

Phil 850: Topics in Recent Philosophy (Spring 2025)

T 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM, 3087 Wescoe Hall

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Office Hours: By appointment

Description: We will consider recent work in social ontology and the philosophy of social science. Specifically, we will analyze (theories about) the nature of social institutions—including their metaphysical status and potential to (mal-)function.

Readings: The readings will (mostly) be available on Canvas.

Grading: (1) First paper (50%)
(2) Second paper (50%)

Penalty for lateness of essays: one full letter grade per day of lateness.

<u>Grading scale:</u>	93-100: A	87-89: B+	77-79: C+	67-69: D+	0-59: F
	90-92: A-	84-86: B	74-76: C	64-66: D	
		80-83: B-	70-73: C-	60-63: D-	

Further important notes:

- (1) CLAS Policy on Academic Misconduct: all students should consult the CLAS Student Academic Misconduct Policy for definitions of types of academic misconduct and the sanctions that can be imposed: <http://clas.ku.edu/sites/clas.ku.edu/files/docs/Policies/Faculty/clas-student-academic-misconduct-2009-04.pdf>.
- (2) Student Access Center: The Student Access Center (SAC) coordinates academic accommodations and services for all eligible KU students with disabilities. If you have a disability for which you wish to request accommodations and have not contacted SAC, please do so as soon as possible. They are located in 22 Strong Hall and can be reached at 785-864-4064 (V/TTY). Information about their services can be found at access.ku.edu. Please contact one of us privately regarding your needs in this course.
- (3) Excused absences: Students shall not be penalized for absence from regularly scheduled class activities that conflict with mandated religious observances (USRR 2.2.3). In cases of conflicts between class activities and mandated religious observances, the student is responsible for initiating discussion with the instructor to reach a mutually acceptable solution. **If you anticipate missing class because of a religious observance, please contact one of us as soon as possible so that alternative arrangements can be made.**
- (4) Pursuant to the University of Kansas' [Policy on Commercial Note-Taking Ventures](#), commercial note-taking is not permitted in PHIL 850. Lecture notes and course materials may be taken for personal use, for the purpose of mastering the course material, and may not be sold to any person or entity in any form. Any student engaged in or contributing to the commercial exchange of notes or course materials will be subject to discipline, including academic misconduct charges, in accordance with University policy. Please note: note-taking provided by a student volunteer for a student with a disability, as a

reasonable accommodation under the ADA, is not the same as commercial note-taking and is not covered under this policy.

- (5) Academic integrity is essential for a fair evaluation of your work and that of your classmates, as KU's policies on academic misconduct make clear. All work submitted in this course must be your own. Assignments for this course are designed to help you develop your critical thinking, close reading, research, and writing skills. Submitting other people's work as your own, repurposing work you have done for other courses without our prior approval and without substantial revision, or using so-called AI tools for your work in this course undermines those goals. In this course, you may not use ChatGPT or other generative AI software for your assignments, including plug-ins or native tools that automatically generate text within word-processing apps. Exceptions include the grammar check and spellcheck options on your word-processing software or Grammarly grammar check (but not GrammarlyGO's generative text option); these approved tools make suggestions for revising work that you have already generated and may be used with caution and with the understanding that you are, as always, ultimately responsible for the work you generate. If you have questions about what constitutes academic misconduct (plagiarism or unauthorized use of tools or assistance), please ask us before submitting your work.
- (6) Additional Resource and Policy Information for Students: In addition to the policies noted above, the following links and resources may be helpful to you for this class, as well as for others you may be taking. If you have questions or concerns about any of these policies, statements, or resources, please let us know. In addition, please visit the Student Resources website (KU Student Affairs) for additional policies and resources.
- a. Change of Grade Policy and USRR, Section 3: Change of Grade
 - b. Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities
 - c. KU Policy on Commercial Notetaking
 - d. KU Statement on Diversity and Inclusion
 - e. Mandatory Reporting (Civil Rights & Title IX)
 - f. Nondiscrimination, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action
 - g. Racial and Ethnic Harassment Policy
 - h. Sexual Harassment
 - i. Counseling and Psychological Services
 - j. Kansas Board of Regents Statement on Freedom of Expression
 - k. Student Support and Case Management
 - l. KU Statement on Diversity and Inclusion

Detailed Syllabus

Note: The syllabus is subject to change—please make sure that you are always operating from the latest version.

Week 1 (Jan. 21, 2025): Introduction

Week 2 (Jan. 28, 2025): Social Metaphysics I

Reading: Ruben, *The Metaphysics of the Social World*, Ch. 1

Week 3 (Feb. 4, 2025): Social Metaphysics II

Reading: Ruben, *The Metaphysics of the Social World*, Ch. 2

Week 4 (Feb. 11, 2025): Social Metaphysics III

Reading: Ruben, *The Metaphysics of the Social World*, Ch. 3

Week 5 (Feb. 18, 2025): Social Normativity I

Reading: Witt, *Social Goodness*, Chs. 1 & 2

Week 6 (Feb. 25, 2025): Social Normativity II

Reading: Witt, *Social Goodness*, Chs. 3 & 4

Week 7 (Mar. 4, 2025): Social Normativity III

Reading: Witt, *Social Goodness*, Chs. 5 & 6

Week 8 (Mar. 11, 2025): Social Normativity IV

Reading: Witt, *Social Goodness*, Ch. 7 & Epilogue

—**SPRING BREAK**—

Week 9 (Mar. 25, 2025): The Nature of Institutions: Guala’s Account I

Reading: Hindriks & Guala (2015) – “Institutions, rules, and equilibria: a unified theory”

First Paper Due

Week 10 (Apr. 1, 2025): The Nature of Institutions: Guala’s Account II

Reading: Guala (2016) – *Understanding Institutions*, chaps. 9&10

Week 11 (Apr. 8, 2025): The Nature of Institutions: Guala’s Account III

Reading: Guala (2016) – *Understanding Institutions*, chaps. 13&14

Week 12 (Apr. 15, 2025): Functionalism I: Overview

Reading: Sciortino (2008) - “Functionalism and Social Systems Theory;” Ormerod (2019) – “The history and ideas of sociological functionalism: Talcott Parsons, modern sociological theory, and the relevance for OR”

Week 13 (Apr. 22, 2025): Functionalism II: Further Developments

Reading: Pettit (1996) – “Functional Explanation and Virtual Selection;” Schmaus (1999) – “Functionalism and the Meaning of Social Facts”

Week 14 (Apr. 29, 2025): Institutional Corruption I: Overview

Reading: Satz (2013) – “Markets, Privatization, and Corruption;” Thompson (2018) – “Theories of Institutional Corruption”

Week 15 (May 6, 2025): Institutional Corruption II: Miller’s Account

Reading: Miller (2017) – *Institutional Corruption*, chaps 1, 3

Week 16: Final Paper

May 16 2025, 12.00PM: **Final Paper Due**