PHI 4552 Social Reality

University of Central Florida

College of Arts and Humanities

Department of Philosophy

Fall 2023

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Course Description

We live in a socialreality. We are patrons of social establishments like restaurants, stores, and universities. We are members of social groups like fraternities, sororities, and sports teams. We are governed by political bodies like the Congress and the Supreme Court. Indeed, aspects of our very selves may be constituted by the social roles we play—we are teachers, students, roommates, children, parents, philosophy majors, and so on. But what arethese social phenomena, most fundamentally? Are they real? Do they have causal powers? What is social construction? Are gender, race, disability, and other human identity categories social constructions? And what sorts of methods and assumptions should we bring to the metaphysics of social reality? This course is a survey of contemporary social metaphysics.

Course Goals

*•* Understand various philosophical views, arguments, and their applications to daily life by:

* Reading before M/W/F class meetings,
* attending class,
* asking clarification questions (ex. “What does this term mean?”), and
* discussing in class and on the webcourse forums

• Develop the transferable skills such as:

* critical thinking skills,
* close reading skills,
* academic writing skills, and
* intellectual charity

Texts

All readings are available for download on the Webcourse page.

Assessments

* Participation (15%)

Active participation is essential to your success in this course. Please speak up during class as often as you can. Here are some ways to do that: respond to a question, raise an objection, follow-up on another student’s comment, or ask a simple clarification question (ex. “Can you explain X again?” or “What does X mean?”)

* Test (20%)

There will be an in-class exam, tentatively scheduled for 10/6. Covers the problem of material constitution, artifacts, social objects, and social groups. Questions will be a mixture of true/false, multiple-choice, and short essays. I will provide more information about the test’s format and content one week beforehand.

* 3 Short Papers (30% total)

Three short papers—two argument reconstruction papers, and one argument analysis paper.

I will post a prompt, a writing guide, and a sample argument analysis paper roughly two weeks before the relevant due dates. Please note that, although these papers are very short, you should plan to start writing and rewriting them well in advance of the due date.

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|  | Topic | Maximum Length | Percentage | Due Date |
| Reconstruction Paper #1 | Material Constitution | 1 page,double-spaced | 5% | 9/15 (tentative) |
| Reconstruction Paper #2 | Social Groups | 2 pages,double-spaced | 10% | 9/25 (tentative) |
| Analysis Paper | Social Construction | 5 pages,double-spaced | 15% | 11/6 (tentative) |

* Term Paper (35% total)

A 6—12 page term paper on a topic of your choice. Two components:

* Rough Draft (5%)—due right before Thanksgiving Break
* Final Draft (30%)—a revised, expanded, and improved version of your rough draft. Due during finals week (exact date TBD).

Attendance Policy

Each student is allotted **three** penalty-free absences throughout the semester, which you can take whenever you want, for whatever reason, and without notifying me ahead of time. However, every subsequent unexcused absence will adversely affect your final course grade. The fourth unexcused absence lowers your grade by one-third of a letter grade (ex. an A becomes an A-), the fifth unexcused lower yours grade by two-thirds (ex. an A becomes a B+), and so on.

Accessibility Policy

I am committed to providing accommodations to students with disabilities. If you are eligible for accommodations, please contact UCF’s Student Accessibility Services by phone at (407) 823-2371, by email at sas@ucf.edu, or in Ferrell Commons 185. Through Student Accessibility Services, a Course Accessibility Letter may be created and sent to professors, which informs faculty of potential access and accommodations that might be reasonable. Determining reasonable access and accommodations requires consideration of the course design, course learning objectives and the individual academic and course barriers experienced by the student.

Academic Integrity Statement

Academic misconduct of any sort will not be tolerated. If you have questions about what qualifies as academic misconduct, please familiarize yourself with Section I of UCF’s Rules of Conduct (<https://scai.sdes.ucf.edu/student-rules-of-conduct>). Here is the University’s description of the potential consequences of academic misconduct: “Penalties for violating rules, policies, and instructions within this course can range from a zero on the exercise to an “F” letter grade in the course. In addition, an Academic Misconduct report could be filed with the Office of Student Conduct, which could lead to disciplinary warning, disciplinary probation, or deferred suspension or separation from the University through suspension, dismissal, or expulsion with the addition of a “Z” designation on one’s transcript. Being found in violation of academic conduct standards could result in a student having to disclose such behavior on a graduate school application, being removed from a leadership position within a student organization, the recipient of scholarships, participation in University activities such as study abroad, internships, etc.”

For more information about Academic Integrity, students may consult The Center for Academic Integrity <<http://www.academicintegrity.org/icai/assets/FVProject.pdf>>.

For more information about plagiarism and misuse of sources, see “Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practices” <<http://wpacouncil.org/node/9>>.

Students should also familiarize themselves with the procedures for academic misconduct in UCF’s student handbook, *The Golden Rule* <<http://goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/docs/goldenrule.pdf>>. UCF faculty members have a responsibility for students’ education and the value of a UCF degree, and so seek to prevent unethical behavior and when necessary respond to academic misconduct. Penalties can include a failing grade in an assignment or in the course, suspension or expulsion from the university, and/or a “Z Designation” on a student’s official transcript indicating academic dishonesty, where the final grade for this course will be preceded by the letter Z. For more information about the Z Designation, see <<http://goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/zgrade>>.

Campus Safety Statement

Emergencies on campus are rare, but if one should arise during class, everyone needs to work together. Students should be aware of their surroundings and familiar with some basic safety and security concepts.

* In case of an emergency, dial 911 for assistance.
* Every UCF classroom contains an emergency procedure guide posted on a wall near the door. Students should make a note of the guide’s physical location and review the online version at <<http://emergency.ucf.edu/emergency_guide.html>>.
* Students should know the evacuation routes from each of their classrooms and have a plan for finding safety in case of an emergency.
* If there is a medical emergency during class, students may need to access a first-aid kit or AED (Automated External Defibrillator). To learn where those are located, see <<http://www.ehs.ucf.edu/workplacesafety.html>> (click on link from menu on left).
* To stay informed about emergency situations, students can sign up to receive UCF text alerts by going to <[my.ucf.edu](http://my.ucf.edu)> and logging in. Click on “Student Self Service” located on the left side of the screen in the toolbar, scroll down to the blue “Personal Information” heading on the Student Center screen, click on “UCF Alert”, fill out the information, including e-mail address, cell phone number, and cell phone provider, click “Apply” to save the changes, and then click “OK.”
* Students with special needs related to emergency situations should speak with their instructors outside of class.
* To learn about how to manage an active-shooter situation on campus or elsewhere, consider viewing this video (<<https://youtu.be/NIKYajEx4pk>>).

Active Duty Military Students Policy

Students who are deployed active duty military and/or National Guard personnel and require accommodation should contact their instructors as soon as possible after the semester begins and/or after they receive notification of deployment to make related arrangements.

Controversial Content Disclaimer

This course will discuss some potentially controversial issues. Part of the purpose of the course is to enable you to understand how reasonable people might disagree about such issues (especially involving ethics and justice). You are not required to believe any particular position that we discuss and examine on such issues. You are expected, however, to have an open mind and to try to understand the arguments (and to consider the ideas and evidence used in such arguments) for many different positions on these issues, and to critically examine and respectfully discuss such arguments, ideas and evidence.

Schedule of Readings[[1]](#footnote-1)

Week 1: Artifacts

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| M 8/21 | W 8/23 | F 8/25 |
| **Course Overview** | **The Problem of Material Constitution** | **Constitutionalism** |
| N/A | Wasserman, “Material Constitution” , §1—2 | * Wiggins, “On Being in the Same Place at the Same Time”
* Baker, “The Ontology of Artifacts”, pp. 1—4
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| M 8/28 | W 8/30 | F 9/1 |
| **Artifacts** | **Hurricane Day** | **Instructor Illness**  |
| * Baker, “The Ontology of Artifacts”, pp. 4—10
* Optional: Thomasson, “Realism and Human Kinds”, pp. 580—584 & pp. 592—607
 | No Class | No Class |

Week 2: Artifacts

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| --- | --- | --- |
| M 9/4 | W 9/6 | F 9/8 |
| **Labor Day** | **Eliminativism** | **Eliminativism** |
| No Class | Merricks, “Epiphenomenalism and Eliminativism” | Merricks, “Epiphenomenalism and Eliminativism” |

Week 3: Artifacts

Week 4: Social Objects

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| --- | --- | --- |
| M 9/11 | W 9/13 | F 9/15 |
| **The Puzzle of Social Objects** | **Materialism** | **Immaterialism** |
| Passinsky, “Social Objects, Response-Dependence, and Realism” | Passinsky, “Social Objects, Response-Dependence, and Realism” | Korman, “The Metaphysics of Establishments” |
| \*Reconstruction Paper #1 due | N/A | N/A |

Week 5: Social Objects

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| --- | --- | --- |
| M 9/18 | W 9/20 | F 9/22 |
| **Immaterialism** | **Immaterialism** | **The Puzzles of Social Groups** |
| Korman, “The Metaphysics of Establishments” | Korman, “The Metaphysics of Establishments” | * Ritchie, “The Metaphysics of Social Groups” §1
* Uzquiano, “The Supreme Court and the Supreme Court Justices” §1—2 & §4
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Week 6: Social Groups

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| M 9/25 | W 9/27 | F 9/29 |
| **The Constitution View** | **The Mereological View** | **The Mereological View** |
| Uzquiano, “The Supreme Court and the Supreme Court Justices” §6 | Hawley, “Social Mereology” | Hawley, “Social Mereology” |
| \*Reconstruction Paper #2 due |  |  |

Week 7: Social Groups

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| --- | --- | --- |
| M 10/2 | W 10/4 | F 10/6 |
| **The Structuralist View** | **Two Types of Social Groups** | **Exam** |
| Ritchie, “What are Groups?”§1 & §6 | Ritchie, “The Metaphysics of Social Groups” §2—4 | N/A |

Week 8: Social Construction I

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| --- | --- | --- |
| M 10/9 | W 10/11 | F 10/13 |
| **Collective Acceptance I** | **Collective Acceptance I** | **Collective Acceptance II** |
| Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* Chapter 1 | Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* Chapter 1 | Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* Chapter 2 |

Week 9: Social Construction I

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| --- | --- | --- |
| M 10/16 | W 10/18 | F 10/20 |
| **Collective Acceptance II** | **Collective Acceptance III** | **Collective Acceptance III** |
| Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* Chapter 2 | Thomasson, “Foundations for a Social Ontology”  | Thomasson, “Foundations for a Social Ontology”  |

Week 10: Gender

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| --- | --- | --- |
| M 10/23 | W 10/25 | F 10/27 |
| **Collective Acceptance III** | **The Sex/Gender Distinction**  | **Gender as Socially Conferred** |
| Thomasson, “Foundations for a Social Ontology”  | * Byrne, “Are Women Adult Human Females?”
* Mason, “Women are Not Adult Human Females”
 | Ásta, “The Metaphysics of Sex and Gender” |

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| --- | --- | --- |
| M 10/30 | W 11/1 | F 11/3 |
| **Gender as Social Structure** | **Gender Identity** | **Gender Identity** |
| Haslanger, “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?” | Jenkins, “Amelioration and Inclusion” (Sections I & II.A—II.B) | Jenkins, “Amelioration and Inclusion” (Section III & IV) |

Week 11: Gender

Week 12: Social Construction II

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| --- | --- | --- |
| M 11/6 | W 11/8 | F 11/10 |
| **Gender Identity** | **Social Structures I** | **No Class** |
| Barnes, “Gender without Gender Identity” | Haslanger, “Social Construction: The Debunking Project” | Veterans Day |
| \*Analysis paper due | N/A | N/A |

Week 13: Social Construction II

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| --- | --- | --- |
| M 11/13 | W 11/15 | F 11/17 |
| **Social Structures I** | **Social Structures II** | **Social Structures II** |
| Haslanger, “Social Construction: The Debunking Project” | Haslanger, “Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground” | Haslanger, “Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground” |

Week 14: Race

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| --- | --- | --- |
| M 11/20 | W 11/22 | F 11/24 |
| **Race Eliminativism** | **Thanksgiving Break** | **Thanksgiving Break** |
| Appiah, “How to Decide if Races Exist” | No Class | No Class |
| \*Term paper draft due |  |  |

Week 15: Race

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| --- | --- | --- |
| M 11/27 | W 11/29 | F 12/1 |
| **Race Eliminativism** | **Constructionism about Race**  | **Constructionism about Race**  |
| Appiah, “How to Decide if Races Exist” | Mills, “But What Are You *Really*?” | Mills, “But What Are You *Really*?” |

1. Note: this schedule is **tentative**. It is subject to change based on student needs, instructor illness, and/or COVID-19 related disruptions. I will distribute an updated schedule if and when such scheduling changes occur. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)