

# Philosophy Against Itself

## Philosophy 43604

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### 1 Office information

411 Malloy Hall  
Tuesday 1-4pm and by appointment

### 2 This course

Philosophy Against Itself is a survey of several kindred philosophical projects of the late 20th and early 21st Centuries. Their common bond is their reaction to the idea of philosophy as a discipline devoted to constructing theories and answering sublime questions. Since that idea is very commonplace, these projects have been described as anti-philosophical. Our reading will show this characterization to be false. We will see that these philosophical projects are devoted to fighting the urge to distort those questions by mistaking them for ordinary ones. The terrain of the struggle will be reflection on the occasions that give rise to familiar philosophical dispute, the history of the interaction between philosophy and science in Modern Europe, and a deconstruction of the idea of a timeless and pure vantage point from which science and culture can be “critiqued” and “grounded.” The result of this struggle is twofold: a better understanding of the role that philosophy plays in our lives and in the development of scientific and humanistic achievements; control over when to engage in philosophy and when to let things lie as they are.

### 3 Texts

We will read two books.

1. *Philosophical Investigations* by Ludwig Wittgenstein
2. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* by Richard Rorty

In addition, I will make available a number of essays that will support, address, or combat the principle themes from these books. I will circulate copies of these informally as we proceed.

## 4 Requirements

There are two requirements for this course.

The first requirement is to be engaged in the class through regular attendance and contributions to our discussion. In addition to the common sense idea about what good class participation is, I expect a specific contribution in the form of a half hour presentation *on* (not *of*!) a historical text. You will be responsible for finding the text, preparing a short lecture about it or leading a short discussion about it, and circulating a handout for the rest of us to read one week prior to your presentation. This handout should either contain relevant passages of the text itself or an informal description of the insights and observations you want to share (and in typical cases both).

The second requirement is to write a term paper. You may give this to me any time up to the last day of class. You may submit drafts of it at any time if you want feedback. The term paper can be about anything that is evidently related to this course, with the exception that it should not be about the same thing that your in-class presentation is about.

## 5 Grades

Your grade will be determined roughly equally by your achievements in the two course requirements.

For the first requirement, occasional insightful questions, helpful comments and in class explanations of ideas that we encounter are all important as is the quality and originality of your presentation.

The second requirement will be graded according to the originality and depth of the views you articulate. I expect you to stumble upon an idea or question that interests you and to put a good deal of time into researching the topic and developing your thoughts prior to writing your paper. It should be evident to anyone reading your paper that the views expressed in it are interesting to you, and it should be reasonably clear why people would be interested in reading your paper twice. I won't grade you directly on your mastery of "philosophers' skills" like argument analysis, conceptual clarity, etc. Instead I assume that you have these skills and can use them as a vehicle for expressing provocative or illuminating original views about the nature of philosophy and its practice.

## 6 Note

Please be aware of the University's policies regarding academic honesty, anti-discrimination, and access to education for students with disabilities.

Here is the web-page of the office for students with disabilities:

<http://www.nd.edu/~osd/NEWHOME PAGE.htm>

Here is the Philosophy Department's web-page devoted to academic honesty, with links to information about plagiarism and the University's honor code:

<http://philosophy.nd.edu/undergraduate-program/honesty/>

In addition I am someone you can approach if you have concerns about discrimination or proper scholarly behavior, whether or not the concern is related to this course.

## 7 Important dates

March 14	no class	spring break
March 16	no class	spring break
April 18	no class	Passover
April 20	no class	Passover
April 25	no class	Passover
May 10	Tuesday, 4:15pm	class