**EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY PHI 3220 CMWA**

**Baruch College, Spring 2014, VC 10170**

**Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:10-12:25.**

**INSTRUCTOR**
Henry Shevlin (hfshevlin@gmail.com, @dioscuri)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Philosophers often like to think of themselves as pretty rigorous and scientific thinkers. However, look closely at most philosophical arguments and you’ll find that they make extensive appeal to intuitions – that is, non-reflective judgements, gut feelings, instincts and hunches. Sometimes they’re explicit about this, and say things like “this argument has counterintuitive consequences.” At other times, they’re sneakier about things, and instead make their appeals to intuition with phrases like “it’s just implausible that…”, “it stands to reason that”, “surely, this couldn’t be right”, “it’s not reasonable to think that…”, “it seems likely that…”. These claims then play some role in supporting or refuting various philosophical theories.

Although philosophers frequently use intuitions, they don’t often take the time to see if ordinary people – sometimes called ‘the folk’ – do, in fact, share the relevant intuitions that they take to be obvious. Experimental philosophy is a new movement that supplements this traditional ‘armchair’ methodology with the methods of cognitive science, using systematic experiments to uncover how people actually think about a range of issues in traditional philosophy. The aim is to better understand the status and scope of philosophical claims, to come to a better understanding of the human mind, and to clarify the role that appeals to intuitions play in philosophical theories.

This course explores this new movement in "experimental philosophy", with a particular eye to seeing how it might (or might not) shed light on perennial problems in ethics, philosophy of mind, and free will. We’ll also do a lot of what’s called *meta-philosophy –* thinking about thinking.

**READING**

The main text is Knobe & Nichols (eds.) *Experimental Philosophy*. I’ll expect you all to have this by the start of next week.

A lot of the material on the course will be assigned from this book. I’ll email you the other articles I want you to read. Here are four other books that we will refer to sometimes and which are very useful. If you have spare money in your book budget or you can track down an electronic copy, then you’ll definitely benefit from having these texts handy!

Alexander – Experimental Philosophy: An Introduction
Dennett – *Intuition Pumps and Other Tools For Thinking*
Kahneman – *Thinking, Fast And Slow*
Knobe & Nichols (eds.) *Experimental Philosophy*, Vol. 2

If you want to do well on the course (by which I mean a B+ or more), you should plan to spend roughly 2-3 hours of reading between weekday sessions and approximately 3-4 hours during the weekends.

**GRADING**

Your grade will be a function of three things: quizzes, a paper, and participation. There will be NO midterm or final exam.

**50% pop quizzes (5% per quiz)** – there will be twelve or thirteen randomly assigned pop quizzes over the course of the summer covering the reading assigned from the previous class. Each quiz will have ten questions. These won’t be particularly hard, but if you haven’t done the reading, you’ll suck at the quiz. At the end of the semester, you’ll get a grade based on your top ten quizzes. Note that there will be more than ten quizzes, so it’s not the end of the world if you miss one due to absence or illness, or completely screw up one quiz. But you want to take as many of them as possible, and do well at them. Also note that I’ll post everyone’s score for the quizzes online, so your awesomeness or suckitude will be very public. Finally, the three students who get the highest final scores in the quizzes are guaranteed an A (provided that they complete all other requirements).

**25% final paper –** at the end of the semester I will expect each student to submit a longer piece of philosophical writing (approximately 2000 words). This should address philosophical themes covered in the class. We’ll discuss topics for your final papers over the course of the semester, and also have a workshop focusing on how I expect you to write and format the paper.

**25% participation, punctuality, and attendance –** I expect all students to attend every class, arrive on time, and participate in class discussions. I appreciate that not everyone

loves debating things in public, so there are some other ways to boost your score. First, you can make sure you volunteer to give answers as we’re grading the pop quizzes. Second, I’ll occasionally ask for volunteers to do mini-presentations on articles for the next class. Finally, you can email me interesting and relevant links, articles, or questions relating to the material.

But here’s a warning: if you say nothing all semester, you’ll struggle to do well on the course.

**POLICIES**

* Show up on time. I notice people who are late, and it will hurt your participation grade. Plus if you come late on a pop quiz day, you’ll miss the quiz.
* At the end of the class, please don’t begin packing up until I explicitly signal that the class session has ended; this too is both distracting and disrespectful.
* Cell phones on silent, please. If your phone rings—especially if your ringtone is some cheesy R&B club hit—you’ll look silly in front of everyone.
* In discussion, be respectful to me and to your fellow students. But especially to me.
* I am happy for student to use laptops for taking notes, but if, as I wander around the classroom, I see you using Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Flickr, or OKcupid, I will instruct you to turn it off (if I see you using Myspace, I will just laugh at you). Also, if you’re using a computer and you look tuned out, I’m pretty much guaranteed to call on you for questions.
* Please treat your email correspondences with me as professionally as possible. You should include your full name and your course section in the body of the email, and should avoid using cheesy slang or netspeak. If you’re asking me to do you a favour – like give you information because you missed class – then ask me nicely.
* **Academic honesty**: Plagiarism, cheating, copying from others, handing in work that isn’t one’s own or isn’t in one’s own words, and all other types of academic dishonesty will result in the offender’s immediate failure of the course. This includes using non-English sources and translating them verbatim. If you are unsure about what counts as academic dishonesty, please consult either me or the following website at your very earliest convenience: [http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/academic/academic\_honesty.html.](http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/academic/academic_honesty.html)

**TIPS ON DOING WELL IN CLASS**

1. Attend every class so you don’t miss material or pop quizzes. Make careful notes.
2. Participate in discussion, and think of something smart to say when I call on you.
3. Do all of the required reading, ideally 1-2 days before class (so your brain has time to digest it).
4. Refresh your memory of the reading an hour or so before each class so you can do well on pop quizzes.
5. Study for exams with classmates, using notes, online study guides, and powerpoints.
6. Do as much as you can earlier in the semester – your life will only get more busy. Start thinking about your paper as early as you can, and put in extra time preparing for the first few pop quizzes.
7. Work like a beast on your final paper, incorporating my suggestions, and hand in something you’re justifiably proud of.
8. **Get everything done on time.**

**READING AND WRITING PHILOSOPHY PAPERS**

Note that reading and writing philosophy papers is unlike reading and writing papers in any other subject, so if you’re relatively new to philosophy, you’ll be required to develop new skills. As a guideline, you should expect to spend at least five minutes reading each page. You should not expect to understand every idea or grasp every reference, but you should try to get an overall understanding of the piece.

Three quick tips: (i) skim read the whole article once, ignoring things you don’t understand; (ii) re-read it again a second time much more slowly, taking at least five minutes per page; (iii) write a brief summary of the article as you read it, and make annotations as you go. In general, expect a ten page philosophy article to take between an hour and an hour and a half to read.

Writing philosophy papers is quite tricky, but we will discuss this in some detail together in class. Jim Pryor has some excellent guidelines on how to read and write philosophy papers. See http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/index.html. We will also discuss these issues in class. Additionally, for assistance with citation formats, see the Newman Library’s online guide: http://newman.baruch.cuny.edu/help/tutorial/Specific\_Topics/cit\_guides.htm.

**SCHEDULE***"No battle plan survives contact with the enemy." - Helmuth von Moltke the Elder.*

I like to be extremely flexible with scheduling. Topics take as long as they take. I also enjoy pursuing relevant tangents. However, here’s a rough idea of some of the topics we might be covering. We won’t have time for all of them, but we’re definitely going to do the first three or four. We can take stock halfway through the semester, and if there’s a topic you’re just desperate to do, maybe we can swap the order around!

**Topic 1 – Introduction to Experimental Philosophy**

*What is X-Phi? How is it different from traditional philosophy and empirical philosophy? How do philosophers use intuitions? When, if ever, are intuitions reliable?*

***Sample readings:***

Knobe and Nichols – ‘An Experimental Philosophy Manifesto’

Prinz – ‘Empirical Philosophy and Experimental Philosophy’
\*Kahneman – *Thinking, Fast And Slow*
\*Appiah – ‘Experimental Philosophy’
\*Dennett – *Intuition Pumps and Other Tools For Thinking*

**Topic 2 – Moral Psychology**

*How do humans arrive at moral judgements? Are our moral judgements reliable? How can they be influenced and skewed? Do some people make more rational moral judgements than others? Are some people just morally superior to others?* ***Sample readings:***\*Haidt – ‘The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail’
\*Inbar et al – ‘Disgust Sensitivity Predicts Intuitive Disapproval of Gays.’
\*Greene – ‘The Secret Joke of Kant’s Soul’
\*Kelly et al – ‘Harm, Affect, and the Moral/Conventional Distinction’
\*Goodman and Darley – ‘The Psychology of Meta-Ethics: Exploring Objectivism’
\*Doris – *Lack of Character*

**Topic 3 – Intentional Action and Folk Psychology**

*What makes an action intentional? Are our judgements about whether an action was done ‘on purpose’ reliable? What is the so-called ‘Knobe effect’?*

***Sample readings:***Knobe – ‘The Concept of Intentional Action’

Nadelhoffer – ‘Bad Acts, Blameworthy Agents, and Intentional Actions’

Cushman and Mele – ‘Intentional Action: Two-and-a-Half Folk Concepts?’

\*Guglielmo and Malle – ‘Can Unintended Side-Effects be Intentional?’

**Topic 4 – Free Will and Responsibility**

*Do human beings ever act freely? Do non-philosophers take determinism seriously? When should we hold people responsible for their actions?*

***Sample readings:***

Nahmias et al – ‘Is Incompatibilism Intuitive?

Nichols and Knobe – ‘Moral Responsibility and Determinism: The Cognitive Science of Folk Intuitions’

Sinnott-Armstrong – ‘Abstract + Concrete = Paradox’

\*Brigard et al – ‘Responsibility and the Brain Sciences’

\*Freiman and Nichols – ‘Is Desert in the Details?’
\*Strawson – ‘Freedom and Resentment’

**Topic 5 – The mind and consciousness**

*Do ordinary people think that corporations and football teams have mental states? Do they think that philosophical zombies are possible? How do they feel about phenomenal consciousness? Do they think that animals are conscious? Are our intuitions about our own experience reliable? Is introspection ever reliable?*

***Sample readings:***\*Knobe & Prinz – ‘Intuitions about consciousness: experimental studies’
\*Sytsma & Machery – ‘How to study folk intuitions about phenomenal consciousness’
\*Haslam et al. – ‘Subhuman, inhuman, and superhuman: contrasting humans and nonhumans in three cultures’
\*Schwitzgebel – ‘The unreliability of naïve introspection’
\*Huebner – ‘Commonsense concepts of phenomenal concepts: Does anyone care about functional

zombies?’
\*Huebner & Sarkissian – ‘What does the nation of China think of phenomenal states?’

**Topic 6 –Cross Cultural and Gender Differences**

*Do different cultures really think differently? Does it affect how they structure their lives? How does this affect their attitudes to ethical and other philosophical issues?*

***Sample readings:***Ames – ‘Reflections on the Confucian self’

Weinberg et al – ‘Normativity and Epistemic Institutions’

Machery et al – ‘Semantics, Cross-Cultural Style’
\*Buckwalter & Stich – ‘Gender and Philosophical Intuition’
\*Nisbett – ‘Culture and systems of thought: Holistic versus analytic cognition.’

\*Heine – ‘Self as Cultural Product’

**Topic 7 – Critics of Experimental Philosophy**

*Is X-Phi a fad? Do philosophers really use intuitions as much as Experimental Philosophers claim? Why should anyone care what ordinary people think about philosophical issues?*

***Sample readings:***Sosa – ‘How Are Experiments Relevant to Intuitions?’

\*Kauppinen – ‘The Rise and Fall of Experimental Philosophy’

\*Ludwig – The Epistemology of Thought Experiments’

Weinberg et al – ‘Are Philosophers Expert Intuiters?’

**IMPORTANT DATES**

Monday January 27th: First day of classes Spring 2014.
Wednesday February 12th: Lincolns' Birthday – College is closed

Monday February 17th: Presidents’ Day – College is closed
Tuesday February 18th: Last day to drop without the grade of 'W'

Thursday February 20th: Classes follow a Monday schedule

Sunday April 6th: Start of Season 4 of *Game of Thrones*.

April 14th – 22th: Spring Recess
Thursday May 15th: Last day of classes for Spring 2014