

Philosophy 249: Consent and Objectification

Mount Holyoke College

Spring 2015

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office hours. Thursdays 4:15-4:45 pm and Tuesdays 2-3 pm

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About the course. This course will focus on topics, such as objectification, choice, and consent, to which feminist thinking has made important contributions. We will draw on a variety of philosophical resources, ranging from liberal and feminist political theory, to speech act theory. We will consider questions such as: Is pornography morally problematic? Can sexism or other biases lead to bad science? Is it wrong to choose to be a stay-at-home parent? The goal will be to see how careful philosophical thought can help us with pressing issues of sex and gender.

Meetings. TTh 11:30-12:45 in Shattuck 216.

Texts.

Jennifer Saul, *Feminism: Issues & Arguments*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

Linda Hirshman, *Get to Work: A Manifesto for Women of the World*, Penguin, 2006.

Other readings available on the course website.

Schedule. This is tentative. I value depth over breadth, as well as the flexibility to adjust the pace and readings to suit the particular needs and interests of this class. N.B. Readings for a given date should be done before class meets on that date.

Day	Date	Topic	N.B.	Reading
1	T 1/20	—	no class	none
2	Th 1/22	Introduction		none
3	T 1/27	The Politics of Language		George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language" Harry Frankfurt, "On Bullshit" Jennifer Saul, Ch. 6: "Feminism and Language Change"
4	Th 1/29	The Politics of Language		Continued.
5	T 2/3	Relativism and Noninterference	Snow day!	Jennifer Saul, Ch. 9: "Feminism and Respect for Cultures" Martha Nussbaum, "Human Capabilities, Female Human Beings"
6	Th 2/5	Relativism and Noninterference		Continued.
7	T 2/10	Bad Science	Guest Speaker: Nina Emery (Brown) - [Canceled because: snow.]	Jennifer Saul, Ch. 8: Feminism, Science, and Bias Peter Lipton, "Inference to the Best Explanation"

Day	Date	Topic	N.B.	Reading
8	Th 2/12	Bad Science		Elizabeth Lloyd, "Pre-Theoretical Assumptions in Evolutionary Explanations of Female Sexuality"
9	T 2/17	Objectification		Rae Langton, "Sexual Solipsism"
10	Th 2/19	Objectification		Optional: Herman, "Could it be worth thinking about Kant on sex and marriage?"
11	T 2/24	Pornography		Jennifer Saul, Ch. 3: Pornography The Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, "Pornography and Harm"
12	Th 2/26	Pornography		Catherine MacKinnon, "Francis Biddle's Sister" Lisa Duggan, Nan D. Hunter, and Carole S. Vance, "False Promises: Feminist Antipornography Legislation"
13	T 3/3	Pornography		Rae Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts"
14	Th 3/5	Pornography		Continued.
15	T 3/10	Social Construction		Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Social Construction: Who? What? When? Where? How?" Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?"
16	Th 3/12	Social Construction		Continued.
	T 3/17		Spring Break	
	Th 3/19		Spring Break	
17	T 3/24	Norms of Feminine Appearance		Saul, Ch. 5 "Feminine Appearance" Sally Haslanger, "'But Mom, crop-tops are cute!' Social Knowledge, Social Structure and Ideology Critique"
18	Th 3/26	Norms of Feminine Appearance		Continued.
19	T 3/31	Choice		Saul, Ch. 1: "The Politics of Work and Family" <i>Optional:</i> Satz, "Feminist perspectives on reproduction and the family"
20	Th 4/2	Choice		Hirshman, <i>Get to Work</i> , pp. 1-38.
21	T 4/7	Work and Family		Hirshman, <i>Get to Work</i> , pp. 39-end.
22	Th 4/9	Work and Family		Continued.
23	T 4/14	Consent		Robin West, "The Harms of Consensual Sex" Baron, "I thought she consented"
24	Th 4/16	Consent		Continued.
25	T 4/21	Catch up day.		

Day	Date	Topic	N.B.	Reading
26	Th 4/23	Catch up day.		

Assignments, Evaluation, and Expectations.

If you want to do well in this class, learn the material, and improve your writing and thinking skills, you should expect to spend roughly 8-12 hours per week *outside* of class working on the material from the class. If that is more time than you think you can spend on this class, then I recommend that you take another.

Participation. Philosophy is a communal activity. Much of it is about asking simple, clarificatory questions. I'll expect you to do at least that much regularly. You are expected to do the assigned readings before class, take notes, prepare questions, and actively participate in class discussion. (Notice, it follows from this that attendance is required.) I realize that participation is more difficult for some of us than others. If you have trouble speaking in class, please see me and we will work on it together. But writing papers, understanding the readings—these too are more difficult for some of us than others. We all must strive to overcome our own difficulties. Class will consist largely of discussion, and everyone is expected to participate.

Readings. Most of the readings we will look at are quite tricky. Some are long and confusing. Give yourself time to digest them. I recommend a two step approach: first, skim, and then carefully read each piece before we discuss it in class. Use the reading assignments to help focus your attention on what is most important. Jot down questions and confusions and raise them in lecture. Second, skim the reading again after we've discussed it. It should be much easier to understand at this point. If you're still unclear about something, get help: ask your email buddies, come by my office hours, etc.

Writing. A major goal of this class is to improve your writing skills. In particular, we'll work on writing clear, concise, persuasive prose. Chances are that you haven't done this sort of writing before—at least not at the level at which we will do it. (At the same time, I hope you will see, it is a much more natural and intuitive way of writing than what you may have been taught in the past.) Like any skill, this one requires practice and patience. Acquiring it will be difficult: you will have to do a lot of writing and rewriting. I am committed to helping you get there because I know that the ability to think critically and express your ideas in clear, crisp prose will serve you well everywhere.

As for my **expectations**, David Foster Wallace said it best in his own syllabus:

If you want to improve your academic writing and are willing to put extra time and effort into it, I am a good teacher to have. But if you're used to whipping off papers the night before they're due, running them quickly through the computer's Spellchecker, handing them in full of high-school errors and sentences that make no sense, and having the professor accept them "because the ideas are good" or something, please be informed that I draw no distinction between the quality of one's ideas and the quality of those ideas' verbal expression, and that I will not accept sloppy, rough-draftish, or semiliterate college writing. Again, I am absolutely not kidding. If you won't or can't devote significant time and attention to your written work, I urge you to drop... and save us both a lot of grief.¹

¹ <http://alosophia.blogspot.com/2008/09/david-foster-wallaces-syllabus.html>

I too am absolutely not kidding.

My expectations for you are high, but I have no doubt every one of you can meet them. To do so you'll have to really engage with the class—read all the instructions carefully, focus on your work, don't leave it to the last minute, proofread, rewrite, and proofread again. You'll have to stay in touch with your classmates and with me to make sure you're understanding the materials. Notice that these are all things anyone can do. It doesn't take genius or a PhD in Philosophy: it just takes care and attention.

Requirements.

Reading Assignments - 20% - pass/fail - no comments

Short Paper - 35% - letter grade - written feedback

Final Paper - 45% - letter grade - in person feedback after break

Note. You must receive a passing grade in each of the two categories in order to pass the class. E.g., you must receive a passing grade on both reading assignments and on papers.

Also note. I do not grade on a curve. The grading system, however, is designed to do take improvement into account automatically: later assignments are worth more, and since you'll have improved your skills by then, this improvement will be reflected in your final grade.

Deadlines.

Reading Assignments - Weekly, Mondays at 8 pm.

Short Paper - Friday, March 13th at 8 pm.

Final Paper - Thursday, April 30th at 8 pm.

FAQs about assignments.

What does it take to pass a reading assignment? Don't bullshit, don't get it completely wrong, and write it in clear, grammatical English.

What does it take to pass a paper? Same as above. See below for more detailed descriptions of letter grades.

Can I have feedback on reading assignments? You have the option of sending me one of your reading assignments for short written feedback. You can do this for one of the assignments in the semester, and you can pick which one it is. If you want to do this, send the assignment to my regular email as well as uploading it to Moodle and indicate that you want feedback on it. I will try to get you comments within 7 days, but it might be longer (depending on when you have turned it in, how many others I've received, etc.). I will not grade the assignment. This is only to give you some feedback, if you are interested in it.

When will my paper be graded? In a class of this size, I aim to return papers within at most three weeks of the date they were submitted. I realize it's hard to wait, but it's also hard to grade. I want to give your work the time and attention it deserves.

Reading assignments won't receive comments but will be marked pass/fail within a week.

For the *short paper*, grades and comments will be available on Moodle.

For the *final paper*, I offer face-to-face feedback toward the start of the following semester. (For example: if you write a final paper for me in the fall semester, I will offer feedback at the start of the spring semester).

If you're interested in this, get in touch with me during the first week of the following semester and we will schedule a time. If one of us is not on campus that semester, we will find another way of communicating.

Can I send you a draft to read? I'm happy to work with you on your paper, but I don't read drafts. Feel free to come by my office hours with questions, an outline, an argument you're considering, etc. We can talk through your ideas and questions. Don't forget also that you can go to the SAW mentor for drafts.

What sources should I use for writing my paper? You do NOT need to read any additional material beyond the assigned reading. In some cases, it might be helpful to read one or two additional articles connected to your topic—especially if you're having trouble understanding it. I am happy to give you additional reading suggestions if you are interested. Do not blindly rely on what you Google, however.

I'd like to talk about my grade. Grades are non-negotiable, but I'm always happy to talk about how you could improve. If you ever find yourself confused about the comments you receive on your assignments, or cannot see why you received the grade you received, please come see me as soon as possible.

Submission instructions. Presenting your assignments in a professional manner is important. It demonstrates respect for yourself and for your audience. Don't waste your reader's time with easy to fix mistakes, like typos, and don't distract them with crazy fonts or weird formatting. Most assignments will be submitted on Moodle. Please use the following guidelines.

For Weekly Reading Assignments.

- Prepare these in whatever word processor you use.
- Proofread, spell check, etc.
- Cite any sources you use beyond the primary reading (but see above about not needing outside sources and below about how to cite them).
- Copy and paste the content into the submission box on Moodle.

For Papers.

- *Word count* at end of paper (exclude bibliography, etc., when calculating).
- *Double space* (except block quotes which should be single spaced and indented).
- *Standard margins* (1 inch), font size (12pt), style (Times New Roman), etc.
- *Cite sources* in a clear, consistent way. MLA, Chicago Style, I don't care. Just be consistent.²
- *Electronic copies* should be in PDF format and named as follows: *assignment_MMDDYY.pdf* for example: *paper01_022814.pdf*
 - Why PDFs? PDFs are more professional than docs and allow you to control how your work looks to your audience. If you don't know how to convert a document into PDF format, figure it out: ask Google, the help desk, or your email buddies.
- **Extremely important:** I use Moodle's blind-grading option. **Do not put your name anywhere in or on your paper**—not in the filename and not in the document—as it will compromise anonymity. (This doesn't hold for the weekly reading assignments.)

Very Important. For Tuesday, January 27th, do the following.

The assigned readings, in this order:

1. Vavova, The Syllabus. All of it. Seriously.
2. Orwell
3. Frankfurt
4. Saul, Ch. 6.

² E.g., http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html.

Assignment:

1. Take the plagiarism tutorial (even if you've done it before): <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/ris/Plagiarism/>.
2. Answer this question: Did you learn anything from taking the plagiarism tutorial? If so, what? If not, why not?
3. Write down six questions you have about the readings (at least one about each, including the syllabus). Questions may be merely clarificatory, but should be thoughtful.
4. Copy the following statement, inserting your name: "I, <insert name here>, have read the entirety of the syllabus for Philosophy 249 and agree to follow its dictates while enrolled in the course." This is an exception to the usual anonymity rule from above.
5. Explain what the "M&M clause" was in a clear way, so that an intelligent ten year old would understand it. Google it, if you don't know. Cite your sources.

Format this according to the above instructions—except the one about excluding your name. To submit, bring a hard copy to class.

Late Policy. Assignments will be penalized by **one letter grade** for **every day late**. This means that if you submit an A paper, five days left, the highest grad you can get is an F. (That is still higher than a zero, so worth turning in.) Of course, things happen. Hence: THE GET OUT OF JAIL FREE POLICY. You get two get out of jail free cards. They aren't real cards, but you really can use them. Each is good for a three-day extension (from the original due date). The only constraints are: (1) you must submit the card on or before the assignment due date, (2) you can only use one per assignment, and (3) extensions cannot go past the end of the exam period. *To use a card:* log into Moodle. Find the assignment you'd like to use the card on. Open it as if you're going to submit it. Write "JAILCARD" in the submission box. That's it! No need to email me to ask for permission or detail an excuse. The point of the is that you not have to do this.

Communication. Important announcements and assignments will be communicated to you via email or in class. It is your responsibility to make sure you are up to date with the latest news. So check your email daily and don't miss class. If you do miss class, check with your group members, whose contact information you can write here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Of course, you are always welcome to email me with any questions. But please keep in mind:

- I do not answer emails in the evening or on weekends.
- I respond as promptly as I can, but not always on the same day.
- I don't respond to emails about assignments that are due within 24 hours of the email.
- I do not answer questions that are clearly answered by the syllabus or assignment instructions. If you're not hearing back from me, that may be a hint to double check the relevant materials. That said, after you've carefully examined the assignment *and* checked with your group, you shouldn't hesitate to ask me to clarify anything. I have many wonderful students. This is the only way I can manage to respond promptly to questions that *do* need to be answered via email

Attendance. Most of the action happens in class—it is where I give away all the answers. Seriously. I guarantee that this is not one of those classes in which you can read by yourself and ace the assignments. So, you won't want to skip class. If you must miss class, proceed as follows:

1. Contact your email buddies for notes and updates.
2. Check Moodle for handouts and supplementary materials.
3. Do the readings, study your buddy's notes, and carefully examine the handouts.

4. Come to my office hours with questions.

Office Hours. I like meeting with you and encourage you to come to office hours. I'd be happy to discuss the material we've been covering, possible paper topics, or any other issues, questions, or concerns you might have. No need to let me know in advance that you're coming or make an appointment. Just show up. If I'm in a meeting, knock and let me know that you've arrived. I try to keep all my student meetings during my office hours. If you have another class scheduled during my office hours and would like to meet, send me an email or talk to me after class and we can arrange an alternate time. Class conflict is the only reason for such an exception.

Gadgets. Turn them off or leave them at home. Laptops, phones, the lot of them. Numerous studies show that students learn better without using laptops in class, even if the laptops are used exclusively for note-taking. Laptops and other electronics can also be distracting for other students. If you have trouble taking notes by hand, let me know immediately we will work something out.

Academic Honesty. Upon entering Mount Holyoke College, you each signed a pledge to uphold the honor code. It is your responsibility to read and understand *A Guide to the Uses and Acknowledgment of Sources* and the Student Handbook, which define the standards adopted by the College. It is also your responsibility to observe the established procedures in preparing assignments and writing papers and examinations, and to submit as your own only that work that you have originated.³

I expect you will all honor the pledge you signed.

Therefore, everything you turn in should be *your own work* and *in your own words*. If your discussions of class topics with your friends, dogs, parents, etc., are helpful, cite them. Credit all sources appropriately, even (especially) Wikipedia and your Googling bounty. (That said, you are not encouraged to seek outside sources—especially Wikipedia. You should be able to complete all the work for this class with just the readings I provide.)

Important. It is a requirement of this class that you take the plagiarism tutorial: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/ris/Plagiarism/>. I will trust you have completed it. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty and to avoid it. Accidental plagiarism is still plagiarism. If in doubt, cite, cite, cite.

In short, do not plagiarize. I *will* fail you.

Assistance. Besides myself, you have a number of resources available to help you succeed.

* You should go to the **SAW center** for help on your assignments. Well-trained peers are there to look over your drafts, help you plan your arguments, etc. There are drop-in hours, and you may go as many times as you want. This is a great resource. Use it.⁴

* There may be a **SAW mentor** in this course. If there is, *go to her*. She is there to read drafts, help you organize your thoughts, talk about the material, and so forth.

* In order to receive reasonable accommodations for a disability, you must register with the **Office of AccessAbility Services**. This office will provide a letter describing the appropriate accommodations. Once you have this letter, set up an appointment with me and we will discuss it.⁵

³ https://www.mtholyoke.edu/deanofstudents/student_handbook

⁴ <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/saw/peer/center>

⁵ <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/accessability>

Grading. Your paper will be evaluated along three dimensions of roughly equal weight:

1. The clarity and soundness of the *argument* for your *thesis*.
2. Your demonstrated understanding of readings and material covered in class.
3. Your insight and creativity in engaging the issues.

Here is what the Mount Holyoke College student handbook says about grades: "As a general guide to instructors, the faculty has agreed to the following equivalencies to letter grades:

A = excellent; B = good; C = satisfactory; D = minimally passing; F = failing." ⁶

Consider: 'B' means 'good'. The obvious question is: what does 'good' mean? I take 'good' to mean good. Therefore, if you do a good job on a paper, you will get a B. This means you have done a good job, and should be happy. 'A' means 'excellent'. This does not mean you have to write a publishable paper or be the next Immanuel Kant to get an A. It does mean that you have to demonstrate some real understanding and aptitude for doing philosophy.

N.B. Do not assume that merely completing the assignment without making any mistakes suffices for an A. (More on this in a moment.) Also, do not panic if your first paper receives a low grade. Track record data suggests that you will get the worst grade you have ever received on the first assignment in this class. N.B. This paragraph applies for you even if you have taken a philosophy class before. Even if this class has been with me. Again, inductive evidence suggests that it applies to you even if you don't think it applies to you. Fewer than 10% of students are able to write above the B- level in their first attempts. Don't let this discourage you. Writing is hard, but it is a skill you can learn. People who make a serious effort often write B+ or A- papers by the end of term.

A final note on grading. Students are often puzzled by the grading standards for papers. Some ask, "If I answered the question competently without making any significant errors, why didn't I get an A?" Here is a guideline for how papers in this course are graded. (N.B. these are the standards for papers prior to assigning late penalties.)

B is the baseline grade for good, competent, but not exceptional work; a solid paper, with some notable mistakes or obscurities, but no serious misunderstandings. At the very least, a B paper does the following:

- addresses all parts of the paper topic
- offers consistent, coherent arguments for a clearly articulated position that makes sense
- considers a significant objection to that position
- replies to that objection
- makes relevant use of course readings and lectures, displaying a grasp of their content
- is generally well-written and well-organized
- does not contain significant misunderstandings

Papers deserving a grade higher than a B meet all these criteria, but do something more.

B+ This is a well-written paper with nothing terribly wrong. It meets all the criteria for a B paper, but also shows more promise or originality. It may do this by working out ordinary ideas to a greater depth than usual, or develop relevant arguments that demonstrate real mastery of the course readings without merely replicating them. Alternatively, a B+ paper might present an unusually apt analogy that illuminates a previously obscure aspect of the problem; a clever counterexample to a seemingly persuasive claim; a sharp distinction that does real philosophical work; a subtle point drawn from a close reading of a text; a

⁶ https://www.mtholyoke.edu/deanofstudents/student_handbook

compelling illustration or application of a principle, and so forth. A B+ paper receives the beginnings of distinction, but its ideas need further development: it doesn't stand out like or operate at as advanced a level as an A- paper.

A or A- These grades are reserved for outstanding work that operates at an advanced level. A paper that just gives a straightforward or obvious response to some philosophical or interpretative problem would not merit an A or A-, even if it is clear. An A or A- paper does something extra—but not at the cost of a clear treatment of the problem. If there are any significant problems with the writing or the organization of the paper, then it won't merit even an A-: this is because good clear writing and organization are not separable from good thinking. An A or A- paper thus meets all the criteria for a B+ paper, but does something more. For example:

- working out the original, striking, or powerful idea, argument, or illustration/application fully and deeply, demonstrating a firm grasp of the underlying concepts, principles, facts, and argumentative strategy
- offering an unusually comprehensive survey of possible moves by both sides, and clearly and systematically evaluating them, to come to a closely reasoned conclusion. The survey is systematic, not scattershot: it develops the alternatives logically and to substantial depth.
- offering an unusually sophisticated, close and systematic reading of a text, paying attention to tensions and contradictions in the author's work, alternative interpretations of passages (offering persuasive arguments for preferring one interpretation to another), or interpretations that bring out philosophically significant points, especially if they offer fresh, unconventional readings

Papers deserving a grade lower than a B fail to meet the criteria and demonstrate carelessness or confusion.

B- This paper contains significant errors, omissions or misunderstandings, but still, there is an effort. The author has some understanding of the problem and of the relevant texts. She does offer some argument. A paper with no argument won't merit a B-. Some ways such a paper might go wrong include:

- the writing is distractingly unclear
- organization is poor: important points aren't logically ordered or signposted
- there are straightforward mistakes and misunderstandings about what the problem is, or about what other philosophers say
- the problem is presented clearly but not really addressed
- doesn't answer one part of the paper topic
- misunderstands a substantial philosophical point or confuses distinct positions
- doesn't articulate a consistent position
- doesn't consider objections to one's position
- wastes space on issues not pertinent to the paper topic
- offers a confused, sloppy, superficial, or erroneous interpretation of course readings or other cited texts

C+ There are more serious problems. Either the writing is really hard to get through; or the paper has no discernible structure; or the author doesn't understand the text or the positions she is discussing; or the paper doesn't really attempt to offer any argument. Alternatively, a paper may merit a C+ or lower if it fails to do what was asked in the paper prompt.

Papers with more problems will earn grades of **C or below**. Papers that plagiarize or don't make a serious effort will not pass.

Do keep in mind: a low grade on the first assignment is not cause for immediate concern. It's cause for reflection, learning, and working harder. A failure to improve over the course of the assignments is cause

for concern. Even if you submit an A paper, I will expect you to do better on your next assignment. If you aren't improving, wherever you start from, neither of us is doing our jobs well.