

Introduction to Philosophy: Who is a philosopher?

Professor: Bryce Huebner
Office: 234 New North
Office hours: T 12:00 - 15:00; and by appointment

Course meets:
M & W 15:30 - 16:45 pm
Location: Walsh 490

You probably have some idea of what philosophy is, and what kinds of things philosophers do. But in different times and different places, philosophers have done their thing as artists and ascetics, court advisors and contemplatives, poets and political leaders, reactionaries and revolutionaries, scientists and sages. In this course, we will explore some of these ways of being a philosopher, and we will ask: what does it mean to do philosophy? And your primary goal as a student will be to work out what you think it means to philosophize!

Reading Schedule:

The philosopher as a curious investigator	
1/14 - 1/16	Dag Herbjørnsrud, " Before the canon: The non-European women who founded philosophy "; Jonardon Ganeri, " The tree of knowledge is not an apple or an oak but a banyan "
The philosopher as an ascetic	
1/23	Selections from The sayings of the desert fathers
The philosopher as rational investigator	
1/28 - 1/30	Zär'a Ya'aqob, Hatata (optional) Lawrence Shapiro, " A drop in the sea "
2/4 - 2/6	Lara Buchak, " Can it be rational to have faith? " Sam Littlefiar, " Do you only live once? "
The philosopher as a self-investigator	
2/11 - 2/13	Unknown, " A dispute between a man and his ba " Samir Chopra, " The usefulness of dread " Pema Chödrön & bell hooks, cultivating openness when life falls apart
*2/19 - 2/20	Rhonda McGee, " How Mindfulness Can Defeat Racial Bias " Bronwyn Finnigan, " Can we reinvent ourselves " Lisa Feldman Barrett & John Dunne, " Buddhists in love "
The philosopher as an artist	
2/25	Wayne Shorter & Herbie Hancock, " An open letter to the next generation of artists " Adrian Piper, " Ideology. Confrontation and Political Self-Awareness "
The philosopher as a game player	
2/27	C. Thi Nguyen, " Agency as art "

Spring Break		
The philosopher as scientist (or meta-scientist)		
3/11 - 3/13	Rachel Carson, " Silent Spring " (heads up: this is a longer read, but it reads quickly) John Dupré, " Metaphysics of metamorphosis " Zeeya Merali, " How cosmic is the cosmos "	
3/18 - 3/20	Lucie Laplane et al, " Why science needs philosophy " (optional) Adam Frank, Marcelo Gleiser, & Evan Thompson, " The blind spot of science " Regina Rini, " The last mortals "	
The philosopher as a science fiction writer		
3/25 - 3/27	Watch: Ghost in the Shell (1995) Octavia Butler, " The evening, the morning, and the night " Ursula K Le Guin, " Introduction to Left Hand of Darkness "	
The philosopher as a reporter		
4/1 - 4/3	Ida B. Wells, The red record	
The philosopher as revolutionary or a reactionary		
4/8 - 4/10	Watch: the debate between William F Buckley and James Baldwin Subcomandante Marcos, " Between light and shadow "	
The philosopher as a cognitive scientist		
4/15 - 4/17	Laura Ruggles, " The minds of plants " Don Ross, " The elephant as a person "	
4/24	Easter Break	Nell Greenfieldboyce, " Octopuses Get Strangely Cuddly... " Philip Gerrans & Chris Letheby, " Model Hallucinations "
4/29	No reading: Summary discussion	

Supplementary Resources:

- **Peter Adamson**, [The History of Philosophy Without any Gaps](#) (podcast)
- **Peter Adamson & Jonardon Ganeri**, [The History of Philosophy in India](#) (podcast)
- **Peter Adamson & Chike Jeffers**, [The History of African and Africana philosophy](#) (podcast)
- [Pieces on Non-'Western' Philosophy for a General Audience](#) by **Abiral Chitrakar Phnuyal**
- [Aeon](#) (There's a specific philosophy section, but feel free to look around!)
- [Nautilus Magazine](#) (This is science focused, but there's lots of philosophy too!)

Course Requirements:

Your main goal in this course is to write a brief paper (Max: 2000 words), which provides an explanation of why *someone's* work should be understood as philosophy. This project is fairly open ended; as you'll see this semester, there are many ways of doing philosophy, and many ways of presenting philosophical ideas. If you're unsure where to start, I recommend looking through the *Supplementary Resources*. And if

you're unsure whether you're on the right track, I recommend sending me an email or coming to office hours (and as a side benefit, doing either of these things will help us get to know one another better).

Assignment	Points	Due date
Identify a source to work with and submit a Four Sentence Paper focusing on it: (1. The philosopher says/does...; 2. I say that this is philosophy because...; 3. One might object that...; 4. But I would reply...)	10	2/1
Provide Anonymous Peer Feedback on two four sentence papers; you will need to address each of the following questions: 1. What is one thing that the author could do to make their summary clearer? 2. What is one thing that the author could do to make their explanation of why this is philosophy stronger? 3. Has the author entertained the strongest potential objection? If not, is there a stronger objection they should consider? 4. Is the author's reply compelling? If so, offer one suggestion about how to elaborate upon; if not what offer one suggestion about what a more promising reply would look like.	10	2/15
Submit an Expanded Summary of your source (Max: 500 words)	15	3/1
Submit an Expanded Explanation of why it is philosophy (Max: 500 words)	15	3/22
Submit an Expanded Potential Objection (Max: 500 words)	15	4/12
Submit revisions of your first three sections, and add your reply, to yield a complete Final Paper (Max: 2000 words)	15	4/26
Participate in class	10	Ongoing
At the end of the semester, you must submit a Brief Narrative detailing what you have learned in the class, as well as what questions you feel have been left unresolved, and what it would take to address them adequately.	10	5/9

Paper deadlines: If you need an extension on a paper, please ask me at least 24 hours before the due date. I will always be willing to give a 48-hour extension (no questions asked). If you need longer than this, you will need to set up an appointment with me so that we can go over your ideas, and set a schedule for finishing the paper. Unless an extension is granted in advance, assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a grade for each day they are late.

Appealing a grade: You can appeal any grade that you feel does not accurately represent the work you have done. Appeals for re-evaluation must be made in writing, no more than two weeks after your paper is returned, and no sooner than 48 hours after you receive your grade. Requests must provide a compelling argument for raising the grade, but an agreement to re-evaluate a paper is no guarantee of a better grade, and it can result in lower grades if there are more serious problems that were missed on the first reading.

The honor code: The Georgetown University Honor pledge requires you to be honest in your academic endeavors and to hold yourself to the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life. I expect you to be familiar with the letter and the spirit of this pledge; and, I will enforce the Honor Code by reporting any and all suspected cases of academic dishonesty.

Accessibility and diversity: One finds a great deal of diversity in teaching and learning styles in a

modern university. These styles may not always mesh in ways that are conducive to the success and wellbeing of everyone in a course. But there are often ways of improving things. I am happy to discuss the structure of this course, and to work with the learning styles people have to the best of my abilities. So please feel free to talk to me in office hours. I sincerely think that every student is entitled to a meaningful and stimulating classroom experience! Disabled students and students on record with the university as requiring particular accommodations, please let me know that this is the case, in confidence, during the first few weeks of the semester—and please take advantage of services provided by the university. Finally, please let me know if you learn during the semester that something would make the classroom accessible.

Mind your manners: Philosophy is best done collectively and collaboratively; however, some of the questions we will be discussing in this class may generate contentious claims, spirited discussions, vehement disagreements, and trenchant criticisms. This is at least part of what doing philosophy is all about. In discussing, disagreeing, criticizing, and arguing with one another, we must make an effort to remain courteous and respectful. I promise to do my best to raise philosophical issues and to start philosophical discussions in ways that are as sensitive as possible to the variety of viewpoints and opinions that we are sure to find among the members of this class. But I will only be able to do this if each of you helps to create an atmosphere where we can develop ideas in a friendly and welcoming environment where we all learn from one another. Perhaps more importantly, if you want to disagree with someone, or if you want to offer a criticism of their viewpoint, be sure to offer reasons for the approach that you are suggesting. If we reason through things together, we are sure to have a great semester!

Sexual misconduct: As a faculty member and an educator, it is my responsibility to help create a safe learning environment on our campus. Georgetown University and its faculty are committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, including relationship violence and sexual assault. And university policy requires all faculty members to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University's response to sexual misconduct. But Georgetown also has a number of fully confidential professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. More information about campus resources and reporting can be found at <http://sexualassault.georgetown.edu>.