Policies

Accommodation Statement

The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements. For further information, please visit Disability Services (https://www.umass.edu/disability/)

Academic Honesty Statement

Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible.

Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent (http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/).

This course assumes that all work submitted by students will be generated by the students themselves, working individually or in groups. Students should not have another person/entity do the writing of any portion of an assignment for them, which includes hiring a person or a company to write assignments **and using artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT.**

Additional Resources

Writing

The Writing Center is located in W. E. B. Du Bois Library and provides free support on any writing you do while at UMass, whether for a course or not. Trained tutors are available to work with you as you plan, draft, and revise your writing. Please visit **www.umass.edu/writingcenter** for hours and information about making appointments. If you have questions about the UMass Writing Center, please email **writingcenter@acad.umass.edu** or call 413-577-1293.

Other campus offices to support success:

- Learning Resource Center: peer tutoring and extra academic help
- English as a Second Language (ESL) Program: supports international students with developing their English language skills and writing
- Student Success: provides resources for setting goals, gaining study skills, finding opportunities

Your wellness matters

As a student, you may experience a range of challenges that can interfere with learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, substance use, feeling down, difficulty concentrating, and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may diminish your academic performance and/or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. UMass Amherst services are available, and treatment does work. You can learn more about confidential mental health services available on campus at the Center for Counseling & Psychological Health: www.umass.edu/counseling or 413-545-2337

Title IX

If you have been the victim of sexual violence, gender discrimination, or sexual harassment, the university can provide you with a variety of support resources and accommodations. UMass is committed to providing these resources with minimal impact and costs to survivors on a case-by-case basis. Resources are available to survivors with or without them filing a complaint. No upfront costs are charged to any currently enrolled students for University Health Services or the Center for Counseling and Psychological Health, and no fees exist for services in the Dean of Students Office, the Center for Women and Community, Student Legal Services, or by live-in residential staff.