



Introduction to Philosophy, PHIL 1301
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Northline Campus, TTh's

Course Description: This course is a study of the major issues in philosophy and/or the work of major philosophical figures in philosophy. Topics in philosophy may include theories of reality, theories of knowledge, theories of value, and their practical applications (Texas ACGM). It provides a theoretically diverse introduction to the study of ideas, including arguments and investigations about abstract and real phenomena, particularly in the areas of knowledge, ethics, and religion (HCC Course Catalogue). This course stresses the HCC Core Objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication Skills, Personal Responsibility, and Social Responsibility.

PREREQUISITE(S): ENGL 1301 or higher

HCC CORE CURRICULUM: This course satisfies the **Philosophy, Language, and Culture** component area or the **Component Area Option** in the HCC Core Curriculum. If you are not sure that you need this course to graduate, please consult with your advisor.

Course Goals: To acquaint students with basic philosophical questions and consider how various historical (Classical and Modern) responses continue to impact or resonate with us today. This is accomplished by reading, analyzing and evaluating the views and arguments of others. Ideally, students will read charitably as well as critically.

Student Learning Outcomes:

- 1. Read, analyze, and critique** philosophical texts.
- 2. Demonstrate knowledge** of key concepts, major arguments, problems, and terminology in philosophy.
- 3. Present** logically persuasive arguments both orally and in writing
- 4. Demonstrate critical thinking skills** in evaluation and application of philosophical concepts to various aspects of life.
- 5. Evaluate** the personal and social responsibilities of living in a diverse world.

Required Texts: **(1)** Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, translated by Donald A. Cress. Hackett Publ. 4th Ed. **(2)** Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, translated by Peter Preuss. Hackett Publ. **(3)** Plato. *Five*

Dialogues, translated by G. M. A. Grube. Hackett Publ., 2nd Ed. **(4)** Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Basic Political Writings*, translated by Donald A. Cress. Hackett Publ.

Reading Strategies: Most of the reading assignments will be short (5-12 pages at a time), but are challenging, dense and abstract. The language tends to be formal and sophisticated containing technical and/or unique terminology. So, much of the vocabulary may be unfamiliar. That means a lot of “unpacking,” notetaking, and reflection will be required. To insure good comprehension and be prepared for class discussion and/or exercises, each assignment should be read at least twice—first, to get a general idea or basic grasp of what is being said; second, to better understand specific reasons, arguments and other details. I also recommend the following:

- Take notes as you read, commenting on and questioning the material.
- If you don't understand or recognize a word, look it up. If it is a technical term and unique to the author or material, consider its context.
- Think about your own position on the issue or topic. If you have none, reflect on why you don't.
- **Finally**, before writing a formal essay on any of the reading assignments, you should go over them a third, even fourth, time.

Reading Schedule:

Week 1: Introduction; Russell's “The Value of Philosophy” (handout)

*****1st Short Essay Due, 2/23*****

Weeks 2-3: Plato's *Meno* (selections) & *Phaedo* (selections)

Week 4: Plato's *Crito* (complete)

*****Paper #1 Due*****

Week 5: Descartes's *Discourse, Parts One & Two* (complete)

*****Paper #1 returned*****

Week 6: Descartes's *Parts Four, Five & Six* (selections)

*****Paper #1 revisions due*****

Week 7: Descartes's *Meditations One & Two* (complete), *Five & Six* (selections)

Week 8-9: Rousseau's, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (complete, including “Preface”)

Rousseau's *Social Contract*—Book I (complete) & Book II (chapters I-IV)

*****Paper #2 Due*****

Weeks 10-11: Nietzsche's *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (complete, including “Preface”)

Week 12: Wrap-up/Review/TBD *****Final Paper Due Finals Week*****

Course Requirements and Grading Policies:

- 1) **30%** Class participation, attendance, group work, peer reviews, and/or individual in-class exercises: Attendance for this course is essential—if you are not present for class,

habitually late or leaving early, it will be difficult to participate in or contribute in a meaningful way. (Please see more on the attendance policy below.) Written exercises will be handed weekly or bi-weekly. They will not be given a letter grade but will be recorded on a C/NC basis, and comments will be provided. There are no make-up opportunities for these, and they will not be accepted late. The expectation is that you will show up on-time, stay for the duration of the class period, and do the readings in advance.

- 2) **10%** 1st Short Essay – due Week 2 (see below)
- 3) **50%** Two papers—25 points each, 4-5 pages, double-spaced, 11-12 point font. Due dates to be determined. **Late papers will not be accepted**, except under significant and compelling extenuating circumstances that can be officially documented. The first paper may be revised **if and only if** the original is submitted on time and you discuss revision plans with me (in a face-to-face meeting or via email) prior to the day rewrites are due.
- 4) **10%** Final Paper—due finals week, exact date/time TBD. This will be a low-stress assignment, perhaps even something fun. It is intended simply as a wrap-up for the course, not a cause for undue anxiety!

Class Conduct, Policies, and Expectations:

- 1) Please turn off all cell phones, tablets, laptops, and other electronic devices—put them away before class, and do not take them out for the remainder of the period. Students are expected to engage in the classroom discussion and exercises throughout the scheduled class period; therefore, there should be no texting, internet, or cell phone use. If you are experiencing an emergency, please notify me of the circumstances in advance if possible. Also, please know that emergencies like this are rare.
- 2) I know that many people prefer taking notes on their computers. However, increasingly, research is showing that note taking on laptops is less results is detrimental to learning. In addition, laptops are often distracting for other members of the class. Also, because this is a reading and writing intensive course, you should have only the book or reading assignment in front of you, a pen, and notepad. Index cards and/or assignment sheets will also be provided on an as-needed basis, and are useful for notetaking and informal writing assignments. If they are collected, they will be returned to you for future use. In sum, the use of laptops is prohibited in this course, except as required by ADA or other policy exceptions. You are expected to use the notepad, write in/on/around the text itself, and/or make use of the handouts
- 3) Be on time and stay for the entire class period. This is as important in college as it is in the working world—consider regular attendance part of your “job” as a responsible student. Students who arrive late or leave early will miss assignments and valuable information.
- 4) No side conversations during class. It is disruptive, disrespectful, distracting, and indicates a lack of engagement with the course material. Despite my tendency to foster an open, informal and lighthearted atmosphere, I do take unnecessary distractions seriously. Please be mindful of this and don’t hesitate to ask for more information regarding these expectations.
- 5) Eating or drink in class is discouraged but will be allowed as long as it is not disruptive.
- 6) Everyone is expected to remain seated for the duration of the class. Please do not begin preparing to leave before the end of the session. I will be keeping my eye on the clock or appointing someone to keep track of time, and promise not to run late!

Grading Criteria and Paper Requirements: For a satisfactory grade of C, the first three requirements must be met. {All five requirements must be met to earn an A; a B would fulfill I-IV; a C would fulfill I-III; and a D or F means that one or more of the first two criteria were *not* met}

- I. **Respond directly to the question:** This is not a “prompt” asking for general information about the philosopher, a summary of his/her ideas or the reading. The expectation here is that you will provide a direct response to each piece of a multi-part question, providing a thesis statement in an introduction, then using the reading(s) to support your claims. Instead of running through a “list” of issues, summarizing the material or providing a general overview, stick to a single point or main idea (thesis). Then, develop focused, relevant arguments that can be supported with text-based evidence. Responding directly also means *not* expecting your readers to draw inferences or “read between the lines” but stating claims directly. (See more on clarity in part III below.)
- II. **Represent the views of the author accurately and charitably:** Whether you agree or disagree with the author’s ideas or position, you must describe them in an accurate and fair manner. This will require you to do some paraphrasing—that is, put another person’s ideas and arguments into your own words. Adhere to a “Principle of Charity” here by taking the author’s claims seriously and treating them respectfully. Do not assume that his/her arguments are wrong simply because they appear implausible or ridiculous to you. Rather, try to think of how you might defend such a claim yourself with examples, additional arguments, etc. Even if you find the author’s thesis or position objectionable or offensive, try to think of why or how someone else might be convinced. Being intellectually generous when dealing with perspectives or beliefs that are distinct from your own will not only allow you better understand diverse views, it may enable you to better defend your own positions.
- III. **Write clearly:** This means writing to “express”—using direct, declarative, short sentences—rather than writing to “impress” by using words and phrases you don’t understand or relying on long, run-on sentences. Be prepared to explain any technical terminology, use standard English, avoid incomplete sentences or fragments, and spell correctly. Writing clearly indicates clarity of thought and demonstrates an understanding of the material. Vagueness, inconsistencies, wordiness, awkward sentence structure, etc. indicates a lack of comprehension. This is where spelling, grammar, and style can make an enormous difference as to whether your claims are understood and evaluated fairly. Be as specific as possible, avoiding sweeping generalities or generic claims. Use examples whenever possible. The objective here is, to make clear to your readers that you have read and understood the material.
- IV. **Respond thoroughly:** Because the assigned questions are complex, this means responding to each part, and supporting your claims in detail. Explain basic points or develop arguments, being as specific as possible and/or providing examples. If quotes are used or direct references to the text are made, you must provide context. That means, clarifying claims made in your own words or elaborating further. Risk being repetitive or redundant, rather than saying too little or assuming your readers know what you mean. As long as your arguments are relevant and you do not exceed the assigned number of pages, this can only strengthen your essay. Again, never assume that your readers understand your intentions or what you meant to say. Don’t forget that you are trying to demonstrate to another person that you have understood the author’s position and can support or defend basic claims.
- V. **Share your own response/reflections:** Assuming all of the previous criteria have been fulfilled, *and the essay question asks for it*, please offer your own perspective.

This is the time to comment on or criticize the author's views, saying why you agree or disagree. Do not resort to insults, focus on irrelevancies, or make comments of a personal nature. As long as your critique or support is relevant and backed-up with evidence from the reading, your comments are not only welcome but essential for a complete essay. Sometimes, simply asking a question, or pointing out missing elements, is sufficient. The objective here is not only to demonstrate that you've read the material, it is to show that you have taken the author's position and arguments seriously, and can provide a relevant, thoughtful response of your own. Because it is important to distinguish your views from the author's, do not hesitate to use "I" to identify your claims from his/hers. Use only the surname of the authors when referring to the text, and cite page numbers in parentheses at the end of your sentences.

Please familiarize yourself with these criteria before writing formal essays, and manage your time effectively. Do not hesitate to email me if anything is unclear or you have any questions, but understand that I will not read rough drafts. Although we will be doing some preliminary work on formal assignments (i.e., peer reviews, group work, informal/exploratory writing), I will still provide advance feedback via email or face-to-face meetings.

Academic Honesty: The pressure to earn high grades and belief that *a good end can justify any means whatsoever* leads many students to try cutting corners by resorting to less than honest methods. Do yourself a favor by avoiding that trap. The HCC *Student Handbook* lists cheating, plagiarism, and collusion as scholastic dishonesty. It defines *plagiarism* as "the appropriation of another's work and the unacknowledged incorporation of that work in one's own written work offered for credit." It defines *collusion* as "the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing work for credit." Work submitted for this course that is determined to be the result of either cheating, plagiarism, or collusion will earn a "0" for that assignment; two instances of cheating, plagiarism, or collusion will result in an automatic "F." Probation or dismissal from HCC and ALL its several colleges may also result. See *Student Handbook*.

General Attendance and Withdrawal Policy: HCC Students are expected to attend class regularly. A daily record of absences will be maintained throughout the semester. NOTE: It is the responsibility of the student to drop, or officially withdraw from this course. Instructors will withdraw a student if and only if provided a written request from that student. Additionally, system-wide rules affect withdrawals.

Attendance/participation policy for this course: The expectation is that you will show up on-time, on a regular basis, and will have done the readings in advance. There will be no "excused" absences. Instead, since this class is on a TTh schedule, everyone will be allowed to miss two classes without it counting against his/her grade. After more than two, you will lose two points (2%) of your overall grade. However, if you miss less than two, you can earn two additional points (or an extra 2%) towards your grade for the course.

- (1) Students who repeat a course for a third, or more times, may face a significant tuition/fee increase at HCC and other Texas public colleges and universities.
- (2) The Texas Legislature passed a law limiting new students (those starting college in Fall 2007) to no more than six total course withdrawals throughout their academic career in obtaining a baccalaureate degree. There may be future penalties imposed.

- (3) No student may withdraw from a course following the set "**last date to withdraw**", which **for the regular term session is 4/3/2017 and 4/11/17 for Second Start**. After that date and time, a student can only be given a grade earned, or an "I" for incomplete. Incompletes must be made up by the end of the following long semester, after which they will automatically change to a grade of "F". Students receiving an "I" for a course are ineligible for graduation until the "I" has been removed from a student's transcript.

Student absences on Holy Days: Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: "a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20...." A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed. For a complete listing of the university policy, check with the Department of Academic Affairs

Students with Disabilities: Houston Community College is dedicated to providing an inclusive learning environment by removing barriers and opening access for qualified students with documented disabilities in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Ability Services is the designated office responsible for approving and coordinating reasonable accommodations and services in order to assist students with disabilities in reaching their full academic potential. In order to receive reasonable accommodations or evacuation assistance in an emergency, the student must be registered with Ability Services.

COURSE GRADING SCALE: 100-89 = A; 88-79 = B; 78-69 = C; 68-59 = D; 58 or below = F

Lastly, if any student finds that he/she is having trouble with an assignment or is unable to meet the requirements laid out above, please contact me as soon as possible. Do not wait until the final weeks of the term to ask for help! Although I am only on campus TTh's, I can be reached via email anytime and will respond in 24 hours or less. I will also make every effort to meet with students on campus, as long as appointments are made in advance. I expect these to be kept or to be contacted as soon as possible if you cannot arrive at the agreed upon time. In order to maintain privacy, I will not discuss papers or grades in the classroom. Please also remember that grades are not based on effort, time spent, or one's personal opinions. What is earned depends on regular attendance and engagement with the course, along with written work that is completed and submitted on time. Finally, and as odd as it might seem, you are more likely to succeed in this course the less you think about grade(s)—just do your best to focus on the material, give yourself time to do the work, follow instructions, and don't be shy about asking for help!