HU2700 – Introduction to Philosophy

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 1:00 – 2:00 and by appointment

Course Description:

This course will be a broad introduction to philosophical issues. We will examine some of the more important issues in Philosophy including: Should one be moral or not, or what is the good life? If one should be moral what is it to be moral? Is democracy the most just form of government? Does science really give us knowledge of the world around us, or with regard to knowledge does science hold a privileged position? Does God exist? and is the existence of God compatible with the fact that there is evil in the world? We will be reading selections from both the great philosophers of the tradition and also contemporary authors to give us a feel for the issues at stake. In addition, we will have discussions about more concrete issues that will hopefully allow us to apply the theories we have learned. Hopefully this will give you a broad overview of philosophical issues and also allow you to learn what some of the great philosophers in the western philosophical tradition have had to say about important philosophical topics.

Course Objectives:

By the end of the course students will have a working knowledge of many of the key issues of philosophical concern, an acquaintance with the views of both contemporary and historical philosophers on such topics, and an ability to think philosophically about those themes both abstractly and as they relate to their contemporary, concrete versions.

Required Texts:

All readings are online at:

Course Requirements:

Class participation is a must and will be facilitated by class presentations/debates throughout the semester. For these presentations you will work in a group and present before the class. You will also be required to do 4 short (2 page) papers throughout the semester two of which will be graded with a letter grade and the rest of which will be graded pass/fail. Finally, there will be a cumulative final exam. The breakdown for grading purposes is as follows:

class participation: 10%
Each pass/fail graded short papers: 5% for a total of 10%
Each letter-graded short paper: 10% for a total of 20%
Class presentation/debate: 30%
Final: 30%
Attendance and participation are required. Excessive absences will be guaranteed to negatively affect your grade. Promptness is expected as a general rule. If you are consistently late to class your grade will be negatively affected.

*No make-up exams will be given or late papers accepted except for documented officially excused absences (e.g., documented illness, documented athletic participation, etc.)*

**Academic Honesty:**

Students are absolutely required to adhere to the Academic Integrity Policy of Michigan Tech, copies of which are available at student affairs. Any violation of this policy will be forwarded to the dean of students. Plagiarism, especially from the Web, is of particular concern. Anything you copy directly or paraphrase from another source, whether that source be electronic, paper, or flesh and blood, that source must be cited. If you have any questions or doubts in a particular case I would be more than happy to discuss that case with you and to clarify what counts as a violation of academic integrity.
Course Itinerary:

August
30th  Introductions/Syllabus

September
1st   What is philosophy? Plato's Apology
6th   Are ethical principles relative?
8th   Should one be moral? Plato's Republic (1st selection)
13th  First class presentation, Just doing business: "The Donald" or Ben and Jerry?
       Should unethical businesses be hired or fired?
15th  First class debate, The ethics of business
20th  What is it to be moral? Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals/R.M. Hare
22nd  Mill, Utilitarianism
27th  Second class presentation, Let 'em fry or let 'em stew?
       Is capital punishment ever justified?
29th  Second class debate, The ethics of capital punishment

October
4th   What is the best form of government? Plato, Republic
6th   Plato, Republic (continued)
11th  Dewey, Democracy/Mill, On Liberty
13th  Dewey/Mill (continued)
18th  Third class presentation, "Puff": Magic dragon or fugitive reptile?
       Should drugs be legalized?
20th  Third class debate, The ethics of drug legalization.
25th  What is the nature of science? Popper, "Philosophy of Science: A personal report"/Smart, "Physics and Reality"
27th  What is the nature of science? Kuhn, "Scientific Revolutions"

November
1st   Fourth class presentation, Science: Myth-maker or fact-finder?
       What does science give us?
3rd   Fourth class debate, The nature of science and its role in society.
8th   What is the human mind and consciousness? Mind over matter or matter over mind? Descartes, Meditations and Ryle, Descartes' Myth
10th  What is the human mind (continued): Armstrong, The Nature of Mind
       Nagel, What is it Like to be a Bat?
15th  Fifth class presentation, Hal 9000: Sentient being or just an Atari 2600 on steroids? Can computers think?
17th  Fifth class debate, Can computers think?
22nd  Thanksgiving Break
24th  Thanksgiving Break
29th  Does God exist?, Aquinas/Copleston/Paley

December
1st   Does God exist? (continued), Hume, the problem of evil
6th   Sixth class presentation, Why do bad things happen to good people? Is evil a problem for the theist?
8th   Sixth class debate, Is evil a problem for the theist?