

PHI 379: PHILOSOPHY OF PLAY, 4 CR.  
 FALL 2018  
 TUES. AND THURS. 1:00 PM – 2:50 PM  
 NOTRE DAME HALL 137

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Name: Dr. Catherine Homan  
 Office Location: Fidelis Hall, 329  
 Phone: (414) 930-3013  
 E-mail: [homanc@mtmary.edu](mailto:homanc@mtmary.edu)  
 Office hours: Mon. 1-4, Tues. 3-4:30, Thurs. 3-4:30, and by appointment, Fidelis 329.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Play is one of the earliest and most ubiquitous activities of both humans and animals. Psychologists, for example, point to play as a vital dimension of child development. Play takes a wide variety of forms, from the play of light to play fighting to chess games to stage productions. Yet, what is it that all of these variations have in common such that we would deem them all “play”? In this course we will examine concepts and theories of play discussed in psychological, anthropological, and philosophical texts. We will ask questions such as, What is play? Is there a difference between human and animal play? What is the relationship between play and work? Is play different from games? Is play different from sport? What is the significance of play for development? What is the relationship between play and reality? At the end of the semester, students will have the opportunity to share their own answers to these questions through creative projects and accounts of play and its significance.

LEARNING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

We will build on the following primary learning goals and objectives throughout the term. At the end of the course, students, you will be able to:

- identify and pose thoughtful questions of several philosophical theories of play,
- compare and distinguish substantively among at least two theories,
- analyze contemporary issues through the lens of a particular philosophical theory,
- facilitate course discussion and demonstrate nuanced understanding of course material,
- argue well for your own position in class and in written assignments,
- cultivate the intellectual virtues of epistemic humility, intellectual curiosity, and open-mindedness, and
- cultivate an appreciation for playful ambiguity.

TEXTBOOK AND MATERIALS

1. Sutton-Smith, Brian. *The Ambiguity of Play*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Other texts will be posted on E-Learning. You must bring the assigned text with you each class period in a format with which you can actively read.

#### MOUNT MARY UNIVERSITY MISSION

Mount Mary University, an urban Catholic university for women sponsored by the School Sisters of Notre Dame, provides an environment for the development of the whole person. The University encourages leadership, integrity, and a deep sense of social justice arising from a sensitivity to moral values and Christian principles.

Mount Mary commits itself to excellence in teaching and learning with an emphasis on thinking critically and creatively. The baccalaureate curriculum integrates the liberal arts with career preparation for women of diverse ages and personal circumstances; the programs at the graduate level provide opportunities for both men and women to enhance their professional excellence.

#### MOUNT MARY UNIVERSITY VISION STATEMENT

Mount Mary University is recognized as a diverse learning community that works in partnership with local, national and global organizations to educate women to transform the world.

#### DIVERSITY AND ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

Mount Mary University and the Department of Philosophy are committed to an educational environment that affirms the uniqueness, diversity, and integrity of all students. Similarly, the well-being and success of each student in this course are important to me. I will do my best to ensure that students from all backgrounds and perspectives will be served equitably. The diversity that students bring to this class will be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful and inclusive of the many identities of students in terms of gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, culture, perspective, and other background characteristics. Thus, I encourage students registered in the course to discuss their learning styles and comprehension requirements with me.

Mount Mary University complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which stipulates that the University will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations; please see me or

- Marci Ocker, Student Success Center, Haggerty Library, Room 124.
- Phone: 414-930-3368
- Fax: 414-930-3700
- Email: [ockerm@mtmary.edu](mailto:ockerm@mtmary.edu)

If you require any particular accommodations, please meet with me by **as soon as possible** so we can work together to make optimal arrangements. Please bring your letter of accommodation to our meeting. All information will be held in the strictest of confidence.

#### BASIC NEEDS STATEMENT

Doing philosophy is challenging, and can be especially challenging if we have difficulty meeting basic needs, too. Any student who faces challenges securing their food, transportation, or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact Sarah Olejniczak, Dean of Student Affairs for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable her to provide any resources that she may possess.

#### ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

In addition to formal assignments listed below, there are a few other requirements:

- ***Come to every class.***
  - Attendance is mandatory. There may be legitimate reasons to miss class, but there can be no more than three absences without impacting your final grade.
- ***Come to class on time.***
  - Late arrivals are disruptive and jeopardize your own ability to follow the class. Three late arrivals count as an absence
- ***Come prepared.***
  - Before class, read the text carefully and make note of any questions or ideas. Have your textbook, notes, and something to write with ready at the start of class. I will do my best to help you understand the material, but you must make a good faith effort to do the work.
- ***Be respectful.***
  - Being respectful means listening attentively and making a good effort to engage with your classmates and me. Please wait for opportunities for group work instead of having side conversations. There is no excuse for rude, disruptive, aggressive, or dismissive behavior toward your classmates or me even if you have a differing opinion. Cell phones must be out of sight during class unless arranged otherwise.
- ***Strive for open communication.***
  - We have a joint responsibility to make the class the best it can be. If you're having difficulties or have other concerns or recommendations, please come to my office hours or make an appointment with me as soon as possible. If something is working well, let me know that, too!
- ***Practice intellectual virtues***
  - Epistemic humility: Question your own certainty in ways that enable you to revise your views, even regarding convictions central to your worldview
  - Intellectual curiosity: See out diverse experiences and perspectives to test, complicate, and enrich existing knowledge.
  - Make an effort to hear and respect others' testimonies, try to inhabit their perspectives, and consider multiple perspectives at once

1. RATs	20%
a. iRAT	(10%)
b. tRAT	(10%)
2. In-class Performance	10%
3. Contemporary Connection	5%
4. ARRs	15%
5. Essays	25% (10%, 15%)
6. Peer Feedback	5%
7. Final Project	20%

### 1. RATs (READINESS ASSURANCE TESTS)

This assignment aims at meeting the learning goal of identifying thoughtful questions of philosophical theories of play and facilitating the discussion. RATs are designed to make sure that you take responsibility for reading and understanding the basic concepts in the core readings for each unit. RATs will be administered on the first day of each unit, and will generally cover basic concepts that will prove essential for further reflecting on the broader significance of the texts. You will take five RATs, ten-question multiple-choice quizzes, both individually and in teams. Your lowest RAT score will be dropped. RATs cannot be made up at a later date. If you must miss a RAT due to an emergency, please meet with me as soon as possible to avoid receiving a zero for the RAT. NOTE: You must score at least 50% on the individual RAT in order to benefit from your team score; if you score less than 50% on the individual RAT, your final score for that RAT will be your individual score alone.

### 2. IN-CLASS PERFORMANCE

This course will be conducted more as a seminar, so participation from everyone is imperative. When you contribute to discussion, other students' learning is enhanced. I expect students to come to class having completed the assigned readings and with the texts in hand. Participation means not simply speaking for the sake of speaking, but contributing to the development of class discussion on comments or questions. As a fairly shy person, I understand that it can be difficult to participate verbally. I urge you to try anyway and I will also make a special note of active listening. Please also remember that participation includes respect, so disruptive behavior such as talking out of turn, arriving late or leaving early, and the use of cell phones won't be tolerated. Pop quizzes may be given in class occasionally and will count toward the participation grade.

### 3. CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS

Part of the aim of this course is to shed light on issues we face in everyday life. You will choose a class day to present an example that demonstrates or challenges the main issue in the reading for the day. The example can be a news story, journal article, event, film, etc., and must be from within the past ten years. You will give

- a five-minute overview of the example, including a bit of background information and discussion of whether the source is reliable

- a five-minute explanation of how the example does or does not reflect the reading and why.
- a question to frame our discussion for the day.

#### 4. ARRs (ACTIVE READING RESPONSES)

It is important that you develop the habit of “active” reading. This assignment is designed to help you do that. As you read, I urge you to highlight significant passages and even include in the margins of the text questions and ideas you have about what you are reading. These texts will be challenging, but will also be rewarding through active reading and discussion. This assignment enables you to prepare better for class by working through the text ahead of class to determine both what you understand and where you have questions. Thus, the responses are a *shared responsibility* between the students and me. Instructions for the responses are on e-Learning. **Responses must be submitted via eLearning by 11am the day they are due.** No late responses will be accepted except in unique circumstances, such as a family emergency, and with prior arrangement. The guidelines for the ARRs are on eLearning. There are no ARRs due the day that RATs are assigned.

#### 5. ESSAYS

The essays will be critical analysis and response papers of 1100-1500 words (approximately 4-6 pages), typed and double-spaced. The essays provide you the opportunity to demonstrate familiarity with the texts by answering a particular prompt, which I will provide you. Students are welcome to come up with their own prompt, but it must receive my approval ahead of time. This assignment connects to learning goal of being able to identify, explain, and pose thoughtful questions of several philosophical theories of play; compare and distinguish substantively among at least two theories; analyze contemporary issues through the lens of a particular ethical theory; and articulate and argue well for your own position in written assignments. Because the aim is to develop your voice and your argument in relation to the texts, we will have writing workshops prior to the final submission. Participating in the workshop, as well as a draft, and a reflection on the revision process, will count toward the essay grade. More specific guidelines for the essays will be discussed in class.

**Please be sure to include your ID number, but not your name, to facilitate anonymous grading.**

N.B.: Wikipedia, Sparknotes, and other sources can be helpful for preliminary background research, but they will not help you significantly beyond this. You’ll need to demonstrate original thought and provide your own analysis of different arguments. Have confidence in your own abilities, and if you need more help, see me. All sources, including those consulted for background absolutely must be cited properly.

## 6. PEER FEEDBACK

Since so much of our work is dependent on shared responsibility for preparation and discussion, peer evaluations will be essential for cultivating that commitment. Over the semester, there will be four peer evaluations. The grades will be determined both by your own contribution to your peers' evaluation as well as their evaluation of your contributions. More details will be given in class.

## 7. FINAL PROJECT

The final project is your opportunity to provide an answer to a question regarding philosophy of health. It is up to you what question you address. To answer your question, you have the opportunity either to

1. create a work (an artwork, piece of music, podcast, dialogue, short story, video, etc.) and provide a 1500-1800 word written analysis and explanation of the work that draws on one of the theories we discussed this semester. Or,
2. write a 2200-2800 word research paper analyzing a theory or contemporary issue in philosophy of health.

Both project formats require a proposal for the project (paragraph length is sufficient), which must be submitted via eLearning by **November 27th**. The proposal should articulate the question you will be asking, some suggestions of how you will answer it, and which project format you have chosen.

Final projects are due by **December 11th**. Students may include a photograph, video, or audio file of their works if they wish to retain the original.

Presentations should be 2-5 minutes long. The written component will be graded according to the rubric provided for writing assignments.

### Project Breakdown for Option 1:

Proposal	10%
Creative work	25%
Paper	65%

### Project Breakdown for Option 2:

Proposal	10%
Paper	90%

## GRADING STANDARDS

- A, Excelling: The work primarily demonstrates especially skillful and in-depth understanding, analysis, synthesis, and insight
- B-A/B, Achieving: The work primarily demonstrates competent understanding, analysis, synthesis, and insight with some depth
- C-B/C, Improving: The work primarily demonstrates basic understanding, analysis, synthesis, and insight, but requires further development
- D. Developing: The work primarily demonstrates incomplete or inaccurate understanding, analysis, synthesis, and insight;

Please also see the detailed rubrics on our course site to see how the essays and final paper assignments will be assessed.

Your grades will be recorded on our class site. I am happy to discuss outcomes and strategies for maintaining or improving your development in the course in person. If you have a question about a particular grade, I ask that you first read through my comments and criteria and then schedule an appointment with me to discuss it.

#### LATE WORK

Late ARRs are not accepted, except in very particular circumstances. For other written assignments, you have a one-day free extension, no questions asked, and it is up to you when you use it. After two days, if I have still not received your work, we must meet together to discuss your ideas and put a plan for completion in place. Late work without that meeting will not be accepted.

#### COMMUNICATION

Students are expected to check their Mount Mary email accounts regularly. The best way to contact me is via email. I will generally respond to all emails within twenty-four hours, except possibly on weekends. I will respond to emails before 8pm, so do not wait until the last minute to contact me.

Emails between us, as well as among your classmates, are professional correspondences and should reflect that degree of formality. Please be sure to include a subject line, greeting, and signature. Remember, too, that a “thank you” goes a long way. I am more than happy to answer questions or bounce around ideas, but try first to verify whether your questions have already been answered in the syllabus or other course materials. So, before you send an email, ask yourself, 1) Did I already check the syllabus?, 2) Did I check eLearning?, 3) Have I asked a classmate, or can I ask at the beginning of the next class meeting? If your question is more substantive, please send it along.

Grades may not be discussed via email, so please come by office hours or set up an appointment instead. Appointments for office hours are not necessary and you’re strongly encouraged to drop in to see me, if even to just say hello.

#### ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Mount Mary is an academic community dedicated to the intellectual and social and ethical development of each of its members. As members of this community we all are responsible for maintaining an atmosphere of mutual respect and honesty.

Standards for academic integrity provide a structure for the creation of an academic environment consistent with the values of the School Sisters of Notre Dame and the mission. In keeping with these goals, all students are expected to strive for integrity, in academic and non-academic pursuits. Acts that involve any attempt to deceive, to present

another's ideas as one's own, or to enhance one's grade through dishonest means violate the integrity of both the student and University.

Academic dishonesty in any form has a negative impact on the essential principles of the Mount Mary Community. Therefore, such acts are treated as a serious breach of trust.

A faculty member has the right and authority to deal with academic dishonesty in his or her classroom; however, a student who commits multiple violations against academic integrity shall be subject to administrative disciplinary action as described in the Academic Honesty and Integrity Policy and Procedures.

*Copies of the full Academic Honesty and Integrity Policy and Procedures are available through the office of the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. The policy and procedures are included in the Mount Mary Student Handbook, the Undergraduate Bulletin and online at [mtmary.edu/handbook.htm](http://mtmary.edu/handbook.htm) and [my.mtmary.edu](http://my.mtmary.edu)*



## COURSE CALENDAR

Please complete assignments before the date listed. Be sure to bring all texts to class.

## PLAY AND PROGRESS

WEEK 1, AUG. 28, 30

1. Tuesday
  - a. Consider: What is play? What are some of our first intuitions on the subject?
2. Thursday
  - a. Read: SS, "Play and Ambiguity" 1-17  
TBL guide
  - b. Consider: Why does Sutton-Smith think ambiguity is important? What does he mean by rhetorics? What are the seven rhetorics?
  - c. Prepare: Practice RAT

WEEK 2, SEPT. 4, 6

1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: Johan Huizinga, "The Nature and Significance of Play"  
Roger Caillois, "A Definition of Play"
  - b. Consider: What connections to Huizinga and Caillois see between play, games, and culture? How are their accounts similar or different?
2. Thursday
  - a. Read: Bernard Suits, from *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia*
  - b. Consider: What role do rules have in play? Why do you think Suits draws on the figure of the grasshopper? How do means, ends, and rules relate?

WEEK 3, SEPT. 11, 13

1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: Rupert Cox, "Is there a Japanese way of playing?"  
Jan van Bremen, "Japan in the world of Johan Huizinga"  
Thomas Crump, "The Japanese Numbers Game"
  - b. Consider: Cox and van Bremen suggest there might be something distinctive about Japanese forms of play, but both reference Caillois and Huizinga. Are there distinctively Japanese ideas about play that couldn't be explained by non-Japanese accounts?
2. Thursday
  - a. Read: SS, "Rhetorics of Animal Progress" 18-34
  - b. Consider: Do non-humans play? If so, is it like human play? What do we mean by "progress"?
  - c. Prepare: First RAT

WEEK 4, SEPT. 18, 20

1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: Cynthia Willet, selection from *Interspecies Ethics*

- b. Consider: Willett argues that a new ethics might be developed on the basis of interspecies relationships. How would animal play fit into such an account?
- 2. Thursday
  - a. Read: SS “Rhetorics of Child Play” 35-51
  - b. Consider: Sutton-Smith suggests there is some suspicion regarding play and learning. How so? Can accounts of child play make sense of individual differences or play between old and young?
  - c. Prepare: **Writing Workshop**

### PLAY OF FORCES

#### WEEK 5, SEPT. 25, 27

- 1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: Alison Gopnik, selections from *The Philosophical Baby*
  - b. Consider: For Gopnik, why do children pretend? What is the relationship between pretend and play? How does imagination aid problem solving?
- 2. Thursday
  - a. Read: SS “Rhetorics of Fate” 52-73  
SS “Rhetorics of Power” 74-90
  - b. Consider: Sutton-Smith argues that there are paradoxes regarding both fate and power. How so? Are these forms of play particularly masculine? Why or why not?
  - c. Prepare: Third RAT

#### WEEK 6, OCT. 2, 4

- 1. Tuesday
  - a. In class: Watch *The Hunger Games*
  - b. Prepare: **First Essay due by the start of class**
- 2. Thursday
  - a. Read: George Dunn: “‘The Odds Have Not Been Very Dependable of Late’: Morality and Luck In the Hunger Games Trilogy”
  - b. Consider: Does Katniss’ experience of luck or fate fit with the descriptions Sutton-Smith provides?

### NEIGHBORHOOD OF MAKE-BELIEVE

#### WEEK 7, OCT. 9, 11

- 1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: SS “Rhetorics of Identity” 111-126  
SS “Child Power and Identity” 127-150
  - b. Consider: How are play and identity connected? Are there identities in play that are not present in non-play? Can play be constitutive of identity?
  - c. Prepare: Fourth RAT

2. Thursday
  - a. Read: Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe “Venus and Serena are 'Doing It' for Themselves: Theorizing Sporting Celebrity, Class and Black Feminism for the Hip-Hop Generation”
  - b. Consider: What connections does Ifekwunigwe identify between race, gender, and athleticism? What does she mean by the “hip-hop” generation? Is code-switching a kind of play?

### WEEK 8, OCT. 16, 18

1. Tuesday
  - a. In class: watch *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*
2. Thursday
  - a. Professor at conference; no class

### PLAY, IDENTITY, AND LANGUAGE

### WEEK 9, OCT. 23, 25

1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: SS, “Rhetorics of the Imaginary” 127-150
  - b. Consider: In what ways are art and play conflated? How are literature and play connected? How would intrinsic and extrinsic accounts of play differ?
  - c. Prepare: **Writing Workshop**
2. Thursday
  - a. Read: Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”
  - b. Consider: What does Derrida mean by signifier and signified? What does the play of signifiers mean? How does structure fit in?

### WEEK 10, OCT. 30, NOV. 1

1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: Colleen Elaine Donnelly, “Re-visioning Negative Archetypes of Disability and Deformity in Fantasy: Wicked, Maleficent, and Game of Thrones” (bookmark)  
“Halloween Provides a Look Into Human Psychology” (bookmark)
  - b. Consider: Although play can help develop identities, are there ways in which play negatively informs identities? At the same time, can play subvert those negative elements?
2. Thursday:
  - a. Visit to Milwaukee Art Museum, *Serious Play* exhibit

### WEEK 11 NOV. 6, 8

1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: SS, “Child Phantasmagoria” 172

- b. Consider: Why does Sutton-Smith think that childhood fantasies are not meant to replicate the world? How do children develop play societies? Do adults and children differ in this?
  - c. Prepare: Fifth RAT
2. Thursday
- a. Read: D.W. Winnicott, "Playing: A Theoretical Statement"
  - b. Consider: How does Winnicott define playing? Is playing different from play?
  - c. Prepare: **Second Essay Due by the start of class**

### WEEK 12, NOV. 13, 15

1. Tuesday
- a. Read: SS "Rhetorics of Self" 173-200
  - b. Consider: What does Play have to do with developing a sense of self? With creativity? What are the differences between intrinsic and extrinsic theories?
  - c. Prepare: Sixth RAT
2. Thursday
- d. Read: Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Play as the Clue to Ontological Explanation"  
Eugen Fink, "Play as Symbol of the World"
  - a. Consider: What does it mean for play to be ontological? What does play have to do with the human condition? How can play be a symbol?

### WEEK 13, NOV. 20, 22

1. Tuesday
- a. Read: María Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception"
  - b. Consider: What does Lugones mean by "world"? Is it similar or dissimilar to Gadamer and Fink's discussions?
2. Thursday
- a. Thanksgiving, no class

### WEEK 14, NOV. 27, 29

1. Tuesday
- a. Read: Julia Annas, "Practical Expertise"
  - b. Consider: Annas suggests we might be mistaken about the differences between work, play, and leisure. How does she use flow to explain the development of virtue?
  - c. Prepare: **Final Project Proposal Due**
2. Thursday
- a. Read: SS "Rhetorics of Frivolity" 201-213
  - b. Consider: What is frivolity? Is it opposed to progress or seriousness? Does play have to be fun?
  - c. Prepare: Seventh RAT

## PLAY AND FUN

WEEK 15, DEC. 4, 6

1. Tuesday
  - a. Read: Matt Dembicki, *Trickster: Native American Tales, A Graphic Collection*
  - b. Consider: How do these stories of tricksters fit or not with Sutton-Smith's discussion of frivolity? Do these stories inform our cultural understandings of play? Are tricksters unserious?
2. Thursday
  - a. Read: SS "Conclusion" 214-231
  - b. Consider: What is play?

EXAM WEEK, DEC. 11, 13

1. Tuesday
  - a. Final paper and presentations