

Introduction to Philosophy
Fall 2020
Class Time:
Eastern Standard Time

Prof. Francey Russell
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(I tend to answer emails M-F, 9-6)
Office Hours: XX and by appointment (don't be shy!)

bell hooks, "Theory as Liberatory Practice."

"When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice...Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end."

Socrates "Apology."

"It is likely that neither of us really knows anything worthwhile, but *this man thinks he knows* something when he does not, whereas I, as I do not know, and neither do I think I know. I seem, then, to be *wiser* than this man to this small extent, that what *I do not think I know what I do not know.*"

Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*.

"There is a persistent temptation to turn philosophy into something less difficult and more shallow than it is. It is an extremely difficult subject, and no exception to the general rule that creative efforts are rarely successful. I do not feel equal to the problems treated in this book. They seem to me to require an order of intelligence wholly different from mine. Others who have tried to address the central questions of philosophy will recognize this feeling."

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Description:

What IS philosophy? One of the things that makes philosophy so exhilarating (maddening?) is that every philosopher provides a new answer to this question, transforming our sense of what philosophy can be and what it can do. Philosophy is an effort to make sense of our most fundamental human questions: What is knowledge? What is critique? What is the good life? Are we morally responsible for what we do? If not, what might human life be like? Sometimes but not always, philosophy offers possible answers. In this class it is our job to try to clarify what these philosophers are saying, and then to issue our own challenges in response. We will explore the idea that philosophy can be a form of *critique*, hence not an abstract or detached academic discipline but something that is, or can be, a demanding form of engagement with the world, oneself, and others.

In this course students will read key primary texts in the history of philosophy and develop their own

philosophical skills, including reading, writing, making arguments, developing ideas with others, applying philosophical concepts to the real world.

Technical Requirements:



Stable internet connection



Laptop or computer



Working microphone



Working webcam

Textbooks:

All readings will be on Canvas *except* **Plato** *Five Dialogues* (Hackett), **Kant** *Groundwork* (Hackett) which you must purchase. They are inexpensive and will be available at Book Culture (536 W. 112th)

Website

This course has a Courseworks/Canvas site. Please should check it regularly, as the syllabus, supplementary readings, and other resources will be posted on the site, as will updates and announcements.

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance, participation: 10%
2. Reading Responses (3, approx. 300-400 words each): 25%
3. Group activities (2 group responses): 15%
4. First paper (approx. 1000 words): 20%
5. Final project (approx. 1200 words): 30%
6. Extra credit response to the film *Orlando*: 5%

Attendance, Participation:

- Material IRL notebook with IRL pen or pencil
 - Give your eyes a break from the screen
 - The screen will already be crowded with me, my slides, your peers
 - Studies show more absorption with handwritten notes
 - More room for creative notetaking
- Speaking up, responding to me, responding to each other, offering your own reflections
- Listening, following what I'm saying, following what your peers are saying, asking yourself what you think about what everyone is saying and writing your own thoughts down
 - You can draw a line down your notebook and keep class notes on one side and leave room for your own reactions/responses on the other

Reading Responses:

There will be three short (300-400) word reading responses due throughout the course. In the first half of each response, you should present the argument from the text, in your own words. In the second half, you should articulate your own response: a critique, a further development, a question, a connection to something else (another philosopher, something in the news, something from another course, from your life, etc.). These are meant to be low stakes, creative, fun (!), and they will allow me to see how you are all doing in terms of your ability to understand and explain these texts.

Group Work:

Papers and final project:

In the first paper (800-1000 words) your task will be to reconstruct an argument that I will select from the readings. Here you are not asked to evaluate or critique it, but present it in the clearest possible light, in a way that demonstrates your understanding of it. To do this, you will need to present the argument in your words, without quotations (though you may cite the relevant page of text in parentheses).

In the final project (1000-1200 words) you will either write a second paper OR something else.

- If a paper: you will spend most of the time reconstructing the argument, but in the final page or so, you will formulate a response. This could be: a well-developed question (that you would not need to answer), a critique of some idea or argument, a further development of some idea or argument, a counter-example, a real-world application, etc. The point here is to bring your voice to the fore and say something about what you've read. The point is *not* to "disprove" the author's argument or simply say they are wrong.
- You will also have the option to write in a different format for the final project: an op-ed, a play, a short story, etc. You'll need to email and discuss with me ahead of time. You can also collaborate with someone else for this.

Lateness:

We are in difficult and unpredictable times and I want to be as flexible as I possibly can. Please try to hand out assignments in on time (this will also help structure your time and work). If you foresee that it will be difficult to hand in on the due date, just write me and we will pick another date. I have no interest in unnecessarily penalizing students. All I ask is that you reach out sooner rather than later.

Grade Guide:

A	94-100	[Absolutely excellent work, almost unimprovable]
A-	90-93	[Excellent work with some minor flaws]
B+	87-89	[Very Good work]
B	84-86	[Good work]
B-	80-83	[Competent work]
C+	77-79	[Acceptable work+]
C	74-76	[Acceptable work]
C-	70-73	[Barely acceptable work]
D	60-69	[Unacceptable work]
F	25	[No assignment turned in]

What is an “online, immersive, experimental seminar”?

On teaching and learning during a pandemic, a fraught presidential election, climate change, and relentless structural racism

Online seminar structure

Technology for the course

Ground rules for online sociality

Academic Honesty:

Plagiarism tends to be quite obvious, and it isn't tolerated. If you look at a website, or another author, etc., and you use these ideas in your own work, you must credit the source. Temptations to plagiarize often arise from stress or anxiety about work. If you are stressed or anxious about work, write or talk to me.

You are expected to abide by the Barnard College and Columbia University honor codes. Students who violate the honor code will be immediately reported to the dean and risk failing the class. If your discussions of class topics with your friends, parents, etc., are helpful, cite them. Credit all sources appropriately, even (especially) Wikipedia and Google discoveries.

Barnard Honor Code:

“We, the students of Barnard College, resolve to uphold the honor of the College by engaging with integrity in all of our academic pursuits. We affirm that academic integrity is the honorable creation and presentation of our own work. We acknowledge that it is our responsibility to seek clarification of proper forms of collaboration and use of academic resources in all assignments or exams. We consider academic integrity to include the proper use and care for all print, electronic, or other academic resources. We will respect the rights of others to engage in pursuit of learning in order to uphold our commitment to honor. We pledge to do all that is in our power to create a spirit of honesty and honor for its own sake.”

Wellness

It is important for all of us to recognize and identify the different pressures, burdens, and stressors we may be facing—whether personal, emotional, physical, financial, mental, or academic—particularly during times of global crisis. Health, sanity, and wellness must always be our priorities. Sleep, exercise, and eating well can all be a part of a healthy regimen to cope with stress. Resources exist to support you in several sectors of your life, and I encourage you to make use of them. Should you have any questions about navigating these resources, please visit these sites:

<http://barnard.edu/primarycare>

<http://barnard.edu/counseling>

<http://barnard.edu/wellwoman/about>

Students with disabilities:

If you are a student with a documented disability and require academic accommodations, please contact CARDS for assistance. Students requesting eligible accommodations in their courses will need to first meet with a CARDS staff member for an intake meeting. Once registered, students are required to visit CARDS each semester to set up new accommodations and learn how to notify faculty. Accommodations are not retroactive, so it is best to register with CARDS early each semester to access your accommodations. If you are registered with CARDS, please see me to schedule a meeting outside of class to review your faculty notification letter and discuss your accommodations for the seminar. Students are not eligible to use their accommodations in this course until they have met with me. CARDS can be reached by email at cards@barnard.edu and by phone at (212) 854-4634.

~Finally, I am here to help you thrive in this class, so please get in touch!

Schedule of Readings

Note: This schedule is provisional and may change. We may speed up, slow down, skip readings, or add readings, depending on where our discussion leads and the interests of members of the class.

Week 1: Knowledge and Critique

1. Introduction and discussion of Kant's "What is Enlightenment?"
2. Kant "What is Enlightenment?"

Week 2: Knowledge and Critique

3. bell hooks "Theory as Liberatory Practice"
4. XX

Week 3: Knowledge vs. Belief

5. Plato *Meno*
Look over Jim Pryor's guide to writing a philosophy paper
6. Plato *Meno*

Week 4: Knowledge vs. Lies

7. Nietzsche. "Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense."
8. Nietzsche. "Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense."

Week 5: Knowledge and Oppression

9. WEB Du Bois. "Of Our Spiritual Strivings;" "The Souls of White Folks."
10. Alison Jaggar "Love and knowledge."

Week 6: Knowledge and Ideology

11. Sally Haslanger “Racism, Ideology, and Social Movements.”
12. Sally Haslanger “Racism, Ideology, and Social Movements.”

Week 7: Kant and Morality OR MAYBE HUME?

13. Kant *Groundwork*, Preface and Section I
14. Kant *Groundwork*, Section I

Week 8: Kant and Morality

15. Kant *Groundwork* Section II
16. Class cancelled

Week 9: On moral responsibility

17. P.F. Strawson. “Freedom and Resentment.”
18. Susan Wolf. “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Moral Responsibility.”

Week 10: Against moral responsibility

19. Tamler Sommers. “The Objective Attitude.”
20. Recap and discussion

Week 11: Genealogy of moral responsibility

21. Nietzsche. *Genealogy of Morals*, Preface and Essay I (§1-10).
22. Nietzsche. *Genealogy of Morals*, Essay I (§11-17) and II (§1-7).

Week 12: Genealogy of moral responsibility

23. Nietzsche. *Genealogy of Morals*, Essay II (§8-25).
24. Thanksgiving no class

Week 13: Beauty and Finitude

25. Iris Murdoch. “Vision and Choice in Morality.” XX
26. Sigmund Freud. “On Transience;” WEB Du Bois “On Beauty and Death”

Week 14: Beauty and Finitude

27. Film: *Arrival*
28. Wrap Up

→ Final Project Due