**Course Data**

**PHIL 410/PHIL510  Philosophy & the News**

5.00 cr.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Grading Options:</th>
<th>Optional for all students</th>
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<tr>
<td>Instructor:</td>
<td>Zack N</td>
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<td>Office hrs:</td>
<td>MW 1-2</td>
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**Description.** Philosophers have opinions on contemporary events and draw on them for examples in theoretical work; philosophers also address social problems directly in theory and some believe that philosophy should be about the world. But philosophers less often theorize about contemporary events as they are happening, as philosophical work. The subject matter of this course will be major news stories occurring during the time of the course. For example, if the course had been given in Fall 2012---when I first proposed this course---likely topics would have been the US presidential election campaign, Hurricane Sandy, the scandal surrounding General David Petraeus, the Israel-Hamas conflict, the pending US Supreme court case, *Fisher v. The University of Texas*, and the looming so-called “fiscal cliff.” Philosophical frameworks of political theory, disaster, feminism, war, racial theory and economics could have been brought to all of these unfolding stories and will be brought to the stories that emerge during Spring term 2014. Classroom discussion will facilitate a plurality of background interests and methodologies. The news contents will be determined by events.

**Required Texts and News Material**

1. *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, Baudrillard, Semiotext, 13-978-1-5835-038-5 pbk
2. *Don’t Think of an Elephant*, Lakoff, Chelsea Green, 1-931498-71-7 pbk-
4. Additional postings on BB, (Others TBA).
   - Benkler (on WikiLeaks)
   - Berger and Milkman, What Makes Online Content Viral
   - Fenster, Disclosure's Effects (on WikiLeaks)
   - Keeley, on conspiracy theories
   - Markham, citizen journalism
   - Journalese – see end of this syllabus

*** See Suggested Further Reading on p.***

**ONGOING NEWS SOURCES INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO.**

campus news, Eugene Weekly for more local news, and so forth—all of which are available online.

See also:
Retroreport.org (revised look at old news stories, sponsored by NYTimes.
http://www.mediachannel.org/ skeptical journalism and commentary
http://wikileaks.org/ documents provided by whistle blowers

Work and Grading

Phil 410- Based on your choice of several news stories, two 5-7 page papers for = 60% of grade. *Two weeks before each paper is due, a draft or outline is required, as indicated on the schedule.*

Phil 510, one 10-15 page revised paper based on news of your choice, suitable for conference presentation=60% of grade. Draft or outline due two weeks before due date of paper, as indicated on the schedule.

410/510—40% of your final grade will consist of news preparations, presentations, and discussion in class. While everyone is encouraged to speak up and present, those who prefer not to will be able to help prepare the news for presentations by others on their ‘news teams.’

Course Objectives

✓ Acquire or strengthen the habit of being informed. Have well developed interests in aspects of the news that you daily pursue on an ongoing basis.
✓ Identify and articulate the picture of the world with which you approach the news or react to news that is surprising or alarming.
✓ Be able to philosophically analyze aspects of the news that interest you or seem to demand your attention, based on your picture of the world. Relate your philosophical analysis to other philosophical ideas or systems of thought.
✓ Be able to identify the ‘slant’ of a news story or the interests served by how a story is reported. Use both insights from other disciplines and from your philosophical analysis in the course of doing this and be able to state your sources and explain how you are applying them.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

• Apply philosophical analysis to events outside the philosophy curriculum.
• Be able to critically analyze your own assumptions in this application.
• Be able to critically engage the assumptions of others in non-academic contexts.

UO standard letter grading. 1/3 grade off per class for late papers without documented excuses (e.g. a B for a paper due on Monday will become a B- if submitted on Wednesday). See appendix for more information on course mechanics.
SCHEDULE

We will pursue and discuss both the required readings and the news stories followed by students and the instructor, each time that we meet. The required readings are not philosophically taxing apart from how we interpret them, so that there is time and energy for the reporting and analysis of news in class.

- Assigned readings must be completed by the time the class meets. Readings will be discussed on all class days.
- Reports will be scheduled so that each team reports once a week.

Note: See appendix for good-paper requirements. All papers need to be emailed to nzack@uoregon.edu.

WEEK 1.
M. Introduction, Discussion of syllabus, Organization of news teams, homework to begin on news stories of interest that are developing. Discussion of what’s in the news when we first meet.
How stories will be reported: Reports should be given from notes and contain the following.

1. Statement of sources, for each story.

2. Facts of the stories.

3. Critical interpretation, which has 3 parts: First, your ‘lens’ or theory that is assumed in your interpretation---you may use the assigned readings as default lenses or theories for your interpretations, although to do that you may need to read ahead, or, you may use another philosophical or cultural theory with which you are already familiar; Second, critique of how a story is being reported or comparisons of different reports---this critique can be positive, but you have to say what it is based on; Third, critique or analysis of the events themselves that are reported.

4. PHIL 410 - Each team will need to stick with the stories it selects to follow through the first paper, if they are still live. If one or more peters out, you may substitute another one. New stories should be chosen for the second paper, to avoid repetition, unless there are special circumstances.

PHIL 510 – You are encouraged to stick with a number of related stories that remain constant throughout the term.

*PHIL 410/510 – A major new event, if it occurs, will pre-empt previous projects, if decided in discussion with the instructor.*

5. The work on reporting is collaborative. However, your papers are required to be individually original, as with other philosophy papers.

W. Reports from teams on news stories or areas that they will follow.
Baudrillard, In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities, first third, “In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities.”

WEEK 2
M. Baudrillard, “. . . Or the End of the Social”

WEEK 3
M., McCluen, Understanding Media, Lapham’s Introduction and Part I, Introduction and chaps 1,2,3.
W. McCluen, Part I, chaps 4, 5, 6, 7. Markham, “Hunched Over their Laptops.”

WEEK 4
M. 410 Outline or Draft of Paper no. 1 due. See text box above for requirements. Email to nzack@uoregon.edu before noon.
M. McCluen, Part II, 8,9,10,11
W. McLuan, Part II, 12, 13, 14, 15
WEEK 5
M. McLuan, Part II, 16, 17, 18, Keeley on conspiracy theories (BB)
W. McLuan, Part II, 19, 20, 21

WEEK 6
M. 410. Paper no. 1. Due. Email to nzack@uoregon.edu before 2PM.
M. McLuan, Part II, 22, 23, 24, 25.
W. McLuan, Part II, 26, 27, 28, 29

WEEK 7
M. 510. Draft of final paper. Email to nzack@uoregon.edu before noon.
M. McLuan, Part II, 30, 31, 32, 33.

WEEK 8
M. 410. Outline or draft of paper no. 2 due. It is expected that this paper will have conclusions about both your tools of interpretation and the stories you are writing about.
M. George Lakoff, Don’t Think of an Elephant, Part I: Theory and Application
W. Lakoff, Part II, From Theory to Action

WEEK 9
W. Mark Fenster, “Disclosures Effects.” 410 students: Choose either Wenkler or Fenster’s article for this week since both are long. 510 students: Please try to cover both.

WEEK 10
M. Presentations of final papers by 410 students, conclusions.
W. Presentation of final papers by 510 students.

Week 11.
M. Final papers for 410 and 510 due before 2PM. nzack@uoregon.edu

Suggested Further Reading
W. Lance Bennett et al. When the Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina, 2007
APPENDIX, A-D

A. Disability

Philosophy Department faculty and instructors do their best to comply with Disability Services policy and instructions, as follows. Please see no. 4 in particular.

At a minimum, Instructors have the responsibility to ensure Full access for students with disabilities by responding to a student's need or request for accommodations as outlined below.

1. If a student presents you with a notification letter from DS:
2. You have the responsibility to cooperate with DS in providing authorized accommodations in a reasonable and timely manner. The specific accommodation determines the amount of involvement required. Refer to the section below entitled "Examples of Shared Responsibility" for a description of your involvement in providing the most common accommodations.

3. If a student does not present you with a notification letter from DS:
4. If a student requests an accommodation without having presented you with the notification letter from DS, please refer the student to DS. If the student is already on file with DS, a request form just needs to be filled out. If the student is new to DS, the process to review documentation and meet with the student may take some time. If the disability is obvious and the accommodation appears appropriate, you may need to provide the accommodation while awaiting official notification. If you are unsure, please call DS for assistance.

5. If a student discloses a disability to you:
6. Ask to see the notification letter from DS. This letter describes the accommodations that the institution is legally mandated to provide. During an office hour or at another convenient time, discuss the letter and the accommodations with the student. Students MUST present a notification letter from DS to receive testing accommodations. If the student does not have a letter, please refer the student to DS. Appropriate accommodations will be determined after reviewing documentation of the disability and the student will be issued the notification letter.

7. If you have a question about the appropriateness of an accommodation:
8. Questions about the appropriateness of certain accommodations should be directed to the Director of DS.

9. If a disability is suspected:
10. Share your concerns with the student regarding his or her performance. If the concern seems disability-related, ask if he or she has ever received assistance for a disability. If it seems appropriate, refer the student to DS for further discussion and guidance. It is the student's decision whether or not to self-identify to DS; however, to receive accommodations, disclosure to DS with proper documentation is required.

B. GRADES: U of O Philosophy Department Policy

What kind of paper deserves an “A,” “B,” etc.? The following reflects the general standards of the Philosophy Department at the University of Oregon.

A = excellent. No mistakes, well-written, and distinctive in some way or other.
B = good. No significant mistakes, well-written, but not distinctive in any way.
C = OK. Some errors, but a basic grasp of the material.
D = poor. Several errors. A tenuous grasp of the material.
F = failing. Problematic on all fronts indicating either no real grasp of the material or a complete lack of effort.

Please note: what counts as “excellent” or “OK,” for example, depends in part upon the nature and level of the class in question.

Discussion forms an integral part of the course, and your performance will be graded on the basis of the quantity and quality of your participation. You should arrive prepared to discuss the material and course assignments.

C. Academic Honesty
The stiffest punishments possible will be sought for those who plagiarize, fabricate, or cheat. (The usual punishment is an “F” for the course.) The following offers examples of academic dishonesty.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the inclusion of someone else's product, words, ideas, or data as one's own work. When a student submits work for credit that includes the product, words, ideas, or data of others, the source must be acknowledged by the use of complete, accurate, and specific references, such as footnotes. Expectations may vary slightly among disciplines. By placing one's name on work submitted for credit, the student certifies the originality of all work not otherwise identified by appropriate acknowledgements. On written assignments, if verbatim statements are included, the statements must be enclosed by quotation marks or set off from regular text as indented extracts.

*A student will avoid being charged with plagiarism if there is an acknowledgement of indebtedness.*

**Indebtedness must be acknowledged whenever:**

1. one quotes another person's actual words or replicates all or part of another's product;
2. one uses another person's ideas, opinions, work, data, or theories, even if they are completely paraphrased in one's own words;
3. one borrows facts, statistics, or other illustrative materials—unless the information is common knowledge.

Unauthorized collaboration with others on papers or projects can inadvertently lead to a charge of plagiarism. If in doubt, consult the instructor or seek assistance from the staff of Academic Learning Services (68 PLC, 346-3226). In addition, it is plagiarism to submit as your own any academic exercise (for example, written work, printing, computer program, art or design work, musical composition, and choreography) prepared totally or in part by another.

Plagiarism also includes submitting work in which portions were substantially produced by someone acting as a tutor or editor.

**Fabrication**

Fabrication is the intentional use of information that the author has invented when he or she states or implies otherwise, or the falsification of research or other findings with the intent to deceive.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

1. citing information not taken from the source indicated;
2. listing sources in a reference not used in the academic exercise;
3. inventing data or source information for research or other academic exercises.

**Cheating**

Cheating is an act of deception by which a student misrepresents or misleadingly demonstrates that he or she has mastered information on an academic exercise that he or she has not mastered, including the giving or receiving of unauthorized help in an academic exercise.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

1. copying from another student's paper, computer program, project, product, or performance;
2. collaborating without authority or allowing another student to copy one's work in a test situation;
3. resubmitting substantially the same work that was produced for another assignment without the knowledge and permission of the instructor;
4. writing a paper for someone else or permitting someone else to take a test for you.

**D. HOW TO WRITE GOOD PHILOSOPHY PAPERS**

Note: When you get your papers back, there will be comments on ‘track changes’—please make sure you turn it on. The letters in parentheses indicate what aspect of your writing might need improvement and you may see them the second or third time this aspect still needs work.

1. **CLARITY**

   Since this is a philosophy paper, make sure that you define your terms and give reasons for claims. All of your ideas should be explicitly stated and not left to the reader to infer. One difference between philosophy and literature is that philosophers spell everything out, while creative writers depend on the imagination of the reader.
2. PRECISION (P) Try not to make vague claims or general statements about the ideas in the readings. Be accurate in reporting the views of others and exact in stating your own.

3. ORGANIZATION (O) Organize the ideas in the paper into a few coherent paragraphs. Summarize the main claims of your paper in 2 or 3 sentences that you write after you write the paper, but put at the very beginning of the paper. This is an appropriate introductory paragraph for a philosophy paper, not a filler or a fluffy beginning.

3. WRITING MECHANICS (WR) The mechanics include spelling, punctuation, syntax and complete sentence structure. Make sure that you already have these down or consult a source if you don’t. Highly recommended is Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style*. This is available online at www.bartleby.com/141/

4. ANALYSIS (A) Analyze claims. This means breaking your ideas down into their simpler components, and defining them. Do not start with or rely on dictionary definitions, but use your own words and cite the dictionary only if necessary. Dictionary definitions report usage, whereas a philosophical definition may be critical of current usage or find it vague. Examine the logical consequences of your claims and the claims of others.

5. CITATION (C) Cite the required readings this way in your text: (author’s last name, page no.) As well, provide a list of citations at the end of the paper. It is important to do this to show you have done the required reading and are not just recycling notes from class or discussion group lectures. If you do use material from lecture, please make sure to cite that as well.

6. QUOTATIONS (Q) Quotations should be used to illustrate a claim that you are making about an author. They are not a substitute for explaining the author’s thought in your own words. A good strategy is to state the author’s ideas in your own words first and then “prove” your interpretation with a short quote.

7. DIRECT (D) Be direct. Make sure that you give a direct and focused answer to the question for the paper. This is the most important requirement for papers to reach the B and A range.

**Avoiding ‘Journalese’**

_by PHILIP B. CORBETT_

Notes from the newsroom on grammar, usage and style. (Some frequently asked questions are here.)

My colleague Susan Wessling offered this reminder about word choice and the perils of “journalese”:

We all move faster than we used to, because deadlines loom at all hours of the day. But one thing that should still set us apart is our careful consideration of language and our aversion to the easy clichés, hype and jargon of “journalese.” We should reach for precise and well-chosen words, and not depend on the overused newswriting terms that spring so readily to mind.

The Times’s stylebook remains a good guide — not as a compilation of “banned” words but for thoughtful advice on avoiding the trite and the timeworn.

Here are a few recent cases where we might have done better, along with the stylebook’s admonitions:

***

*Republicans and Democrats in Congress on Thursday traded barbs again over the yearlong probe into Operation Fast and Furious, as Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. testified for the sixth time about the disputed investigation into a gun trafficking network based out of Arizona.*

From the stylebook:
probe (n. and v.). Do not use as a synonym for inquiry, investigation or investigate; the effect is journalese.

(Note that “traded barbs” is not very fresh, either; we’ve used some version of it more than 20 times in the last year.)

WASHINGTON — It did not take long for Mitt Romney to pounce on Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta’s statement Wednesday that American troops could end their combat role in Afghanistan by mid-2013, 18 months sooner than expected. Within hours, Mr. Romney lambasted it as “naïve” and “misguided.”

From the stylebook:
lambaste. When used to mean criticize or denounce, this colloquial verb is overworked and usually hyperbole.

But the video, which drew more than 2,800 comments and was viewed more than 39,000 times, did not appease the growing number of people online, mostly women, who decried what they view as the politicization of women’s health care.

From the stylebook:
decry is stilted and archaic-sounding. Substitute verbs include deplore and denounce.

More Tales of Dickens

After we noted the enduring popularity of “A Tale of Two Cities” as an inspiration for headline writers, my colleague David Corcoran did a little historical checking. It seems that the first Times headline writer to seize on the device may have seen it as a timely pop-culture reference, not a hoary literary cliché: it was in 1877, Dickens had been dead just seven years and the novel was less than 20 years old.

The headline — “A Tale of Two Continents” — adorned a strange and opaque tale of love, money and a dead banker, apparently borrowed from The San Francisco Chronicle.

The headline, along with its novella-length subhead, doesn’t help make much sense of the story. Still, we’ll give the headline writer points for originality in the use of the allusion — just this once.

In a Word

This week’s grab bag of grammar, style and other missteps, compiled with help from colleagues and readers.

As Ms. Gingrich told reporters, her ex-husband asked for an open marriage, though not in those exact words, after a counseling session so he could continue to see another woman, Callista Bisek, to whom he is now married (a story Mr. Gingrich angrily refuted).
Make it “rebutted” or some other word. “Refute” means to successfully disprove, which goes beyond what we meant here.

That show too started out slowly (and languished in the ratings). But it soon found its voice, and the audience found it. “Smash” gets better as it goes along. It’s unlikely to achieve television greatness like “M*A*S*H” did, but by Episode 3 it shows signs of becoming an addictive pleasure along the lines of this season’s “Revenge.”

Recorded announcement: Avoid this use of “like” as a conjunction. Here, we could say “as” or “the way” instead.

Mr. Paul has largely shied away from directly criticizing Mr. Romney, and his aides have indicated that his continued campaign is far less bothersome to them than Mr. Gingrich’s. Very difficult at first glance — or even second — to be sure of the antecedents of these pronouns.

Still, in what might be a combination of generosity and caginess, Mr. Guettel helped supply Prospect with a music supervisor, Robert Meffe, whom Ms. Lucas said “has sort of been the ear of Adam” at “Myths and Hymns” rehearsals.

Whom has? No. Make it “who,” subject of the verb in the relative clause.

My mother and Chris’s father were deeply in love and hell bent on tying the knot, pronto.

It is one word in our standard dictionary, Webster’s New World College, Fourth Edition.

An Abu Sayyaf leader, Umbra Jumdail, as well as more than a dozen other local militants, were also said to have died in the operation.

Because the phrase introduced by “as well as” is parenthetical, the subject is simply “An Abu Sayyaf leader” and the verb should be singular — “was also said.” It might be smoother like this: “An Abu Sayyaf leader, Umbra Jumdail, was also said to have died in the operation, along with at least 13 other local militants.”

At City Opera, with which she performed regularly until 1954, Miss Williams also sang Nedda in Leoncavallo’s “Pagliacci,” Mimi in Puccini’s “Bohème” and the title role in Verdi’s “Aïda.”

Amazing what you find in the stylebook (including words like “dieresis”). Like this: “Aida.” Use quotation marks for the title, not for the name of the character; neither includes a dieresis (i).

Rabbi Marvin Hier is in the home stretch of a seven-and-a-half year tour through the Talmud, day by day, page by page. He is also mulling his Oscar ballot.

We needed one more hyphen, between half and year.

Although little is known about the Denisovans — the only remains so far are the pinky bone and the tooth, and there are no artifacts like tools. Dr. Reich and others suggest that they were once scattered widely across Asia, from the cold northern cave to the tropical south. The evidence is that modern populations in Oceania, including aboriginal Australians, carry Denisovan genes.
Something went awry, perhaps in revising or editing, that left us without a complete sentence here.

**American contractors say they have been told that the State Department is considering to field unarmed surveillance drones in the future in a handful of other potentially “high-threat” countries, including Indonesia and Pakistan, and in Afghanistan after the bulk of American troops leave in the next two years.**

Make it “considering fielding” or “considering whether to field.” The long, convoluted sentence may have thrown us off track. Simplify.

**His grandfather was a mohel; he decided to follow suit when he was in college and worried about whether polyps on his vocal chords would interfere with his first career choice as a cantor.**

The term is “vocal cords.”

**The fifth set in Melbourne did not require quite as many games to resolve as either of those epics, but the intensity and tension was extraordinary.**

Compound subject. Make it “the intensity and tension were.”

**On Tuesday in the Federal District Court in Manhattan, court lawyers for Mr. Drapkin accused his now former friend of being a “nitpicking” boss who reneged on a promise to pay Mr. Drapkin the millions of dollars Mr. Drapkin says he is owed under a 2007 separation agreement, signed when Mr. Drapkin left MacAndrews & Forbes, Mr. Perelman’s holding company.**

It’s obvious this is in court; not clear what we meant by “court lawyers.”

**After Deadline examines questions of grammar, usage and style encountered by writers and editors of The Times. It is adapted from a weekly newsroom critique overseen by Philip B. Corbett, the associate managing editor for standards, who is also in charge of The Times’s style manual.**

**Journalese and slang**

Do not be too free with slang (eg, *He really hit the big time in 1994*). Slang, like metaphors, should be used only occasionally if it is to have effect. Avoid expressions used only by journalists, such as giving people the thumbs up, the thumbs down or the green light. Stay clear of gravy trains and salami tactics. Do not use the likes of, or Big Pharma (big drug firms). And avoid words and expressions that are ugly or overused, such as the bottom line, caring (as an adjective), carers, guesstimate (use guess), schizophrenic (unless the context is medical), crisis, key, major (unless something else nearby is minor), massive (as in massive inflation), meaningful, perceptions, prestigious and significant.

Politicians are often said to be highly visible or high-profile, when conspicuous would be more appropriate. Regulations are sometimes said to be designed to create transparency, which presumably means openness. Governance usually means government. Elections described as too close to call are usually just close. Ethics violations, if they are not crimes, are likely to be shenanigans, immorality, scandalous behaviour or mere misdemeanours.

Try not to be predictable, especially predictably jocular. Spare your readers any mention of mandarins when writing about the civil service, of their lordships when discussing the House of Lords, and of comrades when analysing communist parties. Must all stories about Central Asia include a reference to the Great Game? Must all
lawns be manicured? Must all small towns in the old confederacy be called the buckle on the Bible belt? Are drug-traffickers inevitably barons? Must starlets and models always be scantily clad? Is there any other kind of wonk than a policy wonk? Resist saying This will be no panacea. When you find something that is indeed a panacea (or a magic or silver bullet), that will indeed be news. Similarly, hold back from offering the reassurance There is no need to panic. Instead, ask yourself exactly when there is a need to panic.

In general, try to make your writing fresh. It will seem stale if it reads like hackneyed journalese. One weakness of journalists, who on daily newspapers may plead that they have little time to search for the apposite word, is a love of the ready-made, seventh-hand phrase. Lazy journalists are always at home in oil-rich country A, ruled by ailing President B, the long-serving strongman, who is, according to the chattering classes, not squeaky clean but a wily political operator—hence the present uneasy peace—but, after his recent watershed (or ground-breaking or landmark or sea-change) decision to arrest his prime minister (the honeymoon is over), will soon face a bloody uprising in the breakaway south. Similarly, lazy business journalists always enjoy describing the problems of troubled company C, a victim of the revolution in the gimbal-pin industry (change is always revolutionary in such industries), which, well-placed insiders predict, will be riven by a make-or-break strike unless one of the major players makes an 11th-hour (or last-ditch) intervention in a marathon negotiating session.

Prose such as this is often freighted with codewords (respected is applied to someone the writer approves of, militant someone he disapproves of, prestigious something you won’t have heard of). The story can usually start with First the good news, inevitably to be followed in due course by Now the bad news. An alternative is Another week, another bomb (giving rise to thoughts of Another story, another hackneyed opening). Or, It was the best of times, it was the worst of times—and certainly the feeblest of introductions. A quote will then be inserted, attributed to one (never an) industry analyst, and often the words If, and it’s a big if... Towards the end, after an admission that the author has no idea what is going on, there is always room for One thing is certain, before rounding off the article with As one wag put it...