

Syllabus: OAP 505, Discussion
“Information Literacy in the 21st Century”

Instructor: Jesse Brown

Office: TBA

Office Hours: TBA

E-Mail: jbrown@santarosa.edu

Phone: TBA

Instructor Homepage: None

Course Webpage: None

Final Exam Date: TBA

Required Text(s): None (or) provided in class.

Suggested Text(s):

- “The Republic of Plato” (trans. Allan Bloom; publisher: Basic Books) ISBN 0-465-06934-7
- “The Postmodern Condition” (trans. Bennington/Masumi) ISBN 978-0816611737

Course Description

This course is a philosophical discussion about the media and the notion of truth in modern societies, as well as the issue of truth more generally in the postmodern age. If you aren’t sure what any of that means, we’ll get to that. This being a philosophy course, we will not be delving heavily into media theory. Instead, be settling on a form of media literacy and information literacy through a philosophical lens. This class’s objective is to train students in basic reasoning which can then be deployed in the contemporary environment to good effect.

Structurally, the course is eclectic, especially given the requirements of the course and the fact that I am not allowed to ask students to buy reading material. As such the readings, where assigned, will be pithy and suitable for starting discussions. In general the course orients around the question of relativism, but, more specifically, it hopes to impress upon the student that relativism, while superficially a weak philosophical position, is actually more resilient than one would think. *By relativism I mean the general claim that one cannot give primacy/preference to a certain form of ethics or knowledge.*

Note: This course is heavily discussion based and you will gain more from participation rather than simply remaining quiet! As such, it helps to make sure you’ve completed the assigned reading so that you have a handle on what is being discussed in class by classmates and others. If discussion is problematic for you, please come see me and we will work out a means to ease you into class discussion.

Class Decorum: While I expect the best from the class, I am including a proviso in the syllabus about decorum especially given the nature of philosophy discussions that could turn heated or acrimonious. That is to say, do not behave in a manner unbecoming of a serious person engaged in higher learning and self-knowledge. *This does not mean you need to agree with another person that you disagree with, it simply means you should provide arguments for claims made.* Additionally, for the sake of the discussion, you should attempt to act under the rubric of charity when arguing: attempt to recognize the strongest form of an opposing claim before rebutting it.

A word on racism and other questionable arguments in that category. While we recognize arguments, some arguments are hardly defensible. As such I will not defend or allow racism, homophobia, misogyny, discrimination, or other statements that are void of philosophical and intellectual merit; they are irrational and have no supporting bases in any empirical or philosophical argument. When

deployed, said arguments serve only to disrupt the classroom and do not have any real validity. With all of that said, students with an issue related to this proviso should come to me, and we can discuss it. If you have questions about speech questions insofar as the college, you can [consult the guidelines](#).

Reading: The course reading draws from multiple theoretical viewpoints with a limited pagecount. While we strive to get through as much as readings as is possible, the selections will need to be cherry picked. *Because of the nature of the course I am not allowed to request the students purchase a book. As such I will provide selections in class for reading.*

Course Questions: These are some core questions related to the course. As we move through *The Republic*, we might look at some or all of these questions in a new way reflecting our changing sensibilities:

- *What is truth?* Does our society have a notion of truth different from other societies? Does that matter? How does this translate in the media?
- *What is justice?* How does our society have a particular notion of justice? How does this play out in the media? How?
- *What are perspectivism and relativism?* Are they a problem, and if so, why? Does the media as a structure encourage or hinder them? How?
- *What are the foundations for our knowledge?* How does knowledge establish itself? Does it?
- *What is the media?* Also, how is our society organized and how does this relate to the media?
- *What is the impact of wealth?* What is the issue of wealth in society? Does wealth impact truth?
- *What is democracy?* Do we have a democracy as Plato understood it?

Grading Scale: Grading is not a massive priority for me, but I will provide a grade to those who request it. With that in mind, I do treat this as a proper academic course and we will conduct ourselves in a serious way. A breakdown of score weight is as follows:

- 100%: Participation
- 0%: Homework
- 0%: Tests

Course Outline [by Week]:

1. Introduction
2. Module A: Philosophical Basics. ‘What’s Epistemology? What’s Knowledge?’
3. Module A2: Philosophical Basics. What’s An Argument? Why Argue?
4. Module A3: Philosophical Basics. Reasoning, Induction, Deduction
5. Module A4: Philosophical Basics. What’s A Fallacy? What’s Bad Reasoning?
6. **Basics Quiz [Unit A] & Discussion**
7. Module B: Classical Relativism. *The Republic* Book I [p.3-35] – Justice, Truth, The Sophists.
8. Module B1: Classical Relativism. *The Republic* Book VII [p.193-221] – Allegory of the Cave
9. Module B2: Classical Relativism. *The Republic* Book VI [p.163-193] – The Sophists Cont.
10. **The Republic Quiz [Unit B] & Discussion**
11. Module C: Postmodernity. *The Postmodern Condition* [p.3]: Knowledge in Computerized Societies
12. Module C1: Postmodernity. *The Postmodern Condition* [p.6]: Legitimation & Knowledge
13. Module C2: Postmodernity. *The Postmodern Condition* [p.23]: Science
14. Module C3: Postmodernity. *The Postmodern Condition* [p.18]: Narrative Knowledge
15. **Postmodernity Quiz [Unit C] & Discussion**
16. Module D: Modern Relativism. *Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent* [p.1-2]: “The Propaganda Model”
17. Module D1: Modern Relativism. Foucault, *The Political Function of the Intellectual* [p.2-3]
18. Module D2: Modern Relativism. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: “Lecture One: 7 January 1976”* [p.81-82]