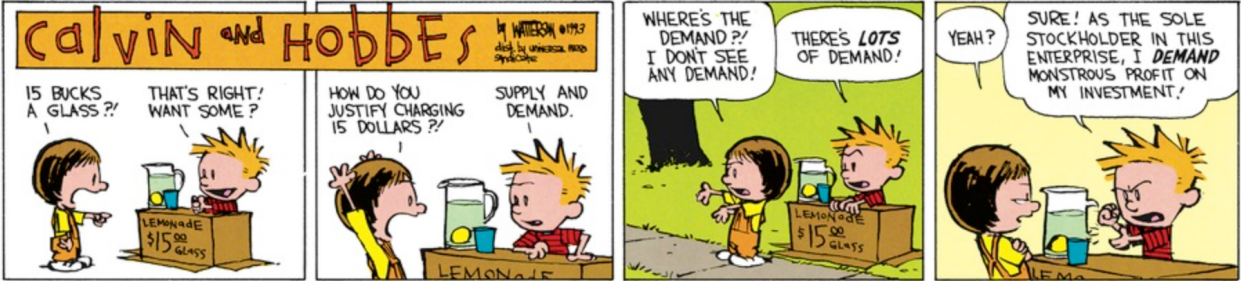


PHPE 401 – Philosophy, Politics, and Economics

Trimester 2, 2024 | Mondays & Wednesdays 12:00–13:50 | MY402 & MY303
 Coordinator: Jesse Spafford (jesse.e.spafford@gmail.com), office hours: after class until 15:00, MY612
 Co-Lecturers: Paul Calcott (upstream.paul@gmail.com), office hours: please email Paul to set up a time.
 Adrian Slack (adrian.slack@vuw.ac.nz), office hours: by appointment, email Adrian to set up a time.



The Course

This interdisciplinary course aims to demonstrate how philosophy, politics, and economics can be combined to help clarify how we understand our society and the institutions that compose it. For example, while economists tell us how markets work, philosophers ask whether markets work *well*—a normative question that tacitly shapes which features of markets we find salient. Similarly, while economists are interested in how rational agents behave, philosophers explore what it means to be rational. And we will see how we can use the diverse tools of economists, philosophers, and political scientists to help answer core questions about the democratic process, e.g., whether it is rational to vote. Finally, the course aims to bring different disciplinary perspectives to bear on some familiar social, economic, and environmental problems, welcoming a diverse set of guest lecturers to present evidence-informed discussions of public policy (with particular attention paid to the historical, political, institutional, international, social, and environmental contexts that shape public policy).

Assignments

For this course, you will take one, write one long expository essay (2,000-3,000 words), write a critical and reflective post, and write two responses to others’ reflective posts. Here is how the grades for these assignments will be weighted:

Assignment	Percentage of Final Grade	Due Date
Test 1	20	August 7
Essay 1	40	September 23
Reflective Post (Assignment 2)	20	See below
Responses to Reflective Posts (Assignment 3)	20	See below

Essay

You will write an expository essay tying together a number of major ideas presented in the course. The purpose of this assignment is for you to practice taking complex and technical ideas, synthesizing them, and presenting them in a clear and well-organized way.

The essay must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. on September 23. If you need an extension, you must request one before the deadline and have a good reason for being granted an extension. Late submissions will be marked down 5% for each day that has elapsed since the deadline.

Reflective Posts

The course will introduce concepts and organise these in frameworks through a series of modules to explore the intersection of philosophy, politics and economics.

In the Discussion Board area on Nuku, a forum will be set up for each module (a short sequence of lectures) prior to the Application sequence (starting in week 9). The assignments below invite you to reflect on how the concepts/frameworks in a particular module may be applied to a case/example of your choice, and to engage in discussion on these posts.

Students may start with a new thread (a post) or respond to comments in an existing thread (a response). The requirements for assessment are detailed below.

- **Assignment 2** requires you to **create** (i.e. originate) a thread applying a concept (or framework of concepts) introduced in a particular class (or across a module) to analyse a professional or personal issue/problem that you have encountered, i.e. a reflective post.
- **Assignment 3** requires you to **respond** to other students' posts.

All posts/responses submitted to the for a will be viewable by every student in the course

Clarification: Two Types of Posts

A student may **begin a discussion thread**. This should start by posing a question, framing an issue, or an application. Then continue by writing a reflection responding to that issue/application/question. Other students can then **respond to any branch of the discussion threads** as they grow.

New threads (by a single student) may be started at the same time. Please do not create more than three of your own threads in a given forum, as the increase in quantity may reduce the quality of interaction. (You can move over to the non-assessed social forum if you wish to expand a discussion/add many threads on a given topic.)

Deadlines

Deadlines will be posted for each module (for posts and responses) on Nuku.

The initial post should be made by the Friday following when a module is completed. For example, module 1 is scheduled to have lectures from Wednesday 10 July to Monday 22 July.

An originating post relating to this module should be made by 11:59pm on Friday 26 July.

Responses must be posted within two weeks of the module being completed, e.g. for module 1 by 11:59pm on Friday 2 August.

Forum Discussion and Expectations

The following describes the steps and considerations involved in the forum discussion process. For assessment purposes, this should be read alongside the post/response rubrics.

Typically, an initial thread (from the originator) is expected to be 500 to 1,000 words and 250-500 words for a response. This does not mean every response has to be analytically deep or rich, but you may not wish to elect such responses to be marked.

An originating post should identify a relevant concept/framework from a particular model, use this to frame a chosen issue/application and pose a question. The subsequent analysis should address the question, investigate the issue/application, and be used to develop an argument to generate insight. Consideration should be given to how to do this in a way that provides opportunities to stimulate further discussion (i.e. via responses).

Responses should engage reflectively and analytically with an originating post. It may involve various elements of critical comment, reflection, and response. Responses should aim to add a new angle, depth and/or breadth as part of an on-going discourse.

Submission

For assessment purposes, you should advise the lecturer by 5pm on the Thursday of week 12 of:

- one of your posts (as an originator) that you wish to be marked (20%)
- two responses/comments that you wish to be marked (10% each; 20% total).

You will find a submission link for each of the two assignments in the *Assessment > Assignments > Assignments 2 and 3* folder. Use the “Write Submission” button to note the name of the thread and the date it was posted. Please ensure that you use the Assignment 2 link for your own post and the Assignment 3 link for your responses (to another person’s post).

If you have any problems, please send Adrian a backup email (adrian.slack@vuw.ac.nz).

If I do not receive your selection by the deadline, your latest post and (up to two) comment(s) will be marked where these can be readily identified. (Where you have not submitted your choices and a post or response is not identified during the marking process, they will not be marked.)

Marking

Marks for each of the three items will range from a minimum of zero (where no substantively meaningful contribution is made) to a maximum of ten, and will be assessed against two main dimensions (5 marks each). See the provided marking handout.

Plagiarism and ChatGPT

Everything that you turn in should be written by you without consulting any resources beyond the assigned readings and me. Assignments found to contain copied material will be subject to disciplinary action. The use of ChatGPT and other LLMs is particularly discouraged, as (a) it will keep you from practicing the skills you are trying to develop, (b) they produce tedious writing that's annoying to encounter when marking, and (c) they can be unreliable when it comes to doing the kind of reasoning that is crucial when producing PPE-related writing (see below).



You

Monty Hall offers you the chance to choose from between two doors, door 1 and door 2. Behind one door is a car, and the other a goat, and Monty knows which is which but you don't. You choose door number 1. Before opening the door, Monty opens door number 2 to reveal a goat. He then offers you the chance to switch to door number 2 or keep your original choice. What is the optimal move?



ChatGPT

The scenario you've described is a variation of the famous Monty Hall problem, a probability puzzle based on a game show scenario. In the traditional Monty Hall problem, there are three doors, but in your version, there are only two doors, which changes the dynamics of the problem.

In the standard three-door version, it is always statistically advantageous to switch doors after Monty reveals a goat behind one of the unchosen doors. This is because initially, you have a 1/3 chance of picking the car and a 2/3 chance of picking a goat. When Monty, who knows where the car is, opens a door to reveal a goat, the probability of the car being behind the other unopened door goes up to 2/3 if you initially chose a goat (which you did with 2/3 probability).

However, in your two-door version, the situation is different. You initially choose one of the two doors, and then Monty, knowing what's behind them, opens the other door to reveal a goat. Since there are only two doors and Monty will always reveal a goat, the odds of the car being behind either door remain equal - 1/2.

In this two-door scenario, there is no statistical advantage to switching doors. The probability of the car being behind either door is the same, so the optimal move is simply a matter of personal preference. You can either stick with your original choice or switch to the other door, but your chances of winning the car are 50/50 either way.



You

are there any prime numbers whose digits sum to 9?



ChatGPT

Yes, there are prime numbers whose digits sum to 9. One such example is 19. Its digits, 1 and 9, sum up to 10, which is divisible by 9.



You

What is a four-letter animal that, when you reverse its letters, becomes the name of a plant?



ChatGPT

That's a clever riddle! The answer is "bear" and "brae."



You

No it isn't. You have to reverse the letters.



ChatGPT

Ah, my bad! Let's try that again. The correct answer is "rats" and "star."



You

Star isn't a plant



ChatGPT

Oops, my mistake again. How about "taco" and "coat"?



You

A farmer and a sheep are standing on one side of a river. There is a boat with enough room for one human and one animal. How can the farmer get across the river with the sheep in the fewest number of trips?



ChatGPT

To get across the river with the sheep in the fewest number of trips, the farmer should follow these steps:

1. The farmer takes the sheep across the river in the boat.
2. The farmer leaves the sheep on the other side of the river and returns alone to the original side.
3. The farmer crosses the river again with the boat empty.
4. The farmer and the sheep are now both on the other side of the river.

Readings (These will likely be subject to modification).

Market Allocation

July 10 **Markets and Allocation**
Friedrich Hayek “The Use of Knowledge in Society”

July 15 **Market Failure**
Erik Olin Wright “What’s So Bad About Capitalism?
(Proposition 5)

July 17 **Markets and Prisoner’s Dilemmas**
Robert Frank *Falling Behind*, chs. 4–5, 9.

July 22 **Externalities and Pigouvian Taxes**
William Nordhaus *The Climate Casino*, ch. 19

Utilitarianism, Efficiency, and Cost Benefit Analysis

July 24 **Well-Being in Philosophy and Economics**
Richard Brandt “Objections to Desire-Satisfaction
Views of Happiness.”

July 29 **Utilitarianism and Economics**
Nicholas Stern *The Economics of Climate Change*, excerpts

July 31 **Social Welfare Functions**
William Bellinger *The Economic Analysis of Public Policy*,
excerpts

August 5 **Efficiency and CBA**
Matthew Adler *Measuring Social Welfare*, ch. 1

August 7 **IN-CLASS TEST**

Rationality and Voting

August 12 **Rationality in Economics**
TBA TBA

August 14 **Newcomb’s Problem**
Michael Huemer “Newcomb’s Problem”

MID-TRIMESTER BREAK

September 2 **CDT vs. EDT**
Andy Egan “Some Counterexamples to
Causal Decision Theory”

Arif Ahmed “Dicing with Death”

September 4 **Prisoner’s Dilemmas,
Decision Theory, & Voting**

David Lewis “Prisoners’ Dilemma is a
Newcomb Problem”

John Leslie “Ensuring Two Bird Deaths
with One Throw”

September 9 **The Rationality of Voting**

Zach Barnett “Should you Vote to Change
the Outcome?”

Governance and Power

September 11 **Governance Mechanisms**
TBA TBA

September 16 **Governance and Power**

Elizabeth Anderson *Private Government*, chs. 1 or 2

Applications and Guest Lecturers

September 18 **Applying Economic Ideas**
TBA TBA

September 23 **Guest Lecturer:**
Girol Karacaoglu on well-being and the TSY/OECD
framework.

September 25 **Guest Lecturer:**
Lee McCauley on nudges.

September 30 **Guest Lecturer:**
Alan Bollard on infrastructure.

October 2 **Guest Lecturer:**
Jonathan Boston on managed retreat.

October 7 **Guest Lecturer:**
Martyn Gosling on society and the boundaries of
markets.

October 9 **Guest Lecturer:**
Eberhard Feess on social norms.