

Philosophy of Sport: PHIL 120

Syllabus

TR:

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Office Hours: MW, 11-12 or by appointment

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Description

This course focuses on the nature, value, and experience of sports. We'll begin by considering a nearby category: games. After examining the nature of games, we'll ask what the relationship between games and sports is. To try to further our understand of the nature of sports, we'll look at the nature of achievement and norms for engaging with sports: for example, what can the badness of cheating, the goodness of sportsmanship, our emotional engagement with sports, or the dangers and competition we expose ourselves to in sports tell us about their nature and value? We'll also talk about the aesthetic experience of playing sports, and we'll examine the question of whether gender should be grounds for discrimination in sports participation.

This is a 3 unit course. This means you're expected to spend somewhere in the neighborhood of 6 hours per week working on the course requirements. This is in addition to the time we meet for class.

Modality

This is an e-engaged course, which means we aren't meeting face-to-face. We are, however, meeting weekly online for discussion and application of course material. Each week of the course (with a few exceptions) will consist of one synchronous day and one asynchronous day.

On Tuesday each week, we'll meet on Zoom during our scheduled class time. I'll introduce the main question and ideas of the week and we'll spend some time discussing them. We'll also spend time working in breakout groups to analyze and evaluate passages of the readings.

By the end of each Tuesday and Thursday (prior to midnight), you should read the assigned reading (either the reading assigned that day, or the reading associated with the whole week) and participate in the associated online discussion.

Every Thursday I'll also post an additional video (usually around 10 minutes long) on Brightspace elaborating on some more course material from the week, suggesting topics for our online discussion, and identifying applications of the course ideas.

Springfield College uses Brightspace as its Learning Management System. It supports teaching and learning. You can find basic course information there such as syllabi and faculty office hours. Brightspace is also a critical

tool to provide communication and course instruction during campus emergencies and emergency recovery. We'll be using Brightspace to host readings, assignments, and any other course documents (such as the syllabus).

Our text-based course discussion will be hosted on Discord, an app designed to facilitate discussion and community. We have a Discord server set up specifically for our course, and the server has several channels assigned to distinct purposes (e.g. "general", "philosophy-in-the-wild", or "questions-for-patrick"). Discord can be accessed via a web browser, or you can download the Discord app on your phone, tablet, or computer. The Discord server for our course can be accessed [here](#).

Spiritual and Ethical Outcomes in the Core Curriculum

1. Demonstrate an understanding of historical and contemporary examples of how humans engage in making meaning within their world.
2. Demonstrate literacy in diverse religious and/or philosophical perspectives on the meaning making process.
3. Describe how human values shape structures and institutions (and vice versa).
4. Practice methods of philosophical and/or religious reasoning as they engage fundamental questions about the human condition.
5. Critically reflect on a diversity of worldviews, including their own.

Objectives

The goals of this course are to empower you to:

- Identify, explain, and evaluate the theories and arguments of a variety of philosophers working in philosophy of sport. (S & E outcomes 1, 2, 4, and 5, measured with SNTs, Problem Sets, and Group Projects.)
- Engage in reflective and respectful discourse with your peers, reflecting openness, humility, and a spirit of collaborative inquiry. S & E outcome 4, measured with Weekly Discussion and Group Projects.)
- Reflect meaningfully on the relevance of what you've read and discussed for living a fruitful and happy life. (S & E outcomes 3 and 5, measured with SNTs and Weekly Discussion.)
- Develop your own answers to the questions we discuss, as well as an increased ability to communicate them and argue for them by written means. (S & E outcomes 4 and 5, measured with Weekly Discussion, Problem Sets, and Group Projects.)

Communication

I will be available to contact via email on weekdays, generally before 5pm. I'll attempt to respond to emails within 48 hours (usually sooner). To make sure your email is responded to in a timely manner, please put "PHIL 120" in the subject line. I'll be available during weekly office hours on Zoom and by appointment for Zoom as well.

If I email you, the email will be sent to your school email, so you should check that once per day on weekdays. If my email requires a response, please respond within 48 hours.

If you're contacting me to ask a question about the course, an assignment, or something related, make sure to check the syllabus first.

Class communication must always be respectful; I won't tolerate rude behavior, unnecessary vulgarity, or abuse of any kind (towards myself or any others). If you aren't sure what counts as any of those things, you should read the [Disruptive Behavior Policy](#) in the Springfield College Student Handbook. Students who engage in rude, vulgar, or abusive communication in the course are subject to dismissal.

Texts

There are no required textbooks for this course. All required readings will be made available via Brightspace.

Assignments and Grading

Your grade for this course will be determined by your performance on some Socratic Note-Taking Responses to readings, your regular engagement in class discussions, a series of three Problem Sets devoted to reconstructing arguments, and a Group Presentation. The distribution of value for each category of assignment is as follows:

SNTs		20%
WEEKLY DISCUSSION		20%
PROBLEM SETS	PROBLEM SET 1	10%
	PROBLEM SET 2	15%
	PROBLEM SET 3	20%
GROUP PRESENTATION		15%

More details on the assignments (including how many offerings are available for each interchangeable assignment) are available below.

Socratic Note Taking Responses

A Socratic Note Taking Response is a short, formally written set of notes on a course reading. The purpose of these assignments is to help you read philosophy with a more engaged, interrogative mindset. "Socratic Note Taking" is named after the philosopher Socrates, who famously taught by asking questions.¹ In these notes you will write questions as you read. Think of it as a reading quiz that you create yourself, along with an answer key. These assignments will also help you create a detailed set of notes on the papers for which you complete them.

You should submit at least 10 SNT responses. You may submit them in response to any readings you choose, but a response is due by the beginning of class on the day the associated reading is assigned. For example, if you are going to write an SNT responding to a reading that has been assigned for class on 03/02, you should turn in the SNT on Brightspace by the beginning of class on 03/02. SNTs will be graded on a pass/fail basis. It's open to you to turn in more than 10 SNTs, and your grade in the category will be determined by the number of passes you have out of a maximum of 10.

Instructions: SNT responses will follow a standard format. Create a page with three columns: a page number column, a question (that you write) column, and an answer (that you also write) column. You should record 2-3 questions for every 5 full pages of reading assigned, up to a maximum of 10 questions. So, for 1-9 pages of reading, 2-3 questions are required. For 10-14 pages, 4-6 questions are required. For 15-19, 6-9. For 20-25, 8-10. For anything above 25 pages, 10 full questions. (For online readings, you should record 3-5 questions for

¹This assignment was inspired by Walker, Trafimow, and Bronstein [2017] "The Socratic Note Taking Technique", Teaching Philosophy 40 (3):341-365.

each online article.) Questions should be one sentence (or not much more), and answers should be 1-3 sentences. (Break it down into more than one question if you find you can't answer in 3 sentences or so.) These are meant to be expository questions – questions about what the text is saying – rather than objections or comments. For a philosophical text, expository questions can be about the author's thesis, about her argument(s) for it, about the reasons for premise(s) in an argument, or just about how to understand something that is said in some specific passage. For a fictional text, expository questions can be about how best to understand the events or states-of-affairs in the story, how to interpret their significance, or about the author's goals in introducing certain themes or ideas. As with all other writing assignments, these should be your work only. Don't consult other students or the internet for help. Upload your response on Brightspace on the day that we discuss the relevant reading. Here is an example:

Page number	Question	Answer
2	What are the three major conceptions of well-being?	The first is hedonism. The second is the desire-based theory. The third comes from objective list theory.
3	What are two examples of the conditions of human flourishing, from Nussbaum's "capabilities approach"?	One example is bodily health. Another is practical reason.
3	What does the author mean by an "objective" theory, as opposed to a "subjective" theory?	An objective theory is one on which the same factors count for well-being for all people. A subjective theory says that different things may contribute to well-being for different people.

Weekly Discussion

As mentioned above, our text-based classroom discussion will take place on Discord. On each course date for which a reading is due (every Tuesday and Thursday of the course), you're required to make an appearance on the course's Discord server to make at least one substantive post about the reading for that day. A substantive post is a post that asks a question, makes an argument, poses an objection, or in some other way interacts thoughtfully with a course text, the related lecture video, another substantive post, or something (say, in the news) that directly relates to the topics of the course.

I'll track your participation in the server in part using a bot called MEE6. MEE6 will monitor your participation in the reading discussion channels, giving you "experience" for each post you make. That experience will allow you to "level up" a couple times over the semester. I'll partake in some of the discussions and I'll monitor to make sure that the posts you're receiving experience for are actually substantive posts. In order to receive full credit for class discussion, you must reach Level 2 in the Discord. However, reaching Level 2 is necessary but may not be sufficient for full credit. For example, getting to Level 3 and making quality contributions throughout will go a long way to helping your discussion grade. I will use my discretion and keep track of both quantity and quality of participation in determining your grade for weekly discussion.

Another important part of your grade here is your attendance and engagement in our Tuesday, synchronous meetings. I will take attendance and keep track of who is contributing to class discussion, has their screen video turned on or is contributing to the discussion via the chat, and is actively engaged. If you regularly fail to show up and engage in the class discussion, that may harm your Weekly Discussion grade.

Problem Sets

You'll complete three problem sets devoted to argument reconstructions. Each problem set will include between 5-10 questions. Each problem set will scale in difficulty: questions on the first set will be largely multiple choice or true/false; questions on the second set will include a mixture of multiple choice, fill in the blank, and open-ended responses; questions on the final set will be entirely open-ended.

Arguments are the reasons people give in favor of the ideas they have. Every argument centers around the main idea the argument is meant to support: commonly called it's "conclusion" or "contention." The propositions that support the contention are called the argument's "premises." We'll spend significant class time devoted to understanding what arguments are and how they work, as well as picking apart, analyzing, and evaluating the arguments of the course readings.

Further instructions for each problem set will follow separately.

Group Presentation

You'll complete a group project by the end of the semester, in groups of 4-5. This will require you to assemble a group, find a contemporary question in philosophy of sport, compile some empirical background on the question, and survey some of the philosophical arguments on two sides of the question. Group members will then prepare a 12-minute presentation on the topic explaining the question and analyzing one compelling argument on each side. Groups will present during the last two days of class.

Instructions: We'll use Discord to allow you to organize yourselves together in groups of 4-5 (either according to your preferences, or, if you have none, randomly). Choose a topic or question in philosophy of sport that interests everyone in your group. For example:

- Should sports referees' employment be contingent on tests for implicit bias?
- Are fans morally responsible for the harms athletes sustain in their sports?
- Can *sport* be defined?
- What is the relationship between sport and games?

1. You might look at the Journal of Philosophy of Sport (recent issues are online, with access available through the Springfield College Library system) for ideas, or the online [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#). You could also look up syllabi for philosophy of sport courses at other schools to find topics that interest you. (Make sure they are taught in a philosophy department.) Your topic must be one that has been discussed by philosophers, in order to complete the assignment. So you should see what's been written in some philosophy journals or books before settling on a topic.
2. Talk to me to discuss your plans once you have some ideas. We will set aside a channel on discord for each group to think about topics and discuss them together, and that's where you can run ideas and plans by me for approval. After you have formed your groups, you'll have two weeks to settle on a topic and begin your research.
3. Together with your group, produce a twelve-minute presentation on your topic. This should include:
 - Some empirical background on the issue (e.g. the history or current legal status of the question). This should be drawn from reputable sources (i.e. not tabloids), and you should provide the citations on your handout or powerpoint slides. (1-2 mins) If you have questions about whether your sources are appropriate, ask me.

- Some philosophical discussion of the arguments on each side. Find at least two compelling philosophical arguments, one on each side of the issue, and summarize them. Present them in the most charitable way you can. (4-5 mins per argument) Make sure the articles you are pulling from make arguments. You should be discussing at least one compelling argument on each side — you do not need to summarize the entire article.
 - Mention and respond to any obvious objections. Since you only have a few minutes, this does not need to be absolutely comprehensive if time doesn't permit.
 - A final conclusion: which argument is the best? Which side is right? (final 2-3 min) If not all group members agree on the right conclusion to draw, the presentation can make note of that – so don't let disagreement hold you back in choosing a topic.
4. For your presentation, make either a handout or a powerpoint summarizing your main points and citing your sources. This will be the only written documentation required for this project. Your classmates should be able to use it to find the articles you read and any other sources you relied on.
 5. General tip: imagine that you are compiling this research for a newspaper article or radio report. Your goal is to introduce a contemporary question – and the case for each side – to a general audience, perhaps consisting of college students like yourselves. You can even involve them in the presentation, say by asking questions of the audience. You want to present the arguments on both sides so that your audience can make up their own minds. But at the end, you will also tell them what conclusion you have come to.
 6. All group members will receive the same grade. When submitting your powerpoint or handout for evaluation, include a statement about which group members did what work.

Late Work & Extensions

SNTs and Problem Sets are due on Brightspace by the beginning of class on the day they're due. I won't take late SNTs. There are more than enough opportunities to receive full credit for those, so try to work ahead in case you're unable to complete them later in the course. I'm happy to grant extensions on your Problem Sets if you communicate with me ahead of time.

The penalty for late Problem Sets without an extension is one third of a letter grade per day. For example, an assignment that would've been an A, if handed in one day late would instead be given an A-. If handed in two days late it would instead be given a B+. Work will be considered one day late if it is to me between any time in the 24 hours after the due date, two days late if to me between 24-48 hours of the due date, and so on.

Academic Dishonesty

Don't plagiarize or cheat. I'll know if you do, and you will receive a 0 on the assignment (and possibly fail the course). It's also immoral and you'll be worse off as a person if you do it. You are responsible for knowing what plagiarism is. If you aren't sure whether something counts as plagiarism, ask me. Simple cases are things like copying words or ideas from others without attributing credit to them, using a paper (or section of a paper) you wrote for another class, or helping anyone else do any of those kinds of things. You can research our school's stance on plagiarism and related issues [here](#).

Tentative Course Schedule

The course will divide into several units, each with a particular theme, as shown on the following table.

Date	Unit	Readings	Assignments Due
01/26	Introduction		
01/28			
02/02	Games	Suits, <i>The Grasshopper</i> , pp. 24-37	
02/04		Nguyen, "Games and the Art of Agency", §§1-3	
02/09		Nguyen, "Games and the Art of Agency", §§4-8	
02/11			
02/16	Games & Sports	Chess is not a sport but a game.	
02/18		Berman, "Sprints, Sports, and Suits"	Problem Set 1
02/23		Walton, "'It's Only a Game!' Sports as Fiction"	
02/25			Form Presentation Groups
03/02	Achievement	Bradford, <i>Achievement</i> , ch. 1	
03/04		Bradford, <i>Achievement</i> , ch. 2	
03/11		Lehman, "Can Cheaters Play the Game?"	
03/16	Values in Sports	Dixon, "Canadian Figure Skaters, French Judges, and Realism in Sport"	Submit Presentation Topics
03/18		Ciomaga, "Rules and Obligations"	
03/23		Brown, "Practices and Prudence"	
03/25			Problem Set 2
03/30		Cherry, "The Interplay between Resentment, Motivation and Performance"	
04/01		Stephens & Feezell, "The Ideal of the Stoic Sportsman"	Submit Presentation Sources
04/06		Nguyen & Zagal, "Good Violence, Bad Violence: The Ethics of Competition in Multiplayer Games"	
04/08		Russell, "The Value of Dangerous Sport"	
04/13	Aesthetics of Sports	Montero, "Proprioception as an Aesthetic Sense"	
04/15		Tanaka, "On Self-Awareness and the Self"	
04/20		Nguyen, The Aesthetics of Rock Climbing	
04/22		Montero, "Aesthetic Effortlessness"	
04/27	Gender & Sports	Tannsjo, "Against Sexual Discrimination in Sport"	
04/29		Boxill, "Football and Feminism"	
05/04		Group Presentation Day	Group Presentations
05/06		No Class	Problem Set 3

Academic Assistance and Accommodations

This class may be recorded or transcribed if an enrolled student has been approved for this service as an academic accommodation by the Academic Success Center's Disability & Accessibility Services. Recordings are for the approved student's individual access only, and are not to be shared, copied, or distributed to others. For questions or concerns about acceptable use, please contact the Academic Success Center: 413-748-3389, asc@springfield.edu, or Learning Commons 300.

A wide variety of academic assistance is offered through the Academic Success Center in the Learning Commons,

Suite 300 (3rd floor). To contact the ASC, please call 413-748-3389 or email asc@springfield.edu. During the fall and spring semesters, the ASC is open Monday-Thursday, 9am-9pm; Friday, 9am-3pm; and Sunday, 4-9pm. The ASC offers the following services:

- Writing & Reading Support Services offers students help with all aspects of the writing and reading processes.
- Math-Science Support Services provides assistance to students taking courses in Mathematics, Physics, Computer Science, Biology and Chemistry.
- The Content Tutorial Program delivers support for course work that is outside what is covered by Writing & Reading Support Services and Math-Science Support Services.
- The Conversation Partners Program provides support for non-native speaking students wishing to improve conversation and comprehension skills.
- Disability & Accessibility Services works with students with disabilities to provide appropriate accommodations, auxiliary aids, and services that facilitate equal access and meaningful participation in their educational experiences at Springfield College.
- The Academic Coaching Program is available to help students improve time management and learning strategies.
- The Academic Progress Program provides assistance and support for the students in academic jeopardy to help improve their academic skills, performance and standing.
- The MTEL Assistance Program provides support for students preparing to take the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure.

Springfield College is committed to an inclusive and accessible educational environment for students with disabilities. If you need academic accommodations due to a disability or disabling condition (including temporary disabilities), please contact the Academic Success Center's Disability & Accessibility Services. They will work with you on an individualized, case-by-case basis to determine eligibility and develop an appropriate accommodation plan. To schedule an appointment, please call 413-748-3389, email asc@springfield.edu, or stop by the ASC located in the Learning Commons, Suite 300. Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the procedures outlined by Disability & Accessibility Services for determining eligibility and requesting accommodations in advance each semester and/or as needed. Accommodations cannot be provided retroactively.

To assist our international students as they transition into an English language academic environment and to support native-born and multilingual speakers, the College offers a variety of supports. The Academic Success Center offers English language supports through its Writing & Reading Support Services, which offers students help with all aspects of the writing and reading processes. Another support is the Conversation Partners Program, which provides support for non-native speaking students wishing to improve conversation and comprehension skills. Pending approval of the course instructor, the International Center offers students who are English Language Learners or multilingual speakers ELL Test Proctoring with extended time for course exams in an alternative location.