

PHIL 126s: PHILOSOPHY OF MARY SHEPHERD

Harvard University
Spring 2022: T 9-11

INSTRUCTORS

Professor Jeff McDonough
jkmcdonough@gmail.com
Office Hours: T 11-1 and by appointment

Professor Alison Simmons
asimmons@fas.harvard.edu
Office Hours: T 11-1 and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Mary Shepherd engages some of the most hotly debated issues of the 18th and 19th centuries: in epistemology, the nature and status of causal or scientific reasoning and sensory perception; in metaphysics, the nature and status of causation and of the external world. Her systematic philosophy represents a comprehensive response to her (in)famous predecessors, most especially George Berkeley and David Hume, in much the way that Kant's transcendental idealism does, but, unlike Kant, Shepherd is an avowed realist! We might think of Shepherd's philosophy as the realist alternative to Kant's transcendental idealism. Shepherd's work is contained primarily in two works, *An Essay on the Relation of Cause and Effect* (1824) and *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe* (1827), both of which we will work through in this seminar. Shepherd's voice is among the "lost" voices in the history of philosophy that have recently been recovered and seriously studied. It's therefore an exciting moment to explore her work, as scholars are just starting to dig into it.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES

Phil 126s is a seminar in the history of philosophy. As a philosophy course, we will focus on the philosophical positions and arguments for them that our philosopher offers. As a history of philosophy course, we will engage in the sympathetic reconstruction of her positions and arguments; this will require that we take into consideration, as much as we can, her philosophical motives and intellectual context.

If you work hard in this course, you can expect to:

1. better understand some central topics of discussion among modern philosophers, along with the various motivations for and constraints on the positions they hold;
2. clearly articulate those positions and the arguments our offered for them in discussion and in writing;
3. critically evaluate those positions and arguments; that means determining their *assumptions* and their *consequences*, reconstructing the *arguments* and *sub-arguments*, and *assessing* the arguments for cogency given the assumptions and consequences;
4. develop your skills in a cooperative philosophical discussion that aims at the shared goal of better understanding the texts, positions, and arguments;
5. better understand how conceptual change comes about;

6. practice using the philosophical tools you have acquired in other philosophy courses: conceptual analysis, thought experiment, counterexamples, disambiguation of concepts and positions, argument reconstruction and/or mapping, etc.;
7. develop your research skills through the writing of a research paper.

PREPARATION FOR THE COURSE

This course is an upper level philosophy course designed for advanced concentrators and starting graduate students. The preparation we will expect from you includes:

1. familiarity with basic philosophical concepts and tools;
2. some familiarity with early modern philosophy (ideally, you will have worked through Berkeley and Hume before);
3. familiarity with the norms of philosophical writing (we do not expect you to have done a *research* paper in philosophy before, but we do expect you to have worked on the basic skills of philosophical writing);
4. familiarity with basic research tools in philosophy and accessing online texts: EEBO (*Early English Texts Online*); *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; *PhilPapers*, *Philosophers Index* and *JStor*. NB: ***You should never use Wikipedia for scholarly research.***

COURSE TEXTS -- [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/W22-PHIL-126S-1](https://tinyurl.com/W22-Phil-126S-1)

We have made an effort to make as many of the texts as possible available in online versions (either as links or electronic versions or as pdfs). Still, having a physical copy is very useful, and so we encourage you, if you are able, to purchase the very recent edition of one of Shepherd's main texts, *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe*, edited by Antonia LoLordo:

LoLordo, Antonia, editor. *Mary Shepherd's Essays on the Perception of an External Universe*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. ISBN-13: 978-0-19-085427-0.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

1. **Attendance.** We meet as a seminar to discuss the primary texts only once a week. If you miss seminar, you will miss some critical discussion and the rest of us will miss your contributions. That said, we realize that even the most diligent students have to miss a class on occasion due to illness or some other emergency, especially given the complicated times we are in right now. *Please notify one of us as soon as possible if you have such an issue.*
2. **Collaborative participation** in seminar. A seminar should be an intense and productive intellectual experience, and every one of us is responsible for making it work. Shared responsibility is if anything *more* important in the online format. As in all classroom settings, it is important that we be **respectful** of each other's time and views. We also expect you to be proactive in helping to generate and sustain a collective learning environment. At a minimum, that means you must *show up to class on time, actively listen, and take notes*. But we'll expect even more of you. We'll expect you to **take intellectual risks**, to **support and encourage your classmates in taking risks**, and to **trust us that we will be there to support you** as well. Building this kind of trust will take work. Be conscientious about doing your part to empower your

classmates and remember that we can all learn a great deal from a mistake that someone wasn't afraid to make. Here are some tips on how to participate in seminar well:

- a. **Preparation** is essential. Come to seminar not only having *read and re-read* the assigned texts, but also having taken *copious notes* on them, *thought* about them, *jotted down questions that you have* about them (no question is a dumb question!), and *prepared the text assignment by writing down ideas, gathering relevant passages, and formulating questions* about it. Think about *connections across seminar meetings*. Sometimes things we discuss one week will only become clear several weeks later! (And sometimes things that seemed clear one week will become murky several weeks later! That's actually progress.) *Steady work*—rather than sporadic work—is a key to success. I provide a typical weekly work schedule below to give you a sense for how to maintain a steady work flow.
- b. **Take notes!** The evidence here is clear: For the kind of learning we're after in this class, taking notes longhand just works better.
<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/reading-paper-screens/>
<http://pss.sagepub.com/content/25/6/1159>
https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/17/08/note-taking-low-tech-often-best?utm_source=SilverpopMailing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=09.05.2017%20%281%29
- c. **Specificity and conciseness** keep us on task. When talking about an assigned reading, refer to it directly. Have it in hand, point to specific passages, and be precise. Sometimes, we have to talk our way into the point we're making: We learn by verbal exploration. We need to be patient with each other when this is happening. But the flip side of this is always striving to be as concise in our discussion contributions as we can. Try to say things only once, and trust others to give you the space to clarify later if necessary.
- d. **Respond directly** whenever possible. Pick up from where the last person left off. Use the same examples and the same language. If you want to pull the discussion in a new direction, first check if anyone else wants to say something more directly related. Since we don't have good opportunities for eye contact in the online format, using classmates' names becomes all the more important.
- e. **Ask for clarity** if someone has said something you don't get. You can ask that person to repeat it. Try rephrasing it to see if you understood. Ask for definitions of unfamiliar terms.
- f. **Awkward Silences** and hesitation are okay. Don't feel you need to rush to speak and don't worry if you need a little time to articulate something. Contributing to class discussion is more than the number of words you say. If you are struggling to articulate something, that's probably a sign that you are saying something that is new and not obvious!

- g. **If you have a quiet personality**, you might find contributing to class discussion more difficult than your outgoing classmates. Don't let this stop you! Come with one or two things prepared and be sure to say them early on. You will find that challenging yourself to contribute early will break the ice and you'll feel more comfortable participating as class goes on. *If you're a confident contributor*, use your confidence for good and not evil: Help bring others into discussion, refer to your classmates by name, and be positive about the contributions of those who don't say as much.
 - h. **We are truth-seeking, and openness helps.** Avoid the "search and destroy" mode, both with your classmates and with the texts we read. Approach others' ideas—and your own!—with charity and critical openness. Be adventurous and take risks. Commit to being curious and having fun.
3. **Weekly pre-class reading assignments.** Each week, we encourage you to carefully read the assigned text and take notes. We ask you to submit a **250-500-word reflection piece on the website by noon on the Monday before class**. Your reflection piece should **identify a central claim that Shepherd makes in the text assigned for class** (clearly indicating where the claim is made) and then do **any of the following** (as many as seem appropriate):
- a. **explain why it's important** for us to figure out that claim
 - b. identify the **concepts or subclaims doing the critical work** and explore them
 - c. identify **ambiguous concepts or subclaims** and try to disambiguate them
 - d. **reconstruct the argument** for the claim
 - e. offer an **objection** to the claim (either in your voice or in her opponent's voice)
 - f. anticipate how Shepherd would **reply** to the objection
 - g. raise other **questions** about the claim

The aim of the reflection pieces is threefold: (a) to help focus your reading; (b) to help generate discussion in class; and (c) to turn up potential research topics.

4. **Research paper.** You will write a research paper of approximately 6000 words) due May 4, 2022 by midnight. Writing a research paper is a process that includes exploring the field and literature, identifying an appropriately focused topic, gathering suitable secondary literature, creating an annotated bibliography, formulating a thesis, garnering evidence *and* counter-evidence for your thesis, drafting the paper, consulting with others, and rewriting your paper. During the second half of term, you will have Research Steps due weekly that will guide you through this process.

GRADES

Your grade will be determined as follows:

Weekly Reflection Pieces: 30%
Weekly Discussion: 30%
Research Paper: 40%

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to doing philosophy, and so we encourage you to talk about the course material with other students. On the other hand, *the work you hand in for your assignments and your research paper must be your own*. If books, articles, websites, or discussions have helped you formulate your ideas, cite them. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious offenses that undermine the trust on which the scholarly endeavor rests. For information on Harvard's academic integrity policies, please visit <https://college.harvard.edu/academics/academic-integrity>.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the [Accessible Education Office](#) (AEO) and speak with me by the end of the second week of the term. Failure to do so may result in my inability to respond in a timely manner.

ACADEMIC HELP: The Harvard College Writing Center provides individual consultations for any writing assignment (<http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/>). The Bureau of Study Counsel offers individual and group tutoring for any course (<http://bsc.harvard.edu/>). Resident Deans of Freshmen and Allston Burr Assistant Deans will work with you through your Yard or House to provide academic assistance and personal support. You also have access to help from the **Philosophy Department Writing Fellow**: Appointments may be made through the department website, under the "Undergraduate" menu.

OTHER CONCERNS: Life at college can be very challenging. Students sometimes feel overwhelmed, lost, anxious, or depressed. If you're struggling, we are happy to listen and to help you find help. For information on confidential counseling and mental health services at Harvard, you can call 617-495-5711 (24 hours) or visit <http://huhs.harvard.edu/services/counseling-and-mental-health>.

COURSE CALENDAR

During the first half of the term, we will be working through Shepherd's chief works together, the 1824 *An Essay Upon the Relation of Cause and Effect* (ERCE) and the 1827 *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe* (EPEU). Each week in seminar, we will begin by jointly constructing an overview of the reading for the week to be sure we are all on the same page. As needed, Professors McDonough and Simmons will fill in some of the background that will be helpful for making sense of the positions Shepherd is engaging with (chiefly from Hume and Berkeley). The rest of seminar will be devoted to working through some of the issues you have identified in your reflection pieces.

During the second half of the term, we will be reading the work of a scholar currently working on Shepherd and we will meet with that scholar (in person or on Zoom, depending on where they live) during seminar. At the very end of term, we will talk through your research papers in progress.

January 25: Introduction to Mary Shepherd

Reading: Browse pages from Project Vox on Lady Mary Shepherd, URL=<https://projectvox.org/shepherd-1777-1847/>

February 1: *An Essay Upon the Relation of Cause and Effect*

Reading: Preface; Introductory Chapter; Chapter 2, Sections 1-2 (pp. 1-63)

February 8: *An Essay Upon the Relation of Cause and Effect*

Reading: Chapter 2, Sections 3-4; Chapter 3 (pp. 63-135)

February 15: *An Essay Upon the Relation of Cause and Effect*

Reading: Chapters 4-6 (pp. 136-194)

February 22: *Essays on the Perception of the External Universe*

Reading: Preface; Introductory Chapter; Chapters 1-2 (pp. 29-61)

March 1: *Essays on the Perception of the External Universe*

Reading: Chapters 3-5 (pp. 62-83)

March 8: *Essays on the Perception of the External Universe*

Reading: Chapters 6-8 (84-107)

March 15: SPRING BREAK

March 22: *Essays on the Perception of the External Universe*

Reading: Essay IX - On the objection made to final causes, as ends on account of the existence of physical efficient means; Essay V - That mathematical demonstration, and physical induction, are founded upon similar principles of evidence

March 29: Visitor 1: Professor Keota Fields

April 5: Visitor 2: Professor Antonia LoLordo

April 12: Visitor 3: Professor Don Garrett on Skepticism

April 19: Visitor 4: Professor Deborah Boyle

April 26: Student Workshop