

Philosophy of Sport

Philosophy 98

Fall 2010

*This is a provisional syllabus. It may change, but I will keep the requirements and expectations unchanged.
syllabus as of 4/2/2010*

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Course Description:

Phil. 98 is an introduction to the discipline of philosophy by way of questions that arise in the context of sports. That is, we will work our way towards philosophical issues by working through more practical debates that arise in the context of sports.

For example, what (if anything) is wrong with using performance enhancing drugs? Is it cheating? What is it to cheat? And what's wrong with cheating anyhow? Are PED's dangerous? Many sports are dangerous, some can even be life-threatening. So, what's wrong with something's being dangerous?

And even if PED's are dangerous, does that give anyone aside from the athlete him- or herself the right to stop the athlete from using them? Are PED's unnatural? What does "natural" mean in the context of human life? Lots of things we do are "unnatural" in some sense. Both cosmetic surgery and hi-tech sports equipment are "unnatural" in some sense. Should they be banned?

Another example: what's the difference between an amateur and a professional, and why does this distinction matter? Do amateurs play for "love of the game," while professionals earn money? Can't someone who earns money, even lots of money, playing a professional sport also or even primarily play for love of the game? Should collegiate athletes be paid? Are big time collegiate athletes exploited by their institutions, by the television networks, by their fans, by the viewing public? Do the pressures of professional or collegiate athletics place an alienating barrier between the athlete and his or her sport? Between the athlete and his or her education?

We all debate questions like these, and when we do we often hit barriers to our understanding. Those barriers are philosophical: What are the ethics of competition and games? May anyone dictate to an adult what he or she does to or with his or her own body? What is the distinction between the natural and the artificial? What is exploitation? What is alienation? These are all philosophical questions, and we will examine them through a range of literature, including



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10/29/2009
outside the FedEx Forum in
Memphis

contemporary contributions to the growing discussion of the philosophy sport and classical writings by the great philosophers of the past.

Course Requirements:

Students will write

- a number of short “reflection” papers in which they explore some of these issues in relation to their own experience.
- two short analytical papers (2-3 pp.) **due Sept. 23rd & Nov. 18th**
- two formal philosophy papers:
 - first paper:
 - first draft **due Oct. 14th**
 - students and an instructor will comment on the first draft and return it by **Oct. 21st**, leaving five days for final revisions
 - final draft **due Oct. 26th**
 - second paper will be due on **whatever day the Registrar sets as our final exam date**

Late papers for the two short analytical and two formal papers: unexcused late papers will be graded down one grade step (e.g., B+ to B) per two business days late. Please discuss legitimate excuses with me as early as possible.

- University approved athletic travel will count as a legitimate excuse to turn work in late. Please discuss the details of any such delays with me *in advance*.
- University approved travel for other sorts of events will also count.
- Medical exigencies, family emergencies, funerals, and weddings all count.
- I have been known to accept other excuses, but only rarely. I can’t write an infallible rule in advance, so please contact me as soon as is practical to discuss any situation that might arise.
- Having to take midterms on the same day or having several assignments from multiple classes due at the same time are *not* legitimate.

Attendance policy: Attendance is required. I will keep attendance in order to encourage you to come to class, and if I notice an “attendance problem” emerging, I will discuss it with you. Bear in mind that the readings are difficult and that lecture and class discussion are almost certainly indispensable to your ability to write good papers. If you do miss a class session, do not request a make-up lecture or review session in my office. Get notes from a classmate.

Academic Integrity: As signatories to the Georgetown University Honor Pledge, and indeed simply as good scholars and citizens, you are required to uphold academic honesty in all aspects of this course. You are expected to be familiar with the letter and spirit of the Standards of

