

UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

74-6950  
M.A. Seminar

Instructor: J. Harvey

Fall-Winter 2009-2010

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Among other things philosophy is a skill-based discipline, ultimately resulting in work that is publicly presented in one form or another. There are three main goals in the course. The first is to focus on some of the crucial skills and ensure that they move significantly for each student during the course. This in turn will involve not only thinking and reading, but some work on certain perceptual skills. The second goal is to explore the variety of philosophical contributions one can make (in a paper, thesis, or discussion). All too often these are reduced to just three: exegetical skills, critiquing someone else's work, or arguing for a position yourself. There are more kinds of philosophical work than these, and the richness of contributions is accessible only if one is aware of other, equally important, forms. The third goal is to help prepare students for public presentations of work, especially conference work (although we will also look at journal publishing). It is by no means too early to be actively involved in public presentations and in particular, conference work is important for a number of reasons throughout one's graduate career. In addition to a number of fairly small-scale pieces of work to further the first two goals, each student will plan and then write two conference papers during the year. This will involve several different stages of work, with input at each stage. The two conference papers will be written for two very different audiences: one academic and the other for the general public. In neither case, however, is the paper written just for academic listeners who work in your own philosophical field. The first paper has to be written so as to be clearly understood by all interested philosophers and the second has an even higher clarity goal. So there are some fairly challenging goals involved in writing the papers. (More details will be given in a separate handout.)

The papers will be read to the class. Also, each student will write conference-length commentaries on two-three such papers. So each paper-presentation in class will be followed by at least one commentary and then a conference-style question period. (Further details will be affected by the number of students in the course.) Tips will be given on everything involved in this process, from conference etiquette to handling questions from the audience. The intention is to submit the academic paper to

that at the end of the year we will organize and present a symposium to which the rest of the department and others (including non-philosophers) will be invited. One can expect that the papers will be revised in the light of specific comments between the stages of reading the paper in class and reading it at the symposium. (They are not "rewritten". Specific but careful revisions are made in the light of specific comments.)

Attendance, doing both the small-scale and the larger-scale work on time, and doing the preparation for sessions where one is neither presenter nor commentator, are all crucial for a Pass Grade. In addition, *some significant movement forward in at least one of the important skills* is required. Students will receive help with this, and providing all the work is done, as set out and on time, there should be no difficulty in demonstrating such progress.

Reading the final paper and a commentary in the symposium and taking an active part as an audience member in a number of sessions other than your own is part of the course work.

TEXT: All the readings called upon will be in the library..