Philosophy of Social Media

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Course Description

From marketing, to sharing our life experiences, to getting the news, social media permeates our lives. In the process it raises important challenges regarding the self, corporate responsibility, and privacy. In this course we will ask questions like: Can we live authentic lives online? How does social media interact with perceptions of race and gender? What should privacy look like online? Is doxing ever justified? Students will investigate these questions through practical and theoretical approaches. Readings will be drawn from diverse sources including philosophy, sociology, law, and the internet. Students will complete a variety of writing assignments that encourage creativity, critical thinking, and clarity of prose.

Learning Outcomes

1. Produce philosophical writing that meets the field of philosophy's expectations regarding structure, argumentation, and evidence.

2. Produce writing that is based on a careful analysis of the text, implementing logical tools presented early in the semester.

3. Handle secondary sources appropriately, properly citing in MLA format.

4. Develop effective preparatory writing strategies such as flow charts, outlining, drafting, and collaboration.

Evaluation

- Exercises and quizzes from Williams and Bizup *Style* (20%).

- Paper 1 (10%). This is the "trial essay", an assessment at the beginning of the semester. Graded on completion.

- Paper 2 (20%). First an outline, then an essay. Rubric will be provided.

- Paper 3 (20%). Philosophical dialogue. Rubric will be provided.

- Discussion assignment (10%). You will write a short philosophical discussion piece.

- Paper 4 (20%). First a draft of essay for peer review, then the final essay. Rubric will be provided.

Zoom Etiquette

- This is primarily a discussion course, not a lecture, so I ask that you **please keep your camera on.** If you strongly prefer to keep your camera off or cannot use the camera function, please send me an email or private chat message explaining your circumstances and you will be excused from using your camera.

- Please use the raise hand function to ask a question or make a comment. If you have a follow up on a question or comment just asked, please write the chat that you have a follow up, and you will be called on next.

Inclusiveness Guidelines

Racially inclusive behavior avoids assuming someone's racial or ethnic identity as well as knowledge or characteristics based on identity. Race- and gender-inclusive language uses words that recognize and affirm how people describe, express, and experience their race and gender. Gender-inclusive language avoids assuming a male speaker ('freshman', 'upperclass-man', 'mankind', etc.), erasing non-binary gender identifications ('men and women'; do use 'Latinx' instead of 'Latino/a'), and conflating biological sex with gender expression ('women have a uterus'). Race-inclusive language avoids using racially-loaded terms except when explicitly discussing the term itself (and even then please be mindful of how your speech affects other students).

The Cornell Office of Diversity and Inclusion and LGBTQ Resource Center each provide helpful guidelines for how to be more inclusive in our speech and writing:

https://dos.cornell.edu/lgbt-resource-center/trans-inclusion-cornell
https://diversity.cornell.edu/networks-and-orgs/lgbt-staff-faculty/gender-inclusive-pronouns

Following these guidelines is essential to fostering an inclusive environment at Cornell.

Students with a Disability

Students with Disabilities: Your access in this course is important. Please give me your Student Disability Services (SDS) accommodation letter early in the semester so that we have adequate time to arrange your approved academic accommodations. If you need an immediate accommodation for equal access, please speak with me after class or send an email message to me and/or SDS at sds_cu@cornell.edu. If the need arises for additional accommodations during the semester, please contact SDS.

SDS is located on level 5 of Cornell Health, 110 Ho Plaza, 607-254-4545, sds.cornell.edu.

Notes on Academic Integrity

1. Each student in this course is required to adhere to Cornell's Academic Integrity Code: http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/aic.cfm. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the Code, and what constitutes a violation of it. All work submitted must be the student's own, and all sources must be properly cited.

2. Students are not permitted to buy or sell any course materials, online or otherwise. This includes handouts, paper topics, homework questions, etc. Such behavior constitutes academic misconduct.

Course Materials

All readings will be available through the Canvas site, but we will be using a significant part of this book if you would like to buy a hard copy:

Williams and Bizup, *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, **11th Edition** (Note: this is not the newest edition) **Henceforth referred to as 'W&B'**

Tentative Schedule of Readings

Readings and assignments should be completed by the day at which they are listed.

Week 1: Introduction, Privacy

Tues 2/9:
Perry et al, "Philosophy"

Thurs 2/11:
Perry et al, "Logical Toolkit"
Julia Angwin, *Dragnet Nation* Chapter 1
Try out the Electronic Frontier Foundation's "Cover Your Tracks" tool

Week 2: Privacy

Tues 2/16:
James Rachels, "Why Privacy Is Important"

Thurs 2/18:
W&B Appendix 1: Punctuation **(Exercises not required, but there will be a quiz in class)**

Trial Essay due 5pm Friday

Week 3: Privacy

Tues 2/23:
Andrei Marmor, "Privacy and Social Media"

Bring a four or five sentence summary of Marmor's paper to class

Thurs 2/25:
David M. Douglas, "Doxing: A Conceptual Analysis"

Outline of 2nd Essay due 5pm Friday

Week 4: Writing Week

Tues 3/2:
W&B Appendix 2: Using Sources **(Exercises not required, but there will be a quiz in class)**

Thurs 3/4:
W&B Chapter 3 "Actions"

2nd Essay due 5pm Friday

Week 5: Race and Social Media

Tues 3/9:
TBD

Thurs 3/11:
W&B Chapter 4 "Characters"

Week 6: Race and Social Media

Tues 3/16:
No class

Thurs 3/18:
Aria Dean, "Poor Meme, Rich Meme" (*Real Life Mag*)
Amanda Hess and Shane O'Neill (The New York Times), "The White Internet's Love Affair With Digital Blackface" (video)

Week 7: Race and Memes

Tues 3/23:
manuel arturo abreu, "Online Imagined Black English" (*Arachne*)

Thurs 3/25:
W&B Chapter 5 "Cohesion and Coherence"

Dialogue due 5pm Friday

Week 8: Conspiracy Theories

Tues 3/30:
Jared Millson, "Conspiracy Theories," *1,000-Word Philosophy*
Maarten Boudry, "The Warped Epistemology of Conspiracy Theories", Blog of the APA

Thurs 4/1:
W&B Chapter 6 "Emphasis"

Week 9: Conspiracy Theories

    Tues 4/6:
    Brian L. Keeley, "Of Conspiracy Theories," *The Journal of Philosophy*

    Thurs 4/8:
    W&B Chapter 7 "Motivation"

Week 10: and the Ideological Echo Chamber

    Tues 4/13:
    C Thi Nguyen, "Escape the echo chamber" in *Aeon*
    Leon Yin and Alfred Ng, "Facebook Said It Would Stop Pushing Users to Join Partisan Political
    Groups. It Didn't" on *The Markup*
    Thurs 4/15:
    W&B Chapter 8 "Global Coherence"

    Discussion assignment due 5pm Friday

Week 11: Free Speech and Hate Speech

    Tues 4/20:
    John Stewart Mill, *On Liberty* (excerpt)
    Electronic Frontier Foundation, "Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act"

    Thurs 4/22:
    W&B Chapter 9 "Concision"

Week 12: Free Speech and Hate Speech

    Tues 4/27:
    Bernard Williams, "The Marketplace of Ideas", in *Truth and Truthfulness*

    Thurs 4/29:
    W&B Chapter 10 "Shape"

Week 13: Identifying Hate Speech

    Tues 5/4:
    Alexandra Schofield and Thomas Davidson, "Identifying hate speech in social media"
    Shirin Ghaffary (Vox), "The algorithms that detect hate speech online are biased against
    black people"
    Jillian C. York, Corynne McSherry, and Danny O'Brien (Electronic Frontier Foundation), "Beyond Platforms: Private Censorship, Parler, and the Stack"

    Thurs 5/6:
    W&B Chapter 11 "Elegance"

Week 14:

Tues 5/11:
Peer review exercises

Draft of Final Essay Due in Class

Thurs 5/13:
TBD