

Introduction to Philosophy

Instructor: Kranti Saran

saran@ashoka.edu.in

Lecture: MW 10:10AM–11:40AM, LT AC 109

Office Hours: MW 5:00PM–6:00PM, 310 New Academic Block

and by appointment

Class webpage: piazza.com/ashoka.edu.in/spring2017/phi101/home

Course Description

Is it wrong to slap a child? If it is, is it wrong in every society and in every age, or is its wrongness relative to those factors? What is knowledge? What kind of knowledge do we have? Can social practices subvert knowledge or undermine its value? What is the nature of reality? Is reality a construction of the mind or is it independent of the mind? Does uttering words communicate more than the words that we say, and if so, how? Does language encode a perspective? What is freedom of expression? What are the ways in which it can be subverted? Via these kinds of questions, this elective course is an introduction to some central philosophical topics such as metaethics, epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of language, and political theory.

Learning Objectives

- To gain familiarity with diverse positions and arguments
- To interpret positions and reconstruct arguments charitably
- To construct rigorous arguments and helpful critiques
- To discern the connections between the domains we study

Instructional Materials

Reading guides and lecture slides will be posted on Piazza. You must purchase the printed coursepack for this course and this required text:

1. Williamson, T. (2015). *Tetralogue: I'm Right, You're Wrong*. Oxford: Oxford.

Schedule of Meetings, Topics, and Readings

This schedule may change depending on the rate at which we proceed. The most current version of the schedule will be the one posted on Piazza.

Day	Date	Topics and Readings
Mon.	23/1	Introduction
		<i>Module I: Relativism and Moral Relativism</i>
Wed.	25/1	“The Perils of Peacemaking” in Williamson (2015)
Mon.	30/1	“The Terrors of Truth” in Williamson (2015)
Wed.	1/2	“The Argument from Relativity,” Chapter 1, §8 in Mackie (1977/1990) “Ethical Relativism” in Taylor (1975)
Mon.	6/2	“The Vices of Value” in Williamson (2015) “Interlude: Relativism” in Williams (1972/1993)
Wed.	8/2	No Class (I’m giving a talk elsewhere)
Mon.	13/2	Paper Discussion Day
		<i>Module II: Epistemology</i>
Wed.	15/2	“First Meditation” in Descartes (1984)
Mon.	20/2	“The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge” in Feldman (2003)
Wed.	22/2	“Modifying the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge” in Feldman (2003)
Mon.	27/2	“The Advantages of Arrogance” in Williamson (2015)
Wed.	1/3	“White Ignorance,” Mills (2007)
Mon.	6/3	“Hermeneutical Injustice” in Fricker (2007) <i>Joothan: A Dalit’s Life</i> , Valmiki (2003)
Wed.	8/3	Paper Discussion Day
Mon.	13/3	No Class (Midterm Break)
Wed.	15/3	No Class (Midterm Break)

Module III: Metaphysics

- Mon. 20/3 “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man,” §1-2 & §4-5, [Sellars \(1963\)](#)
- Wed. 22/3 “Posits and Reality” in [Quine \(1966\)](#)
- Mon. 27/3 §18–§23, *Principles of Human Knowledge* by George Berkeley
- Wed. 29/3 “Thought and Reality” in [Nagel \(1986\)](#)
- Mon. 3/4 Paper Discussion Day
- Wed. 5/4 No Class (Ram Navmi)

Module IV: Philosophy of Language

- Mon. 10/4 “Logic and Conversation,” [Grice \(1967/1987\)](#)
- Wed. 12/4 “The Problem of the Essential Indexical,” [Perry \(1979\)](#)
- Mon. 17/4 Paper Discussion Day

Module V: Freedom of Expression

- Wed. 19/4 Mill’s *On Liberty*, Chap. 1 & 2.
- Mon. 24/4 “Freedom of Expression and Categories of Expression” in [Scanlon \(2003\)](#)
- Wed. 26/4 “Free Expression and Personal Identification,” [Raz \(1991\)](#)
- Mon. 1/5 “Scorekeeping in a Pornographic Language game,” [Langton & West \(1999\)](#)
Optional: “Against Langton’s Illocutionary Treatment of Pornography”
by Antony in [Hornsby et al. \(2011\)](#).
- Wed. 3/5 Paper Discussion Day

How to Read the Material

The assigned material is quite dense. Plan to read it 3–4 times before class:

- First, read the opening and closing paragraphs and all section headings to get a sense of the piece.

- Second, read it through word by word, marking it up with any questions and comments you have, and noting passages that require a closer reading.
- Third, go back and reread the passages you marked up for special attention.

Student Responsibilities

- **Lecture attendance:** There is no attendance requirement. Because the Reading Quiz will begin right on time at the start of class and late arrivals disturb other test takers, the classroom doors will be locked at the start of class. If you arrive after the doors have been locked you cannot take the quiz or attend lecture. If you attend class, you may not leave early (unless you inform me beforehand).
- **Behaviour in the Classroom:** Treat the instructor and your fellow classmates with respect. Be considerate when speaking and make sure others get a chance to voice their views too. While your participation is actively encouraged, remember that listening is as much a form of participation as speaking. Do not confuse the volume of your participation with its value. You are welcome to vigorously disagree, but remember not to be disagreeable! If you are rude or disruptive, you will be asked to leave the classroom. Reading non-class material during class is not permitted.
- **Electronic Etiquette:** Your phone must be off or on silent mode, and out of sight. No laptops are permitted in class. (For those interested in some of the research motivating this policy, see <http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-case-for-banning-laptops-in-the-classroom>.)

Ever wondered how to email your professor? Nobody is born knowing how to do this, but luckily there's a useful guide: <http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor>

- **Academic Integrity:** You are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Your work must be your own. Submitting work which you have not composed yourself, or using another person's ideas without due credit, or failing to mark another person's words with appropriate quotation marks all constitute plagiarism. The instructor reserves the right to assess penalties for violations of academic integrity, which may include giving a failing grade for an assignment, for the entire course, or referral to a University disciplinary committee.
- **Work submission:** All work must be submitted on time. Work that is submitted past the deadline will be docked a third of a grade for every successive 24-hour period after the deadline (e.g., a B+ becomes a B). On no account can you be late in submitting drafts of papers to your peer commentator.
- **Students with Disabilities:** Reasonable academic accommodation will be made for students with documented disabilities. You must contact me before our next meeting if you need such accommodation.

Course Requirements and Grade Distribution

Your grade will be a function of the following distribution:

Reading Quizzes	25%
Group Response Paper (5 x 2 pages)	40%
Final Paper (4-5 pages)	25%
Class Participation	10%

Reading Quizzes

Every class will start with a short quiz focussed on the reading assigned for that day. The quiz must be taken in class. The quiz aims to test your understanding of some of the main claims and arguments covered in the reading and your retention of material we have already covered. It presupposes that you have carefully read and reflected on the material. No notes, texts, or study aids of any kind are allowed during the quiz. Importantly, the quiz is cumulative: *any* material that we have covered till date is fair game. If you miss a Reading Quiz, you will not be able to make it up; the lowest four Reading Quiz scores will not count towards your final Reading Quiz grade.

Your Reading Quiz final score will be computed as follows: your lowest four scores will be dropped and the total number of points earned will be turned into a percentage and then into a grade point as follows: if your final score is between 90-100% you will get a 4.0, 80-89% is a 3.5, 70-79% is a 3.0, 60-69% is a 2.5, 50-59% is a 2.0, 40-49% is a 1.0 and 0-39% is a 0.0, which is a failing grade.

Group Response Papers

The class will be divided into groups of five. Each group will collaboratively write a two page response paper due every Paper Discussion Day. The paper is an opportunity for you to respond as a group to the reading assigned for that Module. You could reconstruct an argument, raise an objection, assess the plausibility of a premise, contrast the reading with other material from the course, develop an insight – have fun exploring the intellectual terrain! Each team member will be assigned to a specific role for each paper:

1. Group Leader: oversees the paper and facilitates communication between team members. Responsible for meeting all deadlines and making sure that everyone contributes to the paper.
2. Lead Writer: while any member of the group can contribute to writing the paper, the lead writer spearheads the writing and is responsible for revising the paper in light of the Reviewers' comments.
3. Editor: focuses on issues of language and format.

4. Reviewers 1 & 2: provide written comments to the Lead Writer on the first draft of the paper.

Each team member must cycle through each one of these roles during the semester. The grade assigned to the paper will be the grade for each member of the group. On Paper Discussion Day, one submitted paper will be randomly selected for discussion.

The Final Paper

You will write your final paper individually.

Class Participation

Class participation is not primarily about the volume of your spoken contribution. Rather, it is about your attentive presence in a community of learning.

References

- Descartes, R. (1984). *The philosophical writings of René Descartes* (J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, & D. Murdoch, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Feldman, R. (2003). *Epistemology*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Fricke, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford and New York: Oxford.
- Grice, P. (1967/1987). Logic and conversation. In Grice 1989. (The William James lectures)
- Grice, P. (1989). *Studies in the way of words*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Hornsby, J., Antony, L., Saul, J., Stoljar, N., Wieland, N., & Langton, R. (2011). Subordination, silencing, and two ideas of illocution. *Jurisprudence*, 2(2), 379-440. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5235/204033211798716826> doi: 10.5235/204033211798716826
- Langton, R., & West, C. (1999). Scorekeeping in a pornographic language game. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 77(3), 303-319. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00048409912349061> doi: 10.1080/00048409912349061

- Mackie, J. L. (1990). *Ethics: Inventing right and wrong*. London: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1977)
- Mills, C. W. (2007). White ignorance. In S. Sullivan & N. Tuana (Eds.), *Race and epistemologies of ignorance* (pp. 15–38). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Nagel, T. (1986). *The view from nowhere*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Perry, J. (1979). The problem of the essential indexical. *Noûs*, 13(1), 3–21. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2214792>
- Quine, W. (1966). *The ways of paradox and other essays*. New York: Random House.
- Raz, J. (1991). Free expression and personal identification. *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 11(3), 303-324. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/764211>
- Scanlon, T. M. (2003). Freedom of expression and categories of expression. In *The difficulty of tolerance: Essays in political philosophy* (pp. 84–112). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sellars, W. (1963). Philosophy and the scientific image of man. In *Science, perception and reality* (pp. 1–40). New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Taylor, P. W. (1975). Ethical relativism. In *Principles of ethics: An introduction* (pp. 13–30). Encino and Belmont, CA: Dickenson Publishing Company.
- Valmiki, O. (2003). *Joothan: A Dalit's life* (A. P. Mukherjee, Trans.). Kolkata: Samya.
- Williams, B. (1993). *Morality: An introduction to ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge. (Original work published 1972)
- Williamson, T. (2015). *Tetralogue: I'm right, you're wrong*. Oxford: Oxford.