

Persuasion and the Truth
(non-majors version)
Spring 20XY

Instructor: Dr. Graham Clay

Email: gclay [at] nd.edu

Course Description:

The history of humanity is riddled with leaders—from Adolf Hitler and Robert Mugabe to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Abraham Lincoln—who have used skilled oratory and rhetoric to convince. Yet, as these very examples show, the ability to persuade is distinct from the ability to convey the truth. Indeed, in the battle for public opinion, the truth wins only incidentally—it defeats falsehood *only if* the truth-tellers happen to be the most persuasive. As the Scottish philosopher David Hume put it, "'tis not reason, which carries the prize, but eloquence; and no man needs ever despair of gaining proselytes to the most extravagant hypothesis, who has art enough to represent it in any favourable colours."

In the age of social media, cable news, and reality shows, snake oil is selling better than ever. As a consequence, knowing how to discern the unvarnished truth from a heaping mound of you-know-what is extremely valuable. By pairing the study of the abstract philosophical science of truth with the art of engaging and lively persuasion, this course will be part of your lifelong quest to acquire and hone this skill. This course will help you learn how to represent the truth in "favourable colours" of your own. You will practice arguing for your philosophical views through activities, projects, debates, and papers. You will work closely with your peers, relying on their insight and feedback to sharpen your argumentation skills and helping them refine theirs. Along the way, you will learn to cut quickly and easily through the drivel, hogwash, baloney, and poppycock of politicians to the substance of their arguments—if there is any. Topics covered will range from immigration to theism, affirmative action, and abortion. Figures studied will range from Sojourner Truth to Cicero, James Baldwin, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Judith Jarvis Thomson.

Course Goals:

By the end of this course, you should expect to have:

- Learned how to evaluate the soundness of philosophical arguments and positions
- Developed your skills of philosophical persuasion
- Improved your ability to extract arguments contained in texts and speeches
- Learned some of the basic tools of logic
- Improved your philosophical writing abilities
- Learned about the positions of philosophers throughout history

Grading:

30% - Participation

10% - Contributions During Lectures and In-Class Activities

Philosophy is a contact sport. This class is training for a life of doing philosophy, so you must engage with me and your classmates during lectures and in-class activities by asking questions, responding to others' claims, working on group assignments, and so on. If you ask a question, make a comment, or otherwise show adequate engagement every session, you will get a perfect score.

10% - Tuesday Reading Quizzes

Unless noted otherwise on the syllabus, there will be a 10-minute quiz in class at the start of every Tuesday class session. These quizzes are designed to be checks of your reading comprehension. If you do the reading for the day, take notes on it, reflect on it, and thereby understand its main claims and its overall structure, you should get an A every time. Your two lowest scores will be dropped.

10% - Thursday Reading Responses

Unless noted otherwise on the syllabus, there will be a written assignment due at the start of every Thursday class session on Sakai. These reading responses are designed to challenge you to dive deeper into the readings and formulate your own views in response to them. Your lowest score will be dropped. More information on these assignments will be provided via Sakai.

30% - Mid-Term Project (Group)

20% - Presentation - Due March 2nd or March 4th in class

You will be grouped with two classmates for the mid-term presentation. Using the persuasive techniques and methods you have learned and practiced in the first half of the semester, you must attempt to convince the class (and me) of a philosophical thesis. The philosophical thesis should be one that we have *not* discussed in class, but it should be one that you and your teammates have discussed with me beforehand. (I will give some suggestions in class to spark the brainstorm process for you and your group.) Since you must do everything you can to persuade your audience, you must leverage many of the tools you've learned up to this point into a seamless presentation--involving all three group members--of an argument or set of arguments for this philosophical thesis. More details on this assignment will be provided in the weeks leading up to the deadline.

10% - Analysis/Reaction - Due March 5th at 5PM EST via email

You will be assigned a group (other than your own) to analyze. When they present their arguments for their philosophical thesis, you must evaluate the extent to which they are successful, with respect to both the philosophical content of their presentation and its persuasiveness. On the Friday after the presentations are complete, you must turn in a written reaction paper which is 2 pages in length and

which contains your analysis and reaction to their presentation. More details on this assignment will be provided in the weeks leading up to the deadline.

40% - Final Project (Solo)

20% - Persuasive Element - Present either April 22nd or April 27th in class

Just like your mid-term project, your final project requires you to persuade your classmates of a philosophical thesis via the methods discussed and practiced this semester. Unlike your mid-term project, though, the final project is solo, so you must complete it and present it entirely on your own. Again it is up to you which philosophical thesis you choose, so long as it is not one that we have discussed in class this semester (but you should discuss it with me in advance). You must combine an argument or set of arguments with the art and science of persuasion to make the best case possible in favor of your conclusion. More details on this assignment will be provided in the weeks leading up to the deadline.

20% - Paper - Due May 4th at 12:30PM EDT in classroom

In addition to the persuasive presentation, you also must write a paper (at most 6 pages in length, double spaced and using 12-pt Times New Roman font) arguing for your philosophical thesis. This is the same philosophical thesis that you attempted to convince your classmates of in your presentation. Here, though, the focus is on the philosophy--you must set aside the rhetorical techniques of oral presentation and focus on the nuts and bolts of your argument for your position. You must consider at least one serious objection to your premises, and you must respond to this objection as well as you can. More details on this assignment will be provided in the weeks leading up to the deadline.

Grading Scale:

| | | | |
|------------------|----|------------------|----|
| $g \geq 93$ | A | $80 > g \geq 77$ | C+ |
| $93 > g \geq 90$ | A- | $77 > g \geq 73$ | C |
| $90 > g \geq 87$ | B+ | $73 > g \geq 70$ | C- |
| $87 > g \geq 83$ | B | $70 > g \geq 60$ | D |
| $83 > g \geq 80$ | B- | $g < 60$ | F |

Attendance:

Attendance is required, but everyone gets one unexcused absence. Each unexcused absence after the first results in the deduction of a third of one's overall letter grade (e.g. if you have two unexcused absences and your final grade would have been an A had you always been present, it would move to an A- because of your second unexcused absence).

Technology Policy:

You are not allowed to use any screened device during class, whether it's a phone, a laptop, or something else. The purpose of this class is to begin to develop a philosophical worldview, and doing so requires active engagement with me and your peers. Screened devices divide your attention and create unnecessary distractions.

Texts:

All texts will be provided via Sakai. They will be labeled with the dates by which they need to be read.

Honor Code:

You must comply with Notre Dame's honor code at all times. You can read more about your responsibilities under the honor code here: honorcode.nd.edu/the-honor-code/. Academic integrity is a serious matter, and I will report any violations of the honor code. Ask me if you have any questions about the honor code.

Accessibility:

Students who have a disability, or who have questions about disability, should come and talk to me. Students can also contact the Office of Disability Services for a confidential discussion in the Sara Bea Learning Center for Students with Disabilities, or by phone at 574-631-7157. All information given to Disability Services is confidential and is shared only with your consent. We recommend that students who believe they may need an accommodation for this course contact Disability Services at their earliest opportunity. This is to ensure there is time to complete the process before accommodations are actually needed. Additional information about Disability Services and the process for requesting accommodations can be found at sarabeadisabilityservices.nd.edu.

Class Schedule

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>Tuesday, January 12 -</u> | <i>Introductions; Course Details; Activity; Survey</i> |
| <u>Thursday, January 14 -</u> | <i>Argument Analysis</i> |
| Reading #1: | - Entirety of the PAT Reasoning and Analysis Packet. |
| In-Class Focus: | - Practice problems; analysis group activity. |
| Special Assignment due Friday, January 15 at 5pm via email | |
| <u>Tuesday, January 19 -</u> | <i>Voting</i> |
| Reading #2 + | - Excerpts from Brennan, G. & Lomasky, L., (1993), <i>Democracy and decision: The pure theory of electoral preference</i> . |
| In-Class Focus: | - Excerpts from Brennan, J., (2009), "Polluting the Polls: When Citizens Should Not Vote." - Excerpts from Brennan, J., (2011), <i>The Ethics of Voting</i> . - Excerpts from Brennan, J., (2016), <i>Against Democracy</i> . |
| Quiz #1 | |

Thursday, January 21 -

Reading #3:

Voting

- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/11/02/its-your-moral-duty-to-vote-here-are-3-reasons/>
- <https://ethicist.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/03/must-you-vote/>

Reading Response #1

In-Class Focus:

- Excerpts from Cicero, (55 BC), *De Oratore*.
- Excerpts from King, M.L., Jr., (1965), "Our God is Marching On!"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44RN0C5jLDc>
<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/our-god-marching>
("Today I want to tell the city of Selma [...] in decency and honor.")
- Excerpts from Obama, B., (2018), "Tell your Friends to Stop Using These 7 Excuses for Not Voting."
<https://twitter.com/attn/status/1052577837968846848>

Tuesday, January 26 -

Reading #4 +

In-Class Focus:

Quiz #2

Democracy

- Excerpts from Barber, B.R., (1984), *Strong Democracy*.
- Excerpts from Madison, J., (1787), Federalist No. 10.

Thursday, January 28 -

Reading #5:

Democracy

- <https://www.nationalreview.com/2019/04/what-the-electoral-college-saves-us-from/>
- <https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2018/10/01/democracy-or-republic/>
- <https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2016-01-25/direct-democracy-may-be-key-to-a-happier-american-democracy>

Reading Response #2

In-Class Focus:

- Excerpts from Hidalgo, C., (2019), "A bold idea to replace politicians," *TED Talk*.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyGWML6cI_k

Tuesday, February 2 -

Reading #6 +

In-Class Focus:

Campaign Finance

- Excerpts from Pevnick, R., (2019), "Should campaign finance reform aim to level the playing field?," *Politics, Philosophy, and Economics*.
- Excerpts from Smith, B.A., (2010), "The Myth of Campaign Finance Reform."
<https://nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/the-myth-of-campaign-finance-reform>
- Excerpts from Khan Academy, (2018), "Campaign finance."
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPfNgTrWKyE>

Quiz #3

Thursday, February 4 -

Reading #7:

Reading Response #3

In-Class Focus:

Campaign Finance

- <https://time.com/4182502/campaign-finance-reform/>

- Excerpts from Cicero, (55 BC), *De Oratore*.

- Excerpts from Will, G., (2015), "Campaign Finance Reform Corrupts," PragerU.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=at82C8E8HUE>

Tuesday, February 9 -

Reading #8 +

In-Class Focus:

Universal Healthcare

- Excerpts from Daniels, N., (1981), "Health-Care Needs and Distributive Justice," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 10.

- Excerpts from Dworkin, R., (1981), "What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of resources," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 10.

- Excerpts from Sachs, B., (2010), "Lingering Problems of Currency and Scape in Daniel's Argument for a Societal Obligation to Meet Health Needs," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 35.

- Excerpts, Jacobs, L., (1996), "Can an egalitarian justify universal access to health care?," *Social Theory and Practice*, 22.

- Excerpts from Hausman, D., (2011), "A Lockean argument for universal access to health care," *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 28.

Quiz #4

Thursday, February 11 -

Reading #9:

Universal Healthcare

- <https://www.dailycal.org/2019/04/02/california-needs-to-implement-a-universal-health-care-plan/>

- <https://www.statnews.com/2018/10/16/medicare-for-all-health-care-elizabeth-warren/>

-

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2018/10/10/donald-trump-democrats-open-borders-medicare-all-single-payer-column/1560533002/>

Reading Response #4

In-Class Focus:

- Excerpts from Cicero, (55 BC), *De Oratore*.

- Excerpts from Kennedy, J.F., (1962), Health Care Speech at MSG. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXUJErr_vfo

Tuesday, February 16 -

Reading #10 +

In-Class Focus:

Immigration

- Excerpts from Van Der Vossen, B. & Brennan, J., (2018), *In Defense of Openness*.

- Excerpts from Altman, A. & Wellman, C.H., (2009), *A Liberal Theory of International Justice*.

Quiz #5

Thursday, February 18 -

Reading #11:

Immigration

- <https://nypost.com/2018/08/04/im-an-immigrant-and-trump-is-right-on-immigration/>
- <https://qns.com/story/2018/06/26/op-ed-trumps-zero-tolerance-policy-wrong-answer-illegal-immigration/>

Reading Response #5

In-Class Focus:

- Excerpts from Truth, S., (1851), "Ain't I a Woman?"
 - Excerpts from Trump, D.J., (2016), Speech on Immigration.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxD5QkzmVOA>

Tuesday, February 23 -

Reading #12 +

In-Class Focus:

Affirmative Action

- Excerpts from Newton, L., (1972), "Reverse Discrimination as Unjustified," *Ethics*, 83.
- Excerpts from Eastland, T., (1996), *Ending Affirmative Action: The Case for Colorblind Justice*.
- Excerpts from Cohen, C. & Sterba, J., (2003), *Affirmative Action and Racial Preferences: A Debate*.
- Excerpts from Appiah, K.A., (2011), "Group Rights and Racial Affirmative Action," *Journal of Ethics*, 15.

Quiz #6

Thursday, February 25 -

Reading #13:

Affirmative Action

- <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-uncomfortable-truth-about-affirmative-action-and-asian-americans>
- <https://calmatters.org/commentary/why-affirmative-action-is-necessary-from-harvard-to-california/>

Reading Response #6

In-Class Focus:

- Excerpts from Baldwin, J. & Buckley, W.F., (1965), Debate at Cambridge Union at Cambridge University.
 - Excerpts from Johnson, L.B., (1965), Commencement Speech at Howard University.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcfAuodA2x8>

Tuesday, March 2 -

Mid-Term Presentations

Thursday, March 4 -

Mid-Term Presentations

Mid-Term Analysis/Reaction due via email on Friday, March 5 at 5PM EST

Tuesday, March 9 -

Mid-Term Break (NO CLASS)

Thursday, March 11 -

Mid-Term Break (NO CLASS)

Tuesday, March 16 -

Theism

Reading #14 +

- Excerpts from Leibniz, G.W., (1697), *On the Ultimate*

- In-Class Focus:** *Origination of Things*, excerpts from Leibniz, G.W., (1710), *Theodicy*, and excerpts from Leibniz, G.W., (1714), *Monadology*.
- Excerpts from Leibniz, G.W., (1695), *A Specimen of Dynamics*, and excerpts from Hume, D., (1779), *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.
 - Excerpts from Pascal, B., (1670), *Pensées de M. Pascal sur la religion et sur quelques autres sujets*.

Quiz #7

Thursday, March 18 -

**Reading #15 +
In-Class Focus:**

- Theism*
- Excerpts from Hume, D., (1779), *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.
 - Excerpts from Leibniz, G.W., (1710), *Theodicy*.
 - Excerpts from Van Inwagen, P., (2008), *The Problem of Evil*, Oxford University Press.
 - Excerpts from Hume, D., (1739), *A Treatise of Human Nature*.
 - Excerpts from Hume, D., (1748), *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*.

Quiz #8

Tuesday, March 23 -

Reading #16:

- Theism*
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/25/opinion/-philosophy-god-omniscience.html>
 - <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/09/is-atheism-irrational/>
 - <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/25/arguments-against-god/>

Reading Response #7

In-Class Focus:

- Excerpts from Edwards, J., (1741), "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."
<https://www.biblebb.com/files/edwards/je-sinners.htm>
- Excerpts from Stillingfleet, E., (1677), *Sermon on Pentecost*.

Thursday, March 25 -

Reading #17:

- Theism*
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/25/opinion/-philosophy-god-omniscience.html>
 - <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/09/is-atheism-irrational/>
 - <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/25/arguments-against-god/>

Reading Response #8

In-Class Focus:

- Excerpts from Hume, D., (1779), *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

- Excerpts from Harris, S., (2005), "An Atheist Manifesto."
<https://samharris.org/an-atheist-manifesto/>
- Tuesday, March 30 -
Reading #18 +
In-Class Focus:
Quiz #9
- Vaccines, Helmet Laws, and Masks*
 - Excerpts from Mill, J.S., (1869), *On Liberty*.
 - Excerpts from Thaler, R.H. & Sunstein, C.R., (2008), *Nudge*.
- Thursday, April 1 -
Reading #19:
- Vaccines, Helmet Laws, and Masks*
 -
<https://townhall.com/columnists/scottmorefield/2020/06/08/countering-the-love-your-neighbor-argument-for-mask-wearing-n2570216>
 - <https://www.nytimes.com/article/coronavirus-N95-mask-DIY-face-mask-health.html>
 -
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/02/opinion/coronavirus-masks.html>
- Reading Response #9**
In-Class Focus:
- Excerpts from Rogan, J., (2018), "Joe Rogan Experience #1183." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvx06vzRANI>
 - Excerpts from Leyonhjelm, D., (2016), "Why we should not be forced to wear bike helmets."
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0iz1F0dWLAc>
- Tuesday, April 6 -
Reading #20 +
In-Class Focus:
Quiz #10
- Abortion*
 - Excerpts from Thomson, J., (1971), "A Defense of Abortion," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1.
 - Excerpts from Marquis, D., (1989), "Why Abortion is Immoral," *The Journal of Philosophy* 86.
- Thursday, April 8 -
Reading #21:
- Abortion*
 - <https://www.cnn.com/2018/05/05/opinions/supporting-abortion-is-pro-life-opinion-campoamor/index.html>
 - <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0821-marcotte-abortion-coercion-20150821-story.html>
- Reading Response #10**
In-Class Focus:
- Excerpts from Clinton, H. & Trump, D.J., (2016), *2016 Final Presidential Debate on CBS News*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKp3k_8h8Qc
- Tuesday, April 13 -
Reading #22 +
- Veganism*
 - Excerpts from Norcross, A., (2004), "Puppies, Pigs, and

In-Class Focus: People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases," *Philosophical Perspectives* 18.
 - Excerpts Fischer, B., (2018), "Arguments for Consuming Animal Products," in *Oxford Handbook of Food Ethics*.

Quiz #11

Thursday, April 15 - *Veganism*
Reading #23: - <https://video.foxnews.com/v/5830538163001#sp=show-clips>
 - <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/04/17/is-veganism-good-for-everyone>

Reading Response #11

In-Class Focus: - Excerpts from Singer, P., (2017), "Is it okay to eat meat? Peter Singer tackles the best objections against vegetarianism."
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLI3vEGU49Q>
 - Excerpts from Sander, B., (2020), "Vegan, meet carnivore."
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MxW-JKLeu1k>

Tuesday, April 20 - *Summary of the Semester*

Thursday, April 22 - *Final Presentations*

Tuesday, April 27 - *Final Presentations*

Tuesday, May 4 - *Final Essays Due*

Final Essay Due at 12:30 PM EDT in classroom