

Frontiers of Social Philosophy

Tuesdays at 14:05–15:40, and Thursdays at 14:05–15:40

Room 308, Teaching Building 5

Peter Finocchiaro

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Course Description:

We all have beliefs, we all perform actions, and we all are judged on the basis of the rationality and morality of our beliefs and actions. But we also talk as if other things – expert communities, governments, sports teams, and so on – have beliefs, perform actions, and are judged on the basis of the rationality and morality of their beliefs and actions. In this course, we will explore the extent to which such talk makes sense. In particular, we will explore whether this talk of collective intentionality is merely metaphorical, or tracking real features of *sui generis* group minds, or something inbetween. As a follow-up, we will explore the extent to which the principles we use to evaluate individual intentionality can be extended to the evaluation of collective intentionality.

This course is an advanced seminar in Social Philosophy. While there are many ways to design an advanced seminar, I have designed this one to be discussion-based and topic-oriented. We will read and discuss three* books on the topic of collective intentionality (broadly construed). In addition, you will write three short reply-style papers, one for each book.

Required Texts: Margaret Gilbert’s *On Social Facts*; Christian List and Philip Pettit’s *Group Agency: The Possibility, Design, and Status of Corporate Agents*; Kirk Ludwig’s *Collective Action: Volumes 1 and 2*

Optional Texts: Collective intentionality is a comparatively new topic in philosophy. But it is growing rapidly. Here are some additional books you may consider acquiring:

- Raimo Tuomela’s *Social Ontology: Collective Intentionality and Group Agents*
- John Searle’s *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization*
- Michael Bratman’s *Shared Agency: A Planning Theory of Acting Together*
- Deborah Tollefsen’s *Groups as Agents*
- Margaret Gilbert’s *Joint Commitment: How We Make the Social World*

(I will provide pdf files of these texts if you send me a picture of a happy cat.)

Letter Grade Distribution: In this course I will use the following scale to convert between numerical and letter grades:

96.00 - 100.00	A+	70.00 - 74.99	B-
90.00 - 95.99	A	67.00 - 69.99	C+
85.00 - 89.99	A-	63.00 - 66.99	C
80.00 - 84.99	B+	60.00 - 62.99	C-
75.00 - 79.99	B	00.00 - 59.99	D

Grade Distribution: The overall grade is determined by the following:

Participation	25%
Paper #1	25%
Paper #2	25%
Paper #3	25%

Course Goals: My goal is help you become a productive junior researcher. In service to that goal, I offer the following three smaller goals:

- (a) to improve your ability to effectively and efficiently read contemporary research (on collective intentionality);
- (b) to improve (or develop) your ability to fruitfully discuss issues (related to collective intentionality) with your peers;
- (c) to develop your ability to produce scholarship, especially in the form of insightful reply-style papers.

Assignments

Participation: This course is a discussion-based seminar. I will not lecture. Instead, I will act as one of your peers, and we will all discuss and think through the reading material together. Consequently, your participation is essential. If you have taken a course of mine before, you know how I think about participation: we should be engaged in a soccer match, not a game of ping-pong. To that end, everyone must come to class prepared to discuss. Being prepared to discuss means, at a minimum, that you have read all of the material, you have come up with questions or thoughts to share, and you are ready to respond to the questions and thoughts shared by your peers. Please come to class prepared to discuss. It will be a painful semester if you do not.

To promote your participation, every week I will send you a personal “progress report”. In this progress report, I will briefly identify some of the ways you have successfully modeled good participation and some of the ways that you could improve as a participant. (My intention is for these progress reports to facilitate an open and honest conversation about how we can all

contribute to the quality of a classroom discussion. Please try to not be intimidated by them. I will not be mean.)

Papers: After we finish reading one of the three* books, you will write a paper that engages with the ideas presented in that book. This paper should take the form of a “reply” or “discussion note”. Typically, such papers are critical: they offer some kind of argument or objection to the ideas presented. But replies can also be constructive, solve some sort of problem that occurs in the original material, extend the ideas to a new context, and so on. Above all, though, this style of paper require concision.

Reading List and Schedule:

Below is a tentative schedule of the material that we will cover throughout the semester. The exact schedule will depend on a variety of factors, the primary factor being how fast we are able to collectively work through the material.

Book 1: Gilbert’s *On Social Facts*

- Day 1: Introductions (Optional: Chapter I)
- Day 2: Chapter II (1–5, approximately 36 pages)
- Day 3: Chapter III (1–3, approximately 42 pages)
- Day 4: Chapter III (4–6, approximately 46 pages)
- Day 5: Chapter IV (1–3, approximately 58 pages)
- Day 6: Chapter IV (4, approximately 33 pages)
- Day 7: Chapter V (1–5, approximately 37 pages)
- Day 8: Chapter V (6–7, approximately 40 pages)
- Day 9: Chapter VI (1–5, approximately 52 pages)
- Day 10: Chapter VI (6–8, approximately 41 pages)
- Day 11: Chapter VII (1–6, approximately 37 pages)
- Day 12: Reserved for holiday cancellations, delays in class, or other unexpected events

Book 2: List and Pettit’s *Group Agency*

- Day 13: Chapters 1–2 (approximately 40 pages)
- Day 14: Chapter 3 (approximately 22 pages)
- Day 15: Chapters 4–5 (approximately 43 pages)
- Day 16: Chapter 6 (approximately 24 pages)
- Day 17: Chapters 7–8 (approximately 33 pages)
- Day 18: Chapter 9 (approximately 15 pages)

Book 3.1: Ludwig’s *From Individual to Plural Agency*

- Day 19:** Chapters 2–4 (approximately 29 pages)
- Day 20:** Chapters 5–6 (approximately 39 pages)
- Day 21:** Chapters 7–8 (approximately 45 pages)
- Day 22:** Chapters 9–10 (approximately 37 pages)
- Day 23:** Chapters 11–13 (approximately 39 pages)
- Day 24:** Chapters 14–15 (approximately 24 pages)
- Day 25:** Chapter 16 (approximately 42 pages)
- Day 26:** Chapter 17 (approximately 15 pages)

Book 3.2: Ludwig’s *From Plural to Institutional Agency*

- Day 27:** Chapters 2–4 (approximately 43 pages)
- Day 28:** Chapters 5–6 (approximately 38 pages)
- Day 29:** Chapters 7–9 (approximately 46 pages)
- Day 30:** Chapters 10–11 (approximately 43 pages)
- Day 31:** Chapters 12–13 (approximately 32 pages)
- Day 32:** Chapters 14–15 (approximately 44 pages)

(**NB:** if you take a picture of a statue at East Lake and send it to me before we finish Gilbert’s book, I will give you 1 extra credit point.)