

PHILOSOPHY 232: PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY
WINTER 2017

Professor Eric Swanson

ericsw@umich.edu, 2259 Angell Hall

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:30–11:30, and by appointment.

(Feel free to drop by between the end of lecture and 10:30, but I can't promise that I'll be there.)

Many important debates involve such profound disagreements that it's hard to know who we should believe. What should we do when we're faced with such a debate? When we learn that people's views are different from ours, should our own views change? If so, in what ways? Might we have wrong views that we can't change, no matter how hard we try? Can two people disagree about so much that it's impossible for one to understand the other's position? Could some truths be literally unbelievable? What does it even mean to say that something is true, or to say that something is true for you but not true for me?

We will discuss all these questions in this course, focusing on how they arise when we think about freedom, morality, justice, science, prejudice, consciousness, and ideology. Reading, thinking, talking, and writing about these philosophical issues is exciting and important work. But the skills you will develop by doing this work are valuable in other contexts as well, helping you think and write more clearly, ask more insightful questions, and become more creative at solving problems.

TEXTS

Thinking It Through: An Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy, by Kwame Anthony Appiah

Blade Runner: The Final Cut, dir. Ridley Scott (available on Google Play, YouTube)

Thelma & Louise, dir. Ridley Scott (available for rental on Amazon Video, Google Play, iTunes, YouTube)

Aguirre: The Wrath of God, dir. Werner Herzog (available for rental on Amazon Video, Google Play, iTunes)

The House I Live In, dir. Eugene Jarecki (available for rental on Amazon Video, Google Play, iTunes, YouTube)

Rashomon, dir. Akira Kurosawa (available for rental on Amazon Video, iTunes)

Run Lola Run, dir. Tom Tykwer (available for rental on Amazon, Google Play, iTunes, YouTube)

Links to other texts and media will be available on Canvas: <https://umich.instructure.com/courses/118060>

COURSE WEB SITE

Canvas: <https://umich.instructure.com/courses/118060>

Please use Piazza, which is available through Canvas, to ask questions that aren't specific to you!

LECTURE

Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:10–9:58, in Auditorium C, Angell Hall

SECTIONS, WITH CAROLINE PERRY

002, Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:10–11:00, 3460 Mason Hall

003, Tuesdays and Thursdays 4:10–5:00, 3411 Mason Hall

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:10–12:00 in 1156 Angell Hall

GRADING

15% each: two in-class exams, on 1/26 and 3/16

15%: one short (two to three page) paper, due 2/12

30%: one slightly longer final paper (five pages), due 4/23

15%: responses to the *upcoming* reading (or viewing), graded pass / fail. (For example, your 1/15 reading response would be on the film *Blade Runner*.) These don't have to be long—one paragraph is fine. But for a pass, your response has to make it *clear* that you did the reading and thought about it. Reading responses are not required for the Sundays before exams, to give you more time to prepare. Late responses will not be accepted, since your GSI and I use these responses to help us prepare for lecture and sections.

10%: your section grade, including participation in section, surprise quizzes if necessary, etc. Excellent reading responses, regularly submitted, will boost your section grade; so will excellent answers on Piazza.

EXPECTATIONS

Keep up with the readings. They demand close attention and careful thought, and we'll always be integrating different topics in philosophy. If you fall behind you'll miss much of what's going on for the rest of the semester.

We'll be discussing many controversial issues in this course, and challenging our beliefs throughout. Be polite, respectful, and charitable in discussion with your classmates and teachers.

Read carefully University of Michigan's policy on academic integrity, available at:

<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity>

We encourage you to discuss the material with your classmates, but all work you turn in must be your own. Cheating or plagiarism will result in a grade of 0 for that assignment and disciplinary action by the University.

If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let me know at your earliest convenience. Some aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way the course is usually taught may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make me aware of your needs, we can work with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to help us determine appropriate academic accommodations. SSD (734-763-3000; ssd.umich.edu) typically recommends accommodation through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. Any information you provide is private and confidential and will be treated as such.

Use of laptops in class can distract the user, other students, and teachers. Lots of research has shown that many students learn better if they take notes by hand. See, for example:

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>

However, some students absolutely have to use laptops, and do benefit from them. If you need to use a laptop in lecture, please sit to the left (as you face the front of the room). If laptops distract you, please sit in the center or on the right. No phone calls, texting, etc. in class.

Missed exams can be made up only with ample appropriate documentation—for medical reasons, a signed and dated doctor's note; for the death of a loved one, a signed and dated letter from a funeral home; etc. We will be more flexible with late papers, but you must contact your GSI in advance to ask for an extension, and you must stand by your agreement with your GSI.

So you can all pay attention to all of lecture, I will finish by 9:58 sharp, leaving at least two extra minutes for you to pack up your things. But I ask you to be fully present for our discussion until 9:58.

SCHEDULE

Thursday 1/5	Organizational meeting
Tuesday 1/10	Lecture on Appiah, Preface, Introduction, and Sections 1.1–1.5: Mind
Thursday 1/12	Lecture on Appiah, Sections 1.6–1.13: Mind
Sunday 1/15	Reading response due
Tuesday 1/17	Lecture on <i>Blade Runner: The Final Cut</i> , directed by Ridley Scott
Thursday 1/19	Lecture on Patricia Churchland, “The Hornswoggle Problem”
Tuesday 1/24	Lecture on Appiah, Sections 2.1–2.5: Knowledge
Thursday 1/26	In-class exam
Sunday 1/29	Reading response due
Tuesday 1/31	Lecture on Appiah, Sections 2.6–2.10: Knowledge
Thursday 2/2	Lecture on Appiah, Chapter 3: Language (focus on sections 3.1–3.4 and 3.12–3.14)
Sunday 2/5	Reading response due
Tuesday 2/7	Lecture on <i>Thelma & Louise</i> , directed by Ridley Scott
Thursday 2/9	Lecture on Appiah, Sections 4.1–4.8: Science
Sunday 2/12	Short paper due
Tuesday 2/14	Lecture on Appiah, Sections 4.9–4.14; Thomas Kuhn, <i>The Structure of Scientific Revolutions</i> (excerpts); and Steve Reich, <i>Come Out</i>
Thursday 2/16	Lecture on Appiah, Sections 5.1–5.5: Morality
Sunday 2/19	Reading response due
Tuesday 2/21	Lecture on Appiah, Sections 5.6–5.13: Morality
Thursday 2/23	Lecture on Sarah McGrath, “Moral Disagreement and Moral Expertise”
Winter break	
Tuesday 3/7	Lecture on <i>Aguirre: The Wrath of God</i> , directed by Werner Herzog
Thursday 3/9	Lecture on Appiah, Sections 6.1–6.8: Politics
Tuesday 3/14	Lecture on Appiah, Sections 6.9–6.17: Politics
Thursday 3/16	In-class exam
Sunday 3/19	Reading response due
Tuesday 3/21	Lecture on Charles Mills, <i>The Racial Contract: Overview</i> ; and Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, “Come Out” (from <i>Fase</i>)
Thursday 3/23	Lecture on Appiah, Chapter 7: Law
Sunday 3/26	Reading response due
Tuesday 3/28	Lecture on <i>The House I Live In</i> , directed by Eugene Jarecki
Thursday 3/30	Lecture on Appiah, Chapter 8: Metaphysics (focus on sections 8.1–8.2 and 8.7–8.13)
Sunday 4/2	Reading response due
Tuesday 4/4	Lecture on <i>Rashomon</i> , directed by Akira Kurosawa
Thursday 4/6	Lecture on Appiah, Sections 9.1–9.9: Philosophy
Sunday 4/9	Reading response due
Tuesday 4/11	Lecture on Sally Haslanger, “But Mom, Crop-Tops Are Cute!”
Thursday 4/13	Lecture on Appiah, Sections 9.10–9.13: Philosophy
Sunday 4/16	Reading response due
Tuesday 4/18	Lecture on <i>Run Lola Run</i> , directed by Tom Tykwer
Sunday 4/23	Final paper due