

Philosophy of Comedy - PHI3930, Spring 2021

T | Period 8 - 9 (3:00 PM - 4:55 PM) - [MAT0113](#)

R | Period 9 (4:05 PM - 4:55 PM) - [MAT0117](#)

Prof. Kyle Driggers – kyledriggers@ufl.edu

Office Hours: via virtual appointment, office at 330 Griffin-Floyd Hall will not be in use

Quick Response Hours via email or text : 10 AM – 4PM Weekdays

Phone: 919-907-0020 (text before calling)

Course Description

This course introduces a number of philosophical questions, theories, and techniques raised by laughter and humor.

The first section of the course will consider various answers to the question: what is it for something to be funny? What is it about a joke, a sketch, or a cartoon that deservedly elicits laughter? And how is laughter about funny things different than laughter that expresses anxiety or grief? This section introduces students to techniques of conceptual analysis as well as the philosophical thought of Hobbes, Freud, Bergson, Dennett and others.

The second section concerns the aesthetics of humor in the context of more general aesthetic concerns. For example, we will explore the curious connection between the humorous and the horrific, ask whether or not there is a form/content distinction in humor as some argue is present in other art forms, and wonder about the nature and power of irony. We will also ask whether or not something can be “objectively” funny.

The third and final section will investigate the relationship between ethics, politics, and comedy. For example, we will wonder whether or not the ethical content of a joke impacts its funniness and whether or not one can appreciate the craft of jokes even if they disagree about the positions advanced by the comedian via those jokes. Alternatively, we will discuss whether or not a joke’s being baldly political can be a detriment to its funniness.

Texts

Text No. 1	Title: COMIC RELIEF: A COMPREHENSIVE PHILOSOPHY OF HUMOR	Author: JOHN MORREALL	
	ISBN: 1405196122	Publisher: WILEY-BLACKWELL	Copyright:
	Cover: paperback book	Edition: 1	This text is req uired
	<hr/>		
Text No. 2	Title: INSIDE JOKES: USING HUMOR TO REVERSE-ENGINEER THE MIND	Author: HURLEY, DENNETT, ADAMS	
	ISBN: 0262518694	Publisher: MIT PRESS	Copyright:
	Cover: paperback book	Edition: ILLUSTRATED	This text is req uired
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Course Goals

The goals of this course are

- To read, interpret, and critically discuss texts in philosophy written about the nature of humor. At the end of the course, I hope you will come to see the intrinsic interest in doing philosophy in general and the philosophy of comedy particular.
- To develop your ability to read, comprehend, and critically engage with texts concerning abstract philosophical questions written from a perspective that is likely remote from your own. Our course will emphasize the challenge and satisfaction of grappling with complex philosophical arguments.
- To develop your ability to collaborate with peers on the difficult task of forming your own interpretation of a text and then assessing the merits of that text.
- To develop the skill of charitable interpretation so that you not only better understand the course material but also so that you can appreciate and productively challenge points of view you disagree with.

Achieving these Goals

- Students are expected to read assigned texts carefully before class and take notes of questions and comments you have about the text. If you would like supplemental reading material to read alongside the text, I am happy to provide it.
- I will give lectures to help explain the more complex material. However, most of class time will consist in my asking pointed questions about the text to help you guide your own thoughts. This class will rely heavily on media analysis.
- Sometimes I will ask small groups to work together to form an interpretation of an unfamiliar text to help develop the skill of constructing one's own interpretation of a text.

- When an objection to a philosopher's views is raised, I will do my best to respond "as" that philosopher.
- When we find points of disagreement with a philosopher I will ask you to reflect on *why* your views are more plausible.

Assignments

10 Weekly Short Reflections - (300 words each)

Each week, you should submit your reflections on the discussion/readings we had for that week. You can, for example, give an example of some bit of comedy that illuminates one of the issues that we discussed. Or you can give an example of comedy that proves to be a counterexample to a theory discussed in class. Or, you could simply discuss the philosophy on its own merits. The only thing you can't do is simply summarize the material and say that you agree/disagree with it. These responses will be graded for perceived effort.

Performance Review - (1500 words)

For this paper, you will review a comedic performance of some kind. It can be a stand-up special, an episode of a TV Show, a film, a podcast episode, or an album of performance comedy (e.g. recordings of prank calls.) In this paper, you will talk about the comedy from a philosophical perspective, teasing out how, e.g., the various theories of humor and theories about humor's connections with our other values are applicable in this piece. Points will be awarded in response to how accurately you describe the philosophical content we discuss in class and how insightfully you apply it to the source material. Note: you should not assume when writing this that I have seen the performance.

Philosophical Paper - (1500/3000 words -- see the 'Grading Standards' Page)

This is your "theory" paper. Here, the goal is to take up a position on one of the issues that we have discussed in class and give a series of philosophical arguments in favor of that position. The goal here is not to apply the philosophy to a particular performance, but to talk about it in its own terms. Topics for this paper will need to be pre-approved by the instructor. If the student selects the longer version of this paper, it must have a bibliography with at least five, peer-reviewed academic sources.

Final Exam

The final exam will consist in short essay questions that cover the material discussed over the course of the semester. It will be open-book, open-note, etc. but cannot be collaborated on.

Grading Policies

- No extra credit will be assigned.
- I am happy to give extra feedback on work, but under no circumstances will I discuss grades after they have been assigned.
 - The one exception to this policy is cases of clerical error (bad math, wrongly recorded grades, etc.)

You may see how to convert your grade in this course to GPA points by seeing this site:
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/#gradestext-otp1>

Grading

This class will be graded differently than many other classes. We will be using a "track" system. Simply put, your grade is determined by *you* and the amount of work that you are willing to put in for this class.

In order to receive the grade for a given track, you must complete the given assignments in a "Satisfactory" fashion, as determined by the instructor. If any assignment for that track is determined to be "Needs to be re-written," the instructor will give you detailed comments on it and you will have a chance to resubmit it one more time to be re-graded after making the requested changes. Otherwise, you will be sorted into the next lowest track down a grade. Comments on "satisfactory" work is by request only.

D-Track

To pass this course, you must complete all of the Weekly Short Reflections, and pass the Final Exam.

C-Track

To receive a C in this course, you must complete all of the Weekly Short Reflections, the Performance Review, and pass the Final Exam.

B-Track

To receive a B in this course, you must complete all of the Weekly Short Reflections, the Performance Review, the shorter Philosophical Paper, and pass the Final Exam.

A-Track

To receive an A in this course, you must complete all of the Weekly Short Reflections, the Performance Review, the longer Philosophical Paper, and pass the Final Exam.

+/-

You will receive a + grade (e.g., a B+) if you complete all of the assignments on one of your tracks and one of your papers is determined to be especially (and I mean *especially*) good. (There are no A+s.)

You will receive a - grade (e.g., a C-) if you have to resubmit an assignment on your track.

Course Policies

- Cell phone use or use of the computer for anything other than participating in class is not permitted. Please make an effort to hold your meeting in a private area, free from distractions.
- Please note that my lectures will contain visual elements, as will the guided discussions. This means that calling in instead of using the Zoom software is not advised. All visual elements will be saved and uploaded to Canvas, when possible.
- Because I cannot feasibly read drafts of exams for everyone, I will not read exams of papers for anyone.
- Class attendance is expected. Though there will be no grade penalty for missed classes, I will not go over the material twice for students with an unexcused absence. Class will be recorded, but I will only share the recordings with those who have excused absences. Excused absences are consistent with university policies in the undergraduate catalog (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>) and require appropriate documentation. Students who can demonstrate that they were unable to submit an assignment by the deadline due to an excused absence and who can provide appropriate documentation for the absence will be given a reasonable period of time to make up the late work.
- Discussions must be respectful. No one wants to feel uncomfortable or unsafe in a classroom. Any comment or action that discriminates or harasses on the grounds of sex, gender, race, sexual identity, nationality, ability, or any physical characteristics will not be tolerated. If you feel disrespected in any way during the class, please contact me immediately.
- Plagiarism and collaboration of any kind on papers or responses is strictly prohibited. You may not collaborate on any written assignment except as part of the peer review process. If your papers refer to or include work that is not your own, whether directly quoted, paraphrased, or even described in general terms, it must be clearly cited. I do not care which citation style you use, as long as I can check the source. If I discover any instance of plagiarism, you will receive a zero for that assignment.
- UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel.
- Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.
- Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific

times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/> ([Links to an external site.](#))

- Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.
- The writing studio is committed to helping University of Florida students meet their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. Visit the writing studio online at <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> or in 302 Tigert Hall for one-on-one consultations and workshops.
- Our class sessions will be audio-visually recorded. Students who participate with their camera engaged or utilize a profile image are agreeing to have their video or image recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who unmute during class and participate orally are agreeing to have their voices recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the "chat" feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live. The chat will not be recorded or shared. As in all courses, unauthorized recording and unauthorized sharing of recorded materials is prohibited.
- Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. [Click here for guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner.](#) Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via ufl.bluera.com/ufl/. [Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students here.](#)
- If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms ([Click here for guidance from the CDC on symptoms of coronavirus](#)), please use the UF Health screening system and follow the instructions on whether you are able to attend class. [Click here for UF Health guidance on what to do if you have been exposed to or are experiencing Covid-19 symptoms.](#)
- Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work. [Find more information in the university attendance policies.](#)
- For technical issues, please contact the helpdesk at 352-392-4357 or visit their website.

For Face-to-face Students

We will have face-to-face instructional sessions to accomplish the student learning objectives of this course. In response to COVID-19, the following policies and requirements are in place to maintain your learning environment and to enhance the safety of our in-classroom interactions.

- You are required to wear approved face coverings at all times during class and within buildings. Following and enforcing these policies and requirements are all of our responsibility. Failure to do so will lead to a report to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution.
- This course has been assigned a physical classroom with enough capacity to maintain physical distancing (6 feet between individuals) requirements. Please

utilize designated seats and maintain appropriate spacing between students.
Please do not move desks or stations.

- Sanitizing supplies are available in the classroom if you wish to wipe down your desks prior to sitting down and at the end of the class.
- Follow your instructor's guidance on how to enter and exit the classroom. Practice physical distancing to the extent possible when entering and exiting the classroom.
- If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms ([Click here for guidance from the CDC on symptoms of coronavirus](#)), please use the UF Health screening system and follow the instructions on whether you are able to attend class. [Click here for UF Health guidance on what to do if you have been exposed to or are experiencing Covid-19 symptoms](#).
 - Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work. [Find more information in the university attendance policies](#).

Course Schedule

Please see the Canvas site for the Course Schedule and Assignment Due Dates.