HU 2700: Introduction to Philosophy

Instructor: Dr. Scott Marratto
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Office Hours: Wednesdays 3-4:30 p.m. (or by appointment)
Course Location: Walker – Arts and Humanities 0134
Class Times: MWF 10:05-10:55

Course Description

This course will provide an introduction to some basic philosophical problems as they are examined in works by some key figures in the history of philosophy. Plato's *Apology* famously dramatizes the trial of Socrates in ancient Athens, but also introduces the figure of the philosopher as a "gad-fly"—someone who challenges familiar assumptions and orthodoxies. We will read two other 'dialogues' of Plato touching upon questions of justice,
law, knowledge and the role of philosophy in relation to the political sphere. Thomas Hobbes *Leviathan* is one of the fundamental texts in modern philosophy and political thought. Hobbes offers accounts of human nature, the grounds of knowledge and morality, and the character of politics that challenged many familiar assumptions and that tried to lend support for a more naturalistic account of the self and of politics. Descartes' *Meditations* is another foundational text in modern philosophy dealing with problems concerning the relation between understanding and sensation, the self, God, skepticism, error, and the modern conceptions of science and nature. We will examine these texts to see how they have contributed to the shaping of many of our own assumptions but also to see how they can continue to challenge our familiar ideas about of ourselves and our world. Finally we will read a very contemporary text that explores many of the key concepts and ideas in 20th century philosophy—the problems of meaning, embodiment, freedom and responsibility, the character of our relations with others—and that also aims to show how philosophy can be understood as a kind of therapeutic practice leading to new possibilities for understanding ourselves and our relation to the world. In exploring these texts we will ask in particular about the way in which philosophy has, perhaps from its very beginnings, occupied a crucial place in the development of political life and its institutions. Philosophy has taken up the challenge of criticizing familiar ideas and prejudices (including the hold of family and tradition over individuals) in order to make possible a form of intellectual life appropriate to the idea of responsible citizenship.

**Course Resources**

**Course Website:**

Blackboard: [http://www.courses.mtu.edu](http://www.courses.mtu.edu)

**Required Course Texts (available at the bookstore):**


Grading Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 short papers (on assigned questions)</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 (out of 7) in-class quizzes</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation/tutorial discussion</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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Assignments:

**Short papers:** For each paper, I will assign a question about one of the texts and you will provide an answer in 3-4 double-spaced pages. To answer this question effectively you will need to be engaging with and reflecting upon the central themes of the texts. You will **not** need to consult secondary sources. Each of your short papers must include a “works cited” page in which you provide a proper bibliographic reference (using MLA style) for the text that you are asked to discuss. Remember to include your name, the course number, and the assignment due date on the first page (or title page). Pages must be numbered and stapled prior to submission.

**In-class quizzes:** In a philosophy class it is of the utmost importance that you keep up with the readings. In order to ensure that you have no trouble with this, the readings in this course have been limited to an average of about 30 pages/week. However, as an extra incentive to stay on top of the readings there will be **seven** very short surprise quizzes (lasting 15 minutes) designed simply to evaluate your familiarity with the content of the readings. Only the best **five** of these test results will be counted toward your final grade. You should come to each class prepared to answer a few simple questions about the day’s readings.

**Class participation/tutorial discussion:** Students in this course are strongly encouraged to come to each class prepared to ask questions about the readings. From time to time, all or a portion of a Friday class will be dedicated to tutorial discussion and questions. Your active participation in these discussions will count toward your final grade in the course.

**Literature Review:** For this assignment, you will be expected to find a scholarly article on a philosophical topic of interest to you (using a library database [i.e., “Philosophers’ Index,” or “JStor”]). You must submit the reference information for the article to me in advance and then, once approved, you will write a 2 page review of the article.

**Final Exam:** There will be a one hour final exam during the exam period.

Course Policies

**Academic integrity** is essential to a student’s education. Plagiarism, Cheating, Fabrication and Facilitating Academic Dishonesty are offences that will not be tolerated. Plagiarism—loosely defined as the presentation of the work of another author as if it were your own—will not be tolerated. If you are unclear about how to cite your sources properly, you are urged to discuss the matter with the instructor before submitting an assignment. Academic regulations and procedures are governed by University policy. Academic dishonesty cases will be handled in accordance with the University policy. See http://www.mtu.edu/dean/conduct/policy/academic-integrity/. **If you have questions about**
plagiarism that are not resolved after reading the policy, ask me for help.

Class Attendance is very important. Three excused or unexcused absences are permitted; it is your responsibility to notify the instructor if you cannot be in class. More than three unexcused absences can result in a lowering of the final course grade, and additional unexcused absences may result in a grade of F being recorded for the entire course. See http://www.mtu.edu/dean/conduct/policy/attendance/ for more information.

Late Policy: All papers and assignments must be submitted in hard copy at the beginning of class on the day that they are due. Papers submitted as email attachments will not be graded except in cases where prior arrangements have been made. Late papers will be reduced 10% of the assignment grade for each week, or part thereof, of lateness, up to 30%.

Disabilities

If you have a disability that could affect your performance in this class or that requires an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please see me as soon as possible so that we can make appropriate arrangements. The Affirmative Action Office has asked that you be made aware of the following:

Michigan Tech complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at Michigan Tech, please call the Dean of Students Office, at 487-2212. For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head or the Affirmative Action Office, at 487-3310. Affirmative Action: http://www.admin.mtu.edu/aoa/

Disability Services:
http://www.admin.mtu.edu/urel/studenthandbook/student_services.html#disability


Tentative Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Week 1:
M: Jan 9: Introduction
W: Jan 11: What is philosophy?
F: Jan 13: Antigone

Week 2:
W: Jan 18: Antigone (cont’d)
F: Jan 20: Plato’s “Apology”
Week 3:
M: Jan 23: Plato’s “Apology” (cont’d)
W: Jan 25: (cont’d)
F: Jan 27: Plato’s “Crito”

Week 4:
M: Jan 30: Plato’s “Crito” (cont’d) [first paper assigned]
W: Feb 1: Plato’s “Meno”
F: Feb 3: (cont’d)

Week 5:
W: Feb 6: Plato’s “Meno” (cont’d) [first paper due]
F: Feb 8: Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (pp. 75-99)

Week 6:
M: Feb 13: Hobbes (pp. 100-134)
W: Feb 15: (cont’d)
F: Feb 17: (cont’d)

Week 7:
M: Feb 20: Hobbes (pp. 183-217)
W: Feb 22: (cont’d)
F: Feb 24: (cont’d)

Week 8:
M: Feb 27 Hobbes (pp. 217-274) [literature review proposals due]
W: Feb 29: (cont’d)
F: March 2: (cont’d) [second paper assigned]

March 3-11: BREAK

Week 9:
M: March 12: Descartes' Meditations, “Letter of Dedication” and “Preface to the Reader” [second paper due]

W: March 14: Descartes' Meditations 1&2

F: March 16: (cont’d)

Week 10:

M: March 19: Descartes' Meditations 3-6

W: March 21: (cont’d) [third paper assigned]

F: March 23: (cont’d)

Week 11:

M: March 26: Russon, Human Experience, Introduction and Ch. 1 [third paper due]

W: March 28: (cont’d)

F: March 30: (cont’d)

Week 12:

M: April 2: Russon, ch. 2-3 [literature reviews due]

W: April 4: (cont’d) [fourth paper assigned]

F: April 6: (cont’d)

Week 13:

M: April 9: Russon, ch. 4-5

W: April 11: (cont’d) [fourth paper due]

F: April 13: (cont’d)

Week 14:

M: April 16: Russon, ch 5-6

W: April 18: (cont’d)

F: April 20: Final class

This syllabus may be changed during the term to accommodate the needs of either the students or the professor.