

Syllabus for *Social Philosophy* Themes of Justice and Injustice

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Introduction

Welcome to Philosophy XXX, Social Philosophy. In this class, we'll examine what social groups are and how those groups affect or are affected by our beliefs, discourse, and political decision-making.

Course Goals

Students will acquire proficiency in some of the basic issues in social philosophy with a particular eye toward how social philosophy intersects a concern for justice. Students will be encouraged to try out their own answers to central questions in the field, and to think creatively while appreciating influential answers that have come before. Students will gain confidence participating in conversations with grace and sensitivity on the one hand, with clarity and rigor on the other.

Students will continue to develop the general philosophical skill of writing arguments clearly and concisely. As is appropriate for a course in social philosophy, students will learn not only how to develop their own philosophical ideas but how to think together as a group in ways that encourage collaboration without enforcing monolithicity.

Prerequisites

Students must have already taken one upper-division philosophy course **or** one topically-related, upper-division humanities or social sciences course **or** received special permission from the instructor.

Required Materials

You should bring a writing utensil and the course reader to class each day.¹

Course Themes

¹ Get in touch with me or Disability Services as appropriate if you need an alternative way to interact with the text during class.

How should we behave given the way that others behave? How do the social categories we inhabit affect our ability to learn and communicate? Where do social categories like race and gender come from in the first place? What's the best way to make political decisions that affect our collective life together?

There has been a growing appreciation in analytic philosophy in the last half-century (perhaps overwhelmingly obvious outside of it) that thinking carefully about our world requires recognizing that our world is social. As such, if one is an epistemologist, one can do social epistemology. If one is a metaphysician, one can study social ontology. One can study the social dimensions of the philosophy of language, and so on.

It can be quite valuable to study these social issues under the auspices of other sub-disciplines. This course does not do that, however. Instead, we aim to put social philosophy front and center. There may be times when we think to ourselves, "Goodness, it would be a lot easier to understand *this* if I understood something about broader metaphysics (or epistemology, or language, or ethics, or philosophy of religion, etc.)." And there will be times when we think to ourselves, "Goodness, this is all going much too fast: the whole class could *just* be about (e.g.) the concept of race and we wouldn't come close to running out of questions." Good. Such thoughts are inevitable in philosophy worth doing. One hope for this class is that it should prove a launching pad into other areas of philosophy and not merely a repository for other sub-disciplines.

Course Schedule

Week 1: What are we talking about?: Social groups and activities

1. (Day 1) Amie L. Thomasson, "The Ontology of Social Groups"
2. (Day 2) Jennifer Lackey, "What is Justified Group Belief?"

Week 2: What is race?

1. Charles Mills, "But What Are You Really?"
2. K. Anthony Appiah, "Race, Culture, and Identity: Misunderstood Connections"

Week 3: What is race? (cont'd) What is gender?

1. Quayshawn Spencer, "What 'Radical Biological Realism' Should Mean"
2. Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) are they? (What) do we want them to be?"

Week 4: What is gender? (cont'd)

1. Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory"
2. Robin Dembroff, "Beyond Binary: Genderqueer as Critical Gender Kind"

Week 5: Perspectives and Standpoints

1. John Rawls, (brief) excerpts from *Theory of Justice*
2. Marilie Coetsee, "On the Reasonability of Reasoning with the Unreasonable"
3. Charles Mills, "White Ignorance"

Week 6: Perspectives and Standpoints (cont'd)

1. Alison Wylie, "Why standpoint matters"
2. Jennifer Hornsby, "Disempowered Speech"

Week 7: The Expression of Perspective through Metaphor

1. Elisabeth Camp, "Why metaphors make good insults: perspectives, presupposition, and pragmatics"
2. Rachel Elizabeth Fraser, "The Ethics of Metaphor"
 - a. *First Extended Discussion Due*

Week 8: Epistemic Injustice

1. Miranda Fricker, "Testimonial Injustice"
2. Miranda Fricker, "Hermeneutical Injustice"

Week 9: Epistemic Injustice (cont'd)

1. José Medina, "The Relevance of Credibility Excess in a Proportional Theory of Epistemic Injustice: Differential Epistemic Authority and the Social Imaginary"
2. Kristie Dotson, "Epistemic Violence"

Week 10: Epistemic Responses to Violence in Religious Context

1. Michelle Lynn Pachnauck, "The Shattered Spiritual Self: A Philosophical Exploration of Religious Trauma"
2. Joshua Cockayne, Jack Warman, and David Erfid, "Shattered Faith: The Social Epistemology of Deconversion by Spiritually Violent Religious Trauma"

Week 11: Discursive Injustice

1. Rebecca Kukla, "Performative Force, Convention, and Discursive Injustice"
2. Ishani Maitra, "Subordinating Speech"

Week 12: Discursive Injustice (cont'd)

1. Elisabeth Camp, "Slurring Perspectives"
2. Jennifer Saul, "Dogwhistles, Political Manipulation and the Philosophy of Language"

Week 13: Responding to Injustice

1. Rae Langton, "Blocking as Counterspeech"
2. D Black "Epistemic Punishment"
 - a. *Second Extended Discussion Due*

Week 16: Partiality and Friendship

1. Sarah Stroud, "Epistemic Partiality in Friendship"
2. Jennifer Lackey, "Why There is no Epistemic Partiality in Friendship"

Expectations and Assessments

It is expected that you will carefully read the texts before class and contribute to discussion during class. The overall length of reading per class will never exceed 40 pages and will sometimes be quite a bit shorter, but those pages should be read closely.

Your grade will come from four components:

- 1) Discussion notes for each reading: 50%
- 2) Two expanded discussion notes: 25%
- 3) The group project: 20%
- 4) Course reflection: 5%

Discussion Notes

Discussion notes should be 300-600 words long and present one argument (either an objection or a supporting argument) based on the reading that is fitting for group discussion. They should target a specific thesis or argument from the reading. Discussion notes should *not* be summaries of the reading or mere questions about the passage.

I will use the discussion notes to form the basis of our class discussion together. I will create a line-up of discussion notes, ask students to read their contributions,² and we will discuss them together.

Discussion notes will be graded on a two-point scale. Notes that receive two points are carefully written, thesis and argument driven, and capable of producing good discussion in our seminar. Completed discussions that do not meet this high standard will receive one point. Notes that are plagiarized, disingenuous, or not submitted at the start of class will receive zero points.

You are required to turn in discussion notes for every day *except* (a) the first day of class and (b) the four group project days (see below). This means that you will complete 27 discussion

² If reading your discussion note aloud in this way is intimidating, come talk to me, and we'll find an accessible way for you to present your ideas to the class.

notes in our class. **All notes are due at noon the day before class** so that I can create a thematically organized line-up of notes before our class together.

Your percentage for the discussion note portion of your grade will be determined by this rule: $(total\ discussion\ points) \times 50$ (max. 100%). This means you can miss two discussion notes and still receive full credit.

Extended Discussion Notes (2)

Twice during the semester students will submit extended discussion notes of 1000 words. Like the regular discussion notes, extended discussion notes should be thesis and argument driven. They may build on a previously-submitted discussion note: they do not have to begin from scratch. Ideally, they should build on the feedback you received from a discussion note you presented in class. But you are allowed to submit an extended discussion note for a class reading for which you did not turn in a regular discussion note. Extended discussion notes are a chance to think more deeply about a paper or argument that especially interested you.

The extended discussion notes are graded on a different scale than the regular discussion notes. Regular discussion notes are graded with the understanding that students have had half a week to write them. Extended discussion notes are graded with the understanding that students have had half a semester to write them and are assigned letter grades.

The Group Project

The class will be broken up into four groups who will collectively teach a class on a reading of their choosing. The classes need not abide by the traditional lecture format, nor do they need to follow our usual discussion note model. The group may creatively choose how they would like to present the reading from the day.

The group project will be graded in the following way:

- 1) Two-page lesson sheet: The lesson sheet should articulate (a) learning goals: what the group wants the rest of the class to learn from the lesson and (b) a learning plan: how the group will present the lesson to achieve those goals. It should *not* be a mere outline of the material you are covering. (30%: graded as a group)
- 2) The presentation: The presentation is evaluated according to the following criteria:
 - (a) Accuracy: does the presentation accurately reflect the content of the reading? 20%
 - (b) Creativity: is the material taught in an effective and creative way? 10%
 - (c) Distribution: did everyone in the group have a role in the presentation of the material?
 - (d) Clarity and Accessibility: was the presentation of the material clear and accessible for its intended audience? 10% (total: 50%: graded as a group)
- 3) One page reflection: The reflection, due one week after the group's presentation, is an opportunity to say what one has learned by (a) teaching the chosen material and

(b) doing so as a member of a group who had to collectively choose what information to present and how to present it. The reflection will be accompanied by a form (provided by the instructor) that asks you to evaluate the contributions of your team members. (Note on the evaluations: I am emphatically *not* interested in nitpicking whether every person did exactly an equal share of the work. I think doing one's fair share is really important, but that is your group's responsibility to work out together. I *am* interested in knowing (a) if someone didn't contribute substantially at all or worked to undermine the group or, more positively, (b) if someone went above and beyond to create a cooperative group atmosphere and pull the project together.) (20%: graded individually)

Course Reflection

Part of the learning process is reflecting on what one has studied and the progress one has made. Your final project is to submit a 1-2 page course reflection on what you learned. Any serious answer will receive full credit: your grade will not be dependent on whether you say that you learned a lot or whether you found the course frustrating. What's important is that you have an opportunity for honest reflection that enables you to carry this course with you beyond the semester.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. This class is based on discussion, and when you miss class, you miss an integral part of the course (and rob us of your contributions as well!). I will take attendance at the beginning of every class. A pattern of unexcused absences (i.e. more than one or two) can result in a lower grade or failure to pass.

Barring extreme circumstances, excused absences will never be granted if they are requested after the start time of a class period. It's your obligation to request an excused absence before missing it.

What Grades Mean

A: 90-100% Truly excellent work that goes above and beyond the baseline requirements for the course. Work that achieves the level of an A exhibits mastery of the material taught in the course and the ability to build on that mastery to contribute something creative, rigorous, and ambitious of your own thought to the assignment.

B+: 85-90%

B: 80-85% Solid, commendable work that fulfills all of the project requirements. B-level work exhibits competence with the course material and genuine insight that goes beyond the confines of what was taught. There may, however, be small errors, or the paper may lack the full rigor or creativity of an A paper.

C+: 75-80%

C: 70-75% Decent work that fulfills most of the project requirements. C-level work may, however, show gaps in understanding of the course material or substantial defects in the argument presented.

D: 60-70% Incomplete work that exhibits a poor understanding of the course material and makes a weak contribution to the discussion.

F: <60% Dishonest, disingenuous, or markedly incomplete work

Late Work Policy

Late work will not be accepted. Extensions may be requested. But except in extreme circumstances, extensions will only be granted if they are asked at least 72 hours before the assignment is due.

Plagiarism and Citations

Plagiarism is representing someone else's work as your own. Don't do it. Give proper credit whenever you are using another person's words, arguments, or ideas. When in doubt, cite.

Citing well isn't just a way to avoid plagiarism—it's an opportunity to demonstrate that you have engaged seriously and in good faith with other thinkers. Citing well also (perhaps counter-intuitively!) highlights where you have made an original contribution, making it easier for your readers to see what distinguishes your work from that of others.

When citing printed material, always include the author's name, date of publication, and page number. Every citation should match an entry in your bibliography.

Plagiarism will result in an F on the assignment and reported to the dean. If the plagiarism is blatant or repeated, it will result in an F in the course.

The university's policy on academic integrity can be found here: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

Technology Policy

You are welcome to use technology in class for and only for class-related purposes (i.e. displaying the course readings). But please be aware that when you use screens for other purposes it is often a distraction to others around you.

Email Guidelines and Office Hours

You should feel free to email me at any point for any course-related or philosophy-related questions!

Email is an excellent medium for *short and specific* questions about the course. I will always aim to get a response to you within 48 weekday hours. Feel free to gently remind me if I seem to have overlooked your email.

For more substantial questions or for extensive feedback on an assignment, it's better to meet during office hours. If my regular office hours do not work for you, we can set up an appointment for an alternative time.

Expectations for Discussion

All discussion in this class must be performed in a respectful and charitable way. The Rutgers Philosophy department writes:

“In our community we expect all participants to observe basic norms of civility and respect. This means stating your own views directly and substantively: focusing on reasons, assumptions and consequences rather than on who is offering them, or how. And it means engaging other’s views in the same terms. No topic or claim is too obvious or controversial to be discussed; but claims and opinions have a place in the discussion only when they are presented in a respectful, collegial, and constructive way.”

Here are three small recommendations that I think go a long way toward making philosophical discussions better:

1. Adopt a general attitude that you and your classmates are involved in the common pursuit of the truth, even when defending contrary theses.
2. Name other students when you’re responding to their idea. This shows that you’ve been listening to them and gives them credit for their contributions. Even when you are (politely) disagreeing, mentioning them communicates that you think their comment is worthy of discussion.
3. Unless the class is very small (and maybe even then), raise your hand before making a contribution. This allows me as the instructor to see that quieter students have a chance to enter the discussion when they want to.

Finally, if I do anything that doesn’t promote good dialogue in our seminar, please let me know! I’m still learning how to be a good philosophical interlocutor as well, and some of my best feedback comes from you.

Accessibility

Please get in touch with the Office of Disability Services (ods.rutgers.edu) if there is any way at all that this course can be made more accessible for you. I want to make this course as accessible for everyone as possible!

Other Services for Students

Student-Wellness Services

[Just In Case Web App](#)

<http://codu.co/cee05e>

Access helpful mental health information and resources for yourself or a friend in a mental health crisis on your smartphone or tablet and easily contact CAPS or RUPD.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS):

(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901/ www.rhscaps.rutgers.edu/

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA):

(848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 /

www.vpva.rutgers.edu/

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 848-932-1181