UPDATING SYLLABI, REIMAGINING ASSIGNMENTS, AND ENCOURAGING ERROR

STRATEGIES FOR RETAINING MARGINALIZED STUDENTS IN PHILOSOPHY
LOSING PHILOSOPHERS

- percentage of women and students of color in philosophy steadily drops from introductory classes onward—impoverishing our discipline
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WHAT’S WRONG WITH PHILOSOPHY?
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• explicit bias and harassment
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http://tinyurl.com/nqtqrqdq
SYLLABI: RETHINKING WHO PHILOSOPHY IS BY, AND FOR

• Introduction to Philosophy syllabi tend to be overwhelming white and male
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  • immediate indication to students of whose voice matters in philosophy; the kind of person who can be a philosopher
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• Introduction to Philosophy syllabi tend to be overwhelming white and male
  • immediate indication to students of whose voice matters in philosophy; the kind of person who can be a philosopher
  • often inadvertently reinforced by implicit biases in teaching and classroom dynamics
  • worth heeding Jennifer Saul’s advice to “begin with a bit of distrust for our initial judgements”

X is bad. Y is worse. If you think that's an endorsement of X, go away and don't come back until you've learned how to think logically.

2:52 AM - 29 Jul 2014

1,082 RETWEETS  1,006 FAVORITES
SYLLABI: RETHINKING WHO PHILOSOPHY IS BY, AND FOR

Richard Dawkins

X is bad. Y is worse. If you think that's an endorsement of X, go away and don't come back until you've learned how to think logically.

2:52 AM - 29 Jul 2014

Richard Dawkins

Date rape is bad. Stranger rape at knifepoint is worse. If you think that's an endorsement of date rape, go away and learn how to think.

2:52 AM - 29 Jul 2014

485 RETWEETS 535 FAVORITES
SYLLABI: RETHINKING WHO PHILOSOPHY IS BY, AND FOR

- Adleberg, Nahmias, and Thompson’s recent large-scale survey at Georgia State University* shows the need to improve syllabi

* ‘Do Men and Women Have Different Philosophical Intuitions? Further Data’, forthcoming in *Philosophical Psychology*. 
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SYLLABI: RETHINKING WHO PHILOSOPHY IS BY, AND FOR

Introduction
How to reason well and avoid fallacious arguments
- Fallacies: Online logical fallacies resources
What is philosophy, and why do it?
- These philosophy articles are insanely difficult—how on earth can I understand them? Pryor, ‘Guidelines on Reading Philosophy’
- What’s the point of doing philosophy? Russell, ‘The Value of Philosophy’, Problems of Philosophy

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION
Is there a god(s)? Where did the world come from?
- The Ontological Argument: St. Anselm, Proslogium (selection)
- The Cosmological Argument: St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica (selection)
- The Wager: Pascal, Thoughts (selection)

What about all the suffering in the world? If there is a god, why would they allow it?
- The Problem of Evil: Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov (selection)
- The Argument from Design: Palley, Natural Theology (selection)
- Critique of the Design Argument: Hume, Natural Religion (selection)

Overview:
- The Role of the Brain: Churchland, ‘Religion and the Brain’

EPISTEMOLOGY
Knowledge and certainty
What is knowledge? What can we know?
- The Nature of Knowledge: Plato, Theaetetus, Meno (selections)
- The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge: The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ‘Justified True Belief’ (selection)
- Gettier Problems: Gettier, ‘Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?’

Can we know anything on the basis of experience?
- Radical Skepticism: Descartes, Meditations I and II

Can we know anything beyond our experience?
- The Problem of Induction: Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (selection)

Why are certain knowers and ways of knowing privileged/ignored in philosophy?
- Invisible biases in epistemology: Code, What Can She Know? (selection)
- Self-knowledge: Kahneman, ‘Thinking Fast and Slow’
- Unconscious influence: Gendler, ‘On the Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias’

METAPHYSICS
Existence and Reality
What things exist? What is reality really like?
- The nature of objects in the external world: Russell, The Problems of Philosophy (selection)
- What’s reality really like? Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (selection)
- Idealism: Berkley, Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous, ‘First Dialogue’, Part II
- Realism about the external world: Moore, ‘Proof of an External World’
- Science and free will: Roskies, ‘Neuroscientific challenges to free will and responsibility’

Free will
Can we really make choices, or does it just seem that way?
- Determinism: Schopenhauer, ‘Freedom of the Will’
- Libertarianism: Chisholm, ‘Human Freedom and the Self

PHILOSOPHY OF MIND
Mind and Body
What’s the relationship between the mind and the body? Is the mind physical? Could a robot or an alien be conscious? What is consciousness?
- The problem of consciousness: Nagel, ‘What is it like to be a bat?’
- Dualism: Descartes and Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia, Correspondence between René Descartes and Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia (selection)
- Functionalism: Levin, ‘Functionalism’
- A Causal-Role Theory: Lewis, ‘Mad Pain and Martian Pain’
- Eliminative Materialism: Churchland, ‘Eliminative Materialism’ (podcast)
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Self-knowledge and social knowledge
How well do we know ourselves? Can self-perception be distorted or incorrect?
• The Unconscious: Freud, ‘The Unconscious’
• False Consciousness: Marx, ‘Estranged Labour’
• Double Consciousness: W.E.B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk (selection)

Are we aware of everything that influences and shapes us?
• Self-knowledge: Kahneman, ‘Thinking Fast and Slow’
• Unconscious influence: Gendler, ‘On the Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias’

METAPHYSICS
Free will
Can we really make choices, or does it just seem that way?
• Determinism: Schopenhauer, ‘Freedom of the Will’
• Compatibilism: Frankfurt, ‘Alternate Possibilities’ and Moral Responsibility’
• Libertarianism: Chisholm, ‘Human Freedom and the Self’
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SYLLABI: RETHINKING WHO PHILOSOPHY IS BY, AND FOR

• Intro. to Philosophy syllabi suggestions:
  • ?
SYLLABI: RETHINKING WHO PHILOSOPHY IS BY, AND FOR

- Readings and philosophers need to be historically and socially situated

Nothing is ever said, learnt, taught, understood or done in an ahistorical socio-cultural vacuum.
SYLLABI: RETHINKING WHO PHILOSOPHY IS BY, AND FOR

- Readings and philosophers need to be historically and socially situated
- Avoids their particular characteristics being made to seem neutral, generic, general—and, so, unassailable (and necessary for philosophical standing)
SYLLABI: RETHINKING WHO PHILOSOPHY IS BY, AND FOR

• Readings and philosophers need to be historically and socially situated
  • avoids their particular characteristics being made to seem neutral, generic, general—and, so, unassailable (and necessary for philosophical standing)
  • reveals the significant material requirements for doing philosophy, and the factors undermining alternative philosophical work
For this assignment read the Correspondence between René Descartes and Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia through carefully.

Write a few personal journal entries from the perspective of Elizabeth of Bohemia:

- What do you really think of Descartes’ replies to your questions?
- Has he fully addressed your concerns?
- What kind of barriers are there to your philosophical work?

In writing these entries, try to ground what you say in the evidence from Elizabeth’s letters themselves. You can round out her character a bit with personal observations, but make your main focus her philosophical views as expressed in her letters.
Reading assignment 10

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Today I wrote to Monsieur Descartes again about my questions regarding the spirit and the connection to the mind. I was confused about how the soul of a human, as a thinking substance, can bring about voluntary physical actions. In order for something to move does it not need to be pushed? Furthermore, isn't how something acts dependent on how it is pushed? I asked Monsieur Descartes for a more in-depth description of the connection between soul and body than that provided in his Meditations. Monsieur Descartes elaborated that he believes we have, up until now, confused the idea of the soul's power to act on the body and the body's power to act on other bodies. He then proceeded to provide an example of a rock, explaining that we readily believe that the rock moves downwards due to it's own weight. As humans, we believe this without proof, which is why we should be able to believe that the soul moves the body. He ended his elaboration by praising my intelligence... however, I do not feel so appeased. He pointed out faults in my reasoning but then covered it up with false praise. While I do realize that he is much better versed in the philosophical inquiry to the body and mind, he must realize that I am much otherwise occupied; the duties that are beholden to me are not easy to bear and I often find my ability to reason much affected by the exhaustion of the day. I may have been slightly snippy in my response. I simply told him that I did not understand how his comparison to the idea of the weight and the rock could be helpful in understanding the relationship between the soul and the body.

Sarah Lamsifer
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Raul Franco

I thought I was going to get an answer from Mr. Descartes when I received his letter, but I only got more confused. First of all, I think he is too old to be “dazzled” by such a young girl as he first writes, and I think he is being too gentle in his explanation because of it. He starts telling me these basic notions that distinguish the body from the mind which I already knew, but those did not really address how the spirit moves the body. Though it may be incorrect to say that the spirit is a material thing that is the only way that I can think the mind can move the spirit. Descartes then gives an example of how the weight of the rock is within it as opposed to an external force, which is an incorrect application of weight and bears no help to answer my question. Though the spirit may be inside the body, I need to know how such an immaterial thing can affect a material thing like the body. Maybe it is because I do not have the time to meditate like he does; my responsibilities to my family do not leave me much time to ponder and meditate. In any case, I think he is not saying what he needs to be said because I am a princess, I need to tell him that this is not helping.
SYLLABI: RETHINKING WHO PHILOSOPHY IS BY, AND FOR

• Social media as a source for readings and feedback
SYLLABI: RETHINKING WHO PHILOSOPHY IS BY, AND FOR

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• Online Resources (http://tinyurl.com/myvjzgv)
  • Diversity & Inclusiveness Syllabus Collection
  • Diversity in Philosophy (Underrepresented Philosophers Database, APA Syllabi on Underrepresented Areas in Philosophy, Diversity Syllabi Project
  • Works by Female Philosophers
  • Some readings by female authors used in introduction to philosophy
  • Core readings in philosophy by female authors for undergraduate curricula
  • Collegium of Black Women Philosophers
  • Re-Reading the Canon
  • ?
CONFIDENCE- AND SKILL-BUILDING ASSIGNMENTS

• In a society as deeply and unconsciously racist, misogynistic, and generally biased as ours, *neutrality is wholly insufficient for equality*
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• In a society as deeply and unconsciously racist, misogynistic, and generally biased as ours, *neutrality is wholly insufficient for equality*
  • more significant problem in philosophy, given its skewed faculty demographics
  • philosophy seen as requiring inherent (just have-the-brain-for-it-or-not) kind of intelligence—more so than any other discipline in the humanities, which is antithetical to women and minorities’ success*

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    (resources to tackle stereotype threat: reducingstereotypethreat.org)


† ‘The Stereotype Threat Hypothesis: An Assessment from the Philosopher’s Armchair, for the Philosopher’s Classroom’, under review at *Hypatia*. 
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  - critical approaches to readings can help increase student confidence by legitimizing their own views


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CONFIDENCE- AND SKILL-BUILDING ASSIGNMENTS

Want to make millions giving people cancer?
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CONFIDENCE- AND SKILL-BUILDING ASSIGNMENTS

TAKE A STEP OUTSIDE YOUR MIND AND EXPERIENCE THE COMPLETE WORLD

Liberate Yourself!

Studying Philosophy will allow you to:
- Break free from the limited and incomplete ideas that dominate our private world,
- Achieve an unrestricted understanding of the complete world through powerful methods such as philosophic contemplation,
- Escape the modes of practicality and rigidity that has guided the intellectual endeavors of mankind for centuries.

Obtain compelling Insight!

Philosophy will also help you to:
- Discover the various truths that are hidden in our everyday lives,
- Explore uncharted avenues of knowledge that can lay the basis for entirely new disciplines,
- Help humanity solve some of its most challenging and thought provoking questions.

Gregory Sylvestre
Keo Chau
CONFIDENCE- AND SKILL-BUILDING ASSIGNMENTS

• importance of constructive, supportive grading:
CONFIDENCE- AND SKILL-BUILDING ASSIGNMENTS

- importance of constructive, supportive grading:
  - grade for content
CONFIDENCE- AND SKILL-BUILDING ASSIGNMENTS

• importance of constructive, supportive grading:
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  • focus on success as much as error
CONFIDENCE- AND SKILL-BUILDING ASSIGNMENTS

• **importance of constructive, supportive grading:**
  • grade for content
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  • give clear, limited guidance on how to improve
CONFIDENCE- AND SKILL-BUILDING ASSIGNMENTS

Reading assignment 6
Monique Whitaker

For this assignment, you need to make an initial, main post on this discussion board—and then also write at least two replies to others posts.

There’s a sub-deadline for your initial post. That has to be made by 11 pm on Monday, 1/13. The deadline for your replies is noon.

Main post:

• First, do some quick online research on the definitions of the concepts of “false consciousness” and “double consciousness” in Marx and Du Bois readings, respectively.
• Once you have a clear idea of what each of these terms means, write a short paragraph, exploring how the concepts of false and/or double consciousness apply to your own life experience, and how this has affected you.
• Also give some thought to ways in which you may be privileged not to have these concepts be particularly relevant to your personal experience. If that is the case, explain why you think that is.
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Gregory Sylvestre
Jan 13, 2014

Greg S

To some extent I could say that double consciousness has played a role in my life. Specifically, when I am placed in a professional environment within a particular area, I feel as if there is a conflict between personas. I recall a time where I used to work at an afterschool program located in a predominantly white area. As a black individual, I cannot say that I did not experience some form of inner conflict. Working with the parents of white children, I indeed noticed that I was particular about the way I spoke to them as well as how I presented myself. Basically, I conformed to how they were. To me, this was what being professional meant. However, in the absence of these parents I relaxed in my manners and reverted to the way I normally spoke and acted. This event happens to me at school, outside, and at hospitals I volunteer at. Wherever a professional environment exists that is mainly composed of whites, I pretty much react in this way on instinct. I think if double consciousness did not have an influence in my life, I would probably be more relatable and comfortable around people in general. I indeed see that adjusting my behavior has made me a little too professional in my mannerisms, especially when meeting people for the first time. In the absence of double consciousness, I probably would seem overall more approachable.
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Keo Chau
Jan 13, 2014

As a Chinese-American, I experience double consciousness everyday, especially when I was younger. After only speaking Chinese at home, it felt right to continue speaking some Chinese in elementary school. However, after hearing a peer say, "This is America, speak English fob" I never looked at myself the same way. Whenever I speak Chinese in public, I feel pairs of eyes from strangers judging me. Luckily, as I grew older I learned to ignore most of these judgmental stares, but I will always be struggling to balance my Chinese heritage as an American.

I don’t think anyone would be able to ignore their double consciousness, unless they are completely oblivious to everything around them or the person is extremely confident. Most humans, judge themselves through other people’s eyes. We always want to impress others and meet their expectations.
ENCOURAGING ERROR

- ungraded, focused free writing
ENCOURAGING ERROR

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- emphasis on the need for messy, rough first drafts that contain numerous mistakes and require much revision
ENCOURAGING ERROR

• ungraded, focused free writing
• emphasis on the need for messy, rough first drafts that contain numerous mistakes and require much revision
• credit/no credit assignments
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Safe Space
I’m committed to making this class a safe space in which absolutely no discrimination in any form, explicit or subtle—whether on the basis of race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, income, mental or physical health, ability, personal characteristics, or the like—will be tolerated.

This class should be an inclusive space for all students. So, if you feel uncomfortable in any way during the course please do let me know. Or, if you prefer, you can contact my colleague Xxxxx Xxxxxx (xxxxxxx@gmail.com), who can advocate on your behalf. You’re also welcome to email anonymously if you’d like.
ENCOURAGING ERROR

• *five-minute free write:*

  How can you correct students’ errors without discouraging them from engaging with and exploring the course material?
ADVERTISE A PHILOSOPHY READING EXERCISE

For this assignment you need to create an advertisement for your favorite philosophy reading:

It's up to you just what format to use, how much text to include, and so on. You should aim, though, to get across the main point(s) of the reading in your ad.