

NYU Paris

PHIL-UA 9026 C01,

History of French philosophy

Instructor Information

- Philippe Lusson
- office hours TBD
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Course Information

- PHIL-UA 9026 C01
- History of French Philosophy
- An overview of important developments in French philosophy from the 16th century to the 1960s. We will pay close attention this semester to the relationship between *the self and others*. We will look at the debates that followed the rediscovery of Ancient philosophy and the Copernican revolution with Descartes' rationalist and individualistic philosophy, Condillac's empiricist critique, whose role for language brings the self into a web of social relations, and the growing recognition of the problem of society with Rousseau. We will then look at Henri Bergson's reaction to the rise of the empirical sciences in the 19th century and especially at his distinction between the deep self and the social self. We will deepen our appreciation of the issues Bergson highlights with readings from René Girard and Jean Baudrillard, and we will look for possible solutions in Alexandre Kojève's reading of Hegel and in Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir's distinctive development of existentialism.
- No prerequisites
- Lecture Tuesday 5 to 6:30pm, recitation sections Thursday 3-4:30pm and 5-6:30pm
- NYU Paris, room TBD

Course Overview and Goals

Upon Completion of this Course, students will be able to:

- get a sense of the historical evolution of philosophy since the 16th-century,
- see how French philosophers developed some of the key ideas and movements in that history
- identify and debate important issues philosophers still discuss today
- learn how to assess the strength and weaknesses of arguments,
- engage in constructive philosophical discussion, give reasons, and raise objections,

- perfect their skills in argumentative writing.

Course Requirements

All grading blind, please only write your N number on papers and other assignments.

Class Participation

Attendance, engagement with the readings, and active participation in class discussion and debates. Participation in the peer comment process for the final paper.

Short papers

Three 1000-word papers for which possible topics will be posted over the first eight weeks of the semester. You need to write at least one of the first four and one of the last four short papers.

Final paper

A 2000-word research paper on a topic of your choice, either engaging in further discussion of a philosophical view or argument, initiating a dialogue between multiple views or arguments, or applying philosophical concepts and arguments to concrete political issues.

After meeting in the second half of the semester to delineate your topic, you'll write a draft of your final paper, on which you'll receive comments from an anonymous peer in the class and from me — and you'll give comments on someone's else anonymous draft. The final paper will then be due at the end of the semester. See schedule below.

Final exam

Paragraph-length answers to questions about the material covered throughout the semester.

Assigned Readings

All articles and book excerpts will be posted at philonos.net/hfp.php

- Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*
- Elizabeth of Bohemia, from her correspondence with Descartes (May-July 1643)
- Condillac, *Essay on the Origins of Human Knowledge*, part I
- Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men" [D]
- Rousseau, *The Social Contract* [SC], from books I, II and IV
- Rousseau, *Rêveries of the Solitary Walker* [R], VI
- Bergson, *Time and Free Will* [TFW], from chapters 2 and 3
- Bergson, from *Laughter* [L]
- Girard, René, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, chapter 1
- Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myth and Structure*, chapters 4 and 5
- Kojève, Alexandre, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, introduction
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism is a Humanism* [EH]

- Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness* [BN], I, 2, I-II
- Beauvoir, Simone de, from *The Second Sex* [TSS], I
- Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* [EA], chapter 2

Grading of Assignments

The grade for this course will be determined according to the following formula:

Assignments/Activities	% of Final Grade
3 short papers	3 x 15% = 45%
Final paper	25%
Final exam	20%
Class participation	10%

Letter Grades

Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

Letter Grade	Points	Description
A	16-20	Outstanding
A-	15	Excellent
B+	14	Very Good
B	13	Good
B-	12	Satisfactory
C+	11	Above Average
C	10	Average
C-	9	Below Average
D+	8	Unsatisfactory
D	7	Low Pass
D-	6	Low Pass
F	5	Fail

Course Schedule

Topics and Assignments

The course format will alternate between lecture (L) (with questions and answers!), “workshops” (W) where we collectively try to construct some argument in the readings, and critical discussion (D) of the issues.

Week/Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment Due
Tuesday Feb 5	Introduction		
Thursday Feb 7	Descartes' project	• Descartes I	
Tuesday Feb 10	Descartes on the mind-body problem	• Descartes II • Antoine Arnauld and Descartes, from the fourth objections and replies	
Thursday Feb 12	(continued)	• Elizabeth of Bohemia	
Tuesday Feb 19	Descartes on God and knowledge	• Descartes, III-V	
Thursday Feb 21	Descartes on the world and others	• Descartes, VI	Short paper 1
Tuesday Feb 26	Empiricism	• Condillac, pp. 11-53	
Thursday Feb 28	Condillac on the mind		Short paper 2
Tuesday, March 5	Language and thought	• Condillac, pp. 63-100	
Thursday, March 7	(continued)		Short paper 3
Tuesday, March 12	Rousseau and the problem of society	• Rousseau, D	
Thursday, March 14	(continued)		Short paper 4
Tuesday, March 19	The social contract	• Rousseau, SC, I, 1-7 and II, 1-4 and IV 1-3 and 8-9	
Thursday, March 21	Rousseau's failure	• Rousseau, R, VI	Short paper 5
Tuesday, April 2	Bergson on duration	• Bergson, TFW, pp. 75-121	

Week/Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment Due
Thursday, April 4	Bergson on the two selves	• Bergson, TFW, pp. 121-139 • Bergson, L, pp. 46-50	Short paper 6
Tuesday, April 9	Bergson on two ways to decide	• Bergson, pp. 165-172	
Thursday, April 11	Mimetic desire	• Girard, ch. 1	Short paper 7
Tuesday, April 16	Desire and the system of consumption	• Baudrillard, ch. 4	
Thursday, April 18	(continued)	• Baudrillard, ch. 5	Short paper 8
Tuesday, April 23	Kojève on Hegel	• Kojève, pp. 3-30	
Thursday, April 25	(continued)		
Tuesday, April 30	French existentialism	• Sartre, EIH	
Thursday, May 2	Beauvoir using Kojève	• Beauvoir, TSS, pp. 159-163	
Tuesday, May 7	Bad faith	• Sartre, BN, pp. 47-67	
Thursday, May 9	Beauvoir's ethics	• Beauvoir, EA, ch. 2 until "...the importance of that universal, absolute end which freedom itself is."	Draft of final paper
Tuesday, May 14	(continued)	• Beauvoir, the rest of ch. 2	Peer comments
Thursday, May 16	Review session		
Tuesday, May 21	Final exam		Final paper

Course Materials

Required Textbooks & Materials

- No required book

Optional Textbooks & Materials

- Descartes, René, *Meditations on First Philosophy*
- Condillac, Etienne Bonnot de, *Essay on the Origins of Human Knowledge*
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Basic Political Writings*
- Diderot, Denis, *Rameau's Nephew*
- Bergson, Henri, *Time and Free Will*
- Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myth and Structure*
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism is a Humanism*
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness*
- Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*

Resources

- **Access your course schedule and materials:** [personal website](http://philonos.net/hfp.php) (philonos.net/hfp.php)
- **Databases, journal articles, and more:** [Bobst Library](http://library.nyu.edu) (library.nyu.edu)
- **Assistance with strengthening your writing:** [NYU Writing Center](http://nyu.mywconline.com) (nyu.mywconline.com)
- **Obtain 24/7 technology assistance:** [IT Help Desk](http://nyu.edu/it/servicedesk) (nyu.edu/it/servicedesk)

Course Policies

Attendance and Tardiness

- Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student's final course grade for every week's worth of classes missed. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in harsher penalties including failure.
- Unexcused absences affect students' grades: unexcused absences will be penalized with a 2% deduction from the students' final course grade.
- Absences are excused only for illness, religious observance, and emergencies.

Illness: For a single absence, students may be required to provide a doctor's note, at the discretion of the Associate Director of Academics. In the case of two consecutive absences, students must provide a doctor's note. Exams, quizzes, and presentations will not be made up without a doctor's note.

Religious Observance: Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. Students must notify their instructor and the Academic Office in writing via email one week in

advance before being absent for this purpose. If exams, quizzes, and presentations are scheduled on a holiday a student will observe, the Associate Director, in coordination with the instructor, will reschedule them.

Please note: if you are unable to attend class, you are required to email your professors directly to notify them.

Late Assignment

Late submission or work will be accepted only with justifiable reasons of health or family emergency.

Academic Honesty/Plagiarism

At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community.

Plagiarism: *presenting others' work without adequate acknowledgement of its source, as though it were one's own. Plagiarism is a form of fraud. We all stand on the shoulders of others, and we must give credit to the creators of the works that we incorporate into products that we call our own. Some examples of plagiarism:*

- *a sequence of words incorporated without quotation marks*
- *an unacknowledged passage paraphrased from another's work*
- *the use of ideas, sound recordings, computer data or images created by others as though it were one's own*
- *submitting evaluations of group members' work for an assigned group project which misrepresent the work that was performed by another group member*
- *altering or forging academic documents, including but not limited to admissions materials, academic records, grade reports, add/drop forms, course registration forms, etc.*

For further information, students are encouraged to check www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

Disability Disclosure Statement

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

Instructor Bio

- Philippe Lusson (PhD, New York University, 2014; Ecole Normale Supérieure de la rue d'Ulm, 2008; agrégé in Philosophy, 2007) works mostly in the philosophy of mind and action, with a particular focus on intentions, willpower, decision-making, omissions and

collective coordination, and with a deep belief in the continuity between scientific and philosophical research in these areas. He has presented his work at various international conferences, most recently in Genova, Cork and Nantes. He is also associated researcher at the Institut Jean Nicod.