

Licence Philosophie UE 5 (Optional course, open to undergraduates of all levels)
« **Philosophical English** » (L3PH005U)
Spring 2019
Thursday, 10h-12h, Salle 423 (Clignancourt)
Instructor : S. Webb – samuel.webb@paris-sorbonne.fr

**READINGS IN CONTEMPORARY ANGLO-AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY:
WHAT CAN PHILOSOPHY TALK ABOUT?**

PRESENTATION

The theme of this course is philosophical discussion, how to do it, what it can achieve. Each session will be dedicated to a discussion in English of a philosophical question or topic on the basis of texts from contemporary Anglo-American philosophy. These texts belong to moral and political philosophy as well as epistemology and metaphysics. They express a variety of conflicting views about what living in society with others requires, about our relation to the world and our understanding of ourselves. These are problems with immediate relevance to how we live our lives. We will learn how to evaluate the arguments put forward in these texts and how to develop our own, through exchange with others.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Refine reading knowledge of English through philosophical texts
- Acquire familiarity with contemporary Anglo-American approaches to political philosophy, ethical theory, epistemology, metaphysics and philosophy of mind
- Practice communication and discussion of philosophy in English
- Develop critical thinking and argumentation skills

EVALUATION

Your grade is composed of the **average of two grades** : 1) an oral or written exposé in English on the readings for the week et 2) an in-class exam (DST). **The exam will take place on the April 18th.**

Instructions for the exposé or presentation

The presentation should accomplish three things :

1. **Identify the problem raised by the text and a thesis it defends.** In your own words, *what* is the text talking about and what does it aim to *show*?
2. **Interpret and explain an argument.** *How* does the author support his or her claim? What reasons does he give us to accept his position?
3. **Respond to the argument.** Tell us whether you find the argument is convincing and why. In your critical analysis, point out an aspect that seems interesting or debatable to you. This could be an unexamined presupposition or premise, a possible objection or the way the argument responds to an objection, an ambiguity. In brief, you should raise a question or problem about the text that you would like to discuss further with the class.

For those who do not present in class, you should hand in a written version of the exposé, following the same format, *the day we discuss the text*. Written exposés should be 2-3 pages, 1.5 spaced, 12 point font.

Students dispensed from attendance only need to pass the exam to validate the class.

Language note : If you do not feel comfortable or able to articulate your ideas in English, say them in French and we will translate them together.

THE READINGS – A Reader containing all the readings will be distributed in class and available on Moodle
We will read the work of the following authors.

Elizabeth Anderson, Elizabeth Anscombe, Nancy Bauer, Daniel Dennett, Ralph W. Emerson, Edmund Gettier, Philippa Foot, Gilbert Harman, Carol Hay, William James, Thomas Kuhn, Martin Luther King, Jr., Krista Lawlor, Richard Moran, Iris Murdoch, Robert Nozick, Martha Nussbaum, Derek Parfit, John Rawls, Mario Rizzo, John Searle, Adam Smith, Amia Srinivasan, Henry D. Thoreau

CALENDAR OF READINGS

[Session 1] 31/01 Presentation of the class.

Philosophy as open conversation about our convictions in the face of problems.

Nancy Bauer, “Authority and Arrogance” (2010)

The Stone: New York Times Philosophy Blog

<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/30/authority-and-arrogance-a-response/>

R. W. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance*

[2] 07/02 *Does disgust (or any emotional reaction) have any place in moral reasoning?*

Carol Hay, “Gross violations” (2014)

<https://aeon.co/essays/does-disgust-have-any-place-in-moral-reasoning>

Attention and the Moral Significance of “Seeing”

Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970)

[3] 14/02 *How should we choose principles of justice? Fairness, disagreement and bargaining.*

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1971, revised ed. 1999)

Gilbert Harman, “Justice and Moral Bargaining” (1983)

[4] 21/02 *What should we do about unjust laws?*

Henry David Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience” (1849)

Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (1963)

[5] 28/02 *Do victims of oppression have a duty to resist?*

Carol Hay, “A Feminist Kant”

<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/12/08/a-feminist-kant/>

Individual rights, duties, and the role of the state

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974), Preface.

Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Bk 4, Ch. 9, § 51

07/03 – Vacation, no class

[6] 14/03 **Amia Srinivasan**, “Questions for Free-Market Moralists”

The Stone: New York Times Philosophy Blog

<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/20/questions-for-free-market-moralists/>

Mario Rizzo, “Questions for Free Market Moralists? Some Answers”

<http://thinkmarkets.wordpress.com/2013/10/22/questions-for-free-market-moralists-some-answers/>

ThinkMarkets *A blog of the NYU Colloquium on Market Institutions*

[7] 21/03 *What is it to secure a right? The capabilities approach and the point of equality*

Martha Nussbaum, “Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements: Sen and Social Justice” (2003)

Elizabeth Anderson, “What is the Point of Equality?” (1999)

[8] 28/02

What is the relationship between truth and usefulness?

William James, *The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to Pragmatism* (1911)

Does science progress towards the “Truth”?

Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), Postscript, 1969.

[9] 04/04

What can we learn from analytic thought experiments?

Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” (1963)

John Searle “Minds, Brains, and Programs” (1980) The “Chinese Room” Argument

Can computers understand language?

Philippa Foot “The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect”(1967)

What are we to do with “trolley problems”?

[10] 11/04

Is the self a fictional character?

Daniel C. Dennett, “The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity” (1992)

When (if ever) does it make sense to say someone has become a different person?

Derek Parfit on “successive selves” in *Reasons and Persons* (1984)

[11] 18/04 **Examen sur table/Exam in class** – On texts and themes from the course

25/04 – 02/05 Spring Break, no class!

[12] 09/05

Do we have an intuitive self-consciousness?

Charles S. Peirce, *Collected Papers* vol. 5 Book 2 Question 2

What does “I” stand for?

Elizabeth Anscombe, “The First-Person” (1975)

[13] 16/05

How do we know what we want ? Problems of self-knowledge

Krista Lawlor, “Knowing What One Wants” (2009).

Richard Moran, *Authority and Estrangement. An Essay on Self-Knowledge*, 2001.