

Montgomery College

Germantown Campus

PHIL 101.HC – Introduction to Philosophy, Honors

Spring 2019

Meetings: MW, 5:55-7:10 PM, HS 171

Instructor: Dr. Michael Harding

Office: HS181, M/W 11:00-12:00; 2:00-4:30 Email is almost always the best way to reach me.

Email: michael.harding@montgomerycollege.edu. Please note: the college considers the Montgomery College email account to be the official means of communication between students and faculty. It is recommended that you check this account routinely for official communication or as directed by your instructor(s). Some items you may find there are: course announcements, invoices, important admission/registration information, waitlist status. To check your e-mail, log into your MyMC online account and locate the e-mail icon in the upper right hand corner of the page.

Telephone: 240.567.7759

Course Description: “Introduction to philosophical analysis of the problem of knowledge, the problem of reality, and the problem of the good. Major philosophical attitudes of Western civilization are introduced. Special attention is paid to some of the philosophical implications of contemporary natural and social science. The basic themes of the course are that the major questions philosophy deals with are present in the lives of all persons; that we must clarify the questions, if possible, before we try to answer them; and that the basic questions are always concerned with the nature and meaning of human existence. (HUMD)
PREREQUISITE: Second-year standing or consent of department. Assessment levels: EN 101/101A, MA 097/099, RD 120. Three hours each week.”

Required Texts:

1. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Joe Sachs
2. Hobbes's *Leviathan*, edited by Curley

Do not purchase other translations/editions of these works.

Recommended Text:

Crider, Scott F. *The Office of Assertion: an Art of Rhetoric for the Academic Essay*
Published by ISI Books. ISBN 193223645-7

This text is not required; however, it is the finest guide to undergraduate academic writing I have come across, and I highly recommend it. You can read it in an afternoon, and it will greatly improve your writing, and therefore your grades. ***Based on prior experience, I highly recommend that you purchase this book and spend a weekend with it.***

Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, the student will be able to:

- Describe humankind's perennial issues and questions in a thematic way: what is real, true and good.

- Begin comprehending basic questions of metaphysics: such as, questions of “God”, personal identity, and being in the world.
- Identify historical and current interpretations of truth and knowledge.
- Analyze ethical concepts such as: what is good, what is right in a multicultural society.
- Distinguish between aesthetic and non-aesthetic experiences.
- Critically evaluate different schools of philosophical thinking.

Academic Dishonesty/Misconduct:

Academic dishonesty in college is a very serious offense. The strength of an educational institution and the value of the degrees or credits earned ultimately depend on academic and personal integrity. In this course you are expected to comport yourself in an honest, truthful, and ethical manner. Each student is expected to do his/her own work on all tests, papers, and other assignments. Students who engage in any act that the classroom instructor judges to be academic dishonesty or misconduct are subject to sanctions. (See the *Student Code of Conduct*, 07/01/03, for further information.)

Academic Dishonesty or Misconduct can occur in many ways. Some common forms include

- cheating on assignments or examinations;
- plagiarizing from written, video, or Internet resources;
- submitting materials that are not the student’s own;
- taking examinations in the place of another student, including assessment tests.

For purposes of this course, any one of the above will result in an automatic failure for the course.

In addition to course requirements and objectives that are in this syllabus, Montgomery College has information on its web site (see link below) to assist you in having a successful experience both inside and outside of the classroom. It is important that you read and understand this information. The link below provides information and other resources to areas that pertain to the following: student behavior (student code of conduct), student e-mail, the tobacco free policy, withdraw and refund dates, disability support services, veteran services, how to access information on delayed openings and closings, how to register for the Montgomery College alert System, and finally, how closings and delays can impact your classes. If you have any questions please bring them to your professor. As rules and regulations change they will be updated and you will be able to access them through the link. If any student would like a written copy of these policies and procedures, the professor would be happy to provide them. By registering for this class and staying in this class, you are indicating that you acknowledge and accept these policies.

<http://cms.montgomerycollege.edu/mcsyllabus/>

General Information About This Class:

Be on time, and attend as many classes as possible. Late arrivals are an irritating distraction to both your fellow students and myself; early departures are just as rude. If you must leave early, please tell me beforehand. Bring the assigned texts with you. Read them beforehand. The instructor *may* drop students accumulating excessive absences; according to the College catalog, an excessive absence is “one more absence than the number of classes per week during a spring or fall semester.” Common courtesy is expected. *All* electronic devices should be turned off. This includes notebook computers. Cell phones should be turned off or turned

to vibrate. This class is only 75 minutes long: as an adult, you should not need to leave the room during this period. If you must, be discreet and do not make a habit out of it. Finally, if you are having difficulty in class, contact me as soon as possible. If you don't, there's nothing I can do to help you. If you find the texts and concepts difficult, you should come talk to me outside of class. If you have questions that are not discussed in class, come talk to me outside of class. If you can't make my office hours, we can make other arrangements or you can email me with questions.

Lastly, **philosophy is hard**. Students are frequently surprised by this fact, since in contemporary usage "philosophy" simply means one's general point of view. But this is not what philosophy means in an academic context. Likewise, the readings assigned in this class are not "textbook" readings. They are translations of works written hundreds, if not thousands of years ago; and they are complicated, subtle and rigorous arguments. As such, they are not immediately clear in their meaning. You cannot simply "skim" the text in order to understand it. Your goal here is not to learn *about* the philosophers we read, but to learn *from* them. From that point of view, it is more important to focus on understanding those with whom you disagree rather than those with whom you agree.

Because of this, it is *highly* recommended that you write in your books. Underline passages that seem important. Mark cross-references, and write comments, notes and questions in the margins. To truly engage these philosophers, one must enter into a conversation with them, and not read them passively. Real reading is done with a pen or pencil in hand.

Niccolò Machiavelli's description of his reading habits might serve as a useful illustration:

On the coming of evening, I return to my house and enter my study; and at the door I take off the day's clothing, covered with mud and dust, and put on garments regal and courtly; and reclothed appropriately, I enter the ancient courts of ancient men [*his library*], where, received by them with affection, I feed on that food which only is mine and which I was born for, where **I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they in their kindness answer me**; and for four hours of time I do not feel boredom, I forget every trouble, I do not dread poverty, I am not frightened by death; entirely I give myself over to them.

And because Dante says **it does not produce knowledge when we hear but do not remember, I have noted everything in their conversation which has profited me...**¹

He describes himself as entering his library where he is in the presence of ancient men. Reading is described as a conversation, where he questions those ancients and they, through their books, answer him. Finally, he takes careful notes in order to ensure that he remember what they said and profits from it.

Like Machiavelli, you need to read actively and attentively. The liberal arts of reading, thinking, and writing have perhaps always been under assault in one way or another (cf. the popularity of cliff's notes or quickie summaries of various sorts), but on-line resources (frequently unreliable!) have encouraged a cottage-industry of brevity and short-cuts. Such

¹ Machiavelli, Letter to Vittori, 12/10/1513

temptations need to be resisted, because ultimately they do not help you do the most important thing, which is thinking for yourself. John Locke writes:

the understanding, like the eye, judging of objects only by its own sight, cannot but be pleased with what it discovers... Thus he who has raised himself above the alms-basket, and, not content to live lazily on scraps of begged opinions, sets his own thoughts on work, to find and follow truth, will (whatever he lights on) not miss the hunter's satisfaction; every moment of his pursuit will reward his pains with some delight; and he will have reason to think his time not ill spent, even when he cannot much boast of any great acquisition.²

We will read the following texts in our class, and in doing so, we will encounter all of the major questions of philosophy.

Outline of our Readings:

- Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* - we will carefully read the *Ethics* in order to understand how Aristotle thinks about human life, and the fundamental questions of human life. We will be particularly interested in how Aristotle answers the most fundamental question: what is the best way of life for a human being?
- St. Thomas Aquinas, excerpts - we will examine brief excerpts from St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* in order to get a sense of how Aristotelian natural right is transformed into medieval natural law.
- Hobbes's *Leviathan* - we will focus chiefly on the discussions of physics, ethics, and politics in the early parts of the *Leviathan* in order to understand a) how changes in physics lead to changes in our analysis of human life, morality, psychology, etc., and b) how the Hobbesian teaching serves to ground and establish early modern liberalism.

Grading:

Midterm Exam: 15%

Final Exam: 15%

Reading Questions: 30%

Term Paper: 25% (this includes submission of a paper proposal and annotated bibliography for my approval no later than Monday, April 1. This is worth 10% of your paper grade)

Participation: 15%. Please note that this is not "attendance," but participation.

Effort: 0%

Each exam (the midterm and the final) will be worth 15% of your grade (15% x 2 = 30%), and the research paper will be worth 25% of your grade. Your reading questions will be due every Monday. They must be questions *about* the assigned reading, and they must be typed. I will not accept handwritten questions. I will not accept them by email. In many cases, these questions will serve as the starting point for our discussions. Focus on what you do *not* understand. Focus on what seems interesting, irritating, obscure, frustrating, and unclear.

² Locke, John. *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Epistle to the Reader.

The final 15% of your grade will come from classroom participation – philosophy is a liberal art, and liberal arts classes are at their best when there is vigorous discussion. Please note that this is not an “attendance” grade. Simply occupying space for a certain amount of time twice a week does not qualify as participation.

Note: the exams may or may not be in-class exams; it really depends on whether or not we can afford to set aside a day for taking an in-class exam. This is a decision that will be made as we approach the exam periods. The term paper should be a minimum of 7 pages long (double spaced, 12-point font, standard one-inch margins), and it should use Chicago style citations in footnotes. You must submit a proposal for a paper no later than Monday, April 1. This proposal must include an annotated bibliography of scholarly writing dealing with the subject. **This means it must be peer-reviewed and published in a reputable academic venue – i.e., academic books or journal articles. Wikipedia, the Stanford Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, and other online sources (including websites maintained by professors!) are *not acceptable sources*.**

Finally and crucially: due to recent experiences, late work will not be accepted. This syllabus lays out everything you are supposed to be doing, and tells you when things are due.

Rough Schedule

Week of January 21: Syllabus, Introduction – what *is* philosophy?; first short assignment due in lieu of reading questions.

Week of January 28: Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* book I (*eudaimonia*). Focus on the following chapters:

- 1 (orientation toward the good)
- 2 (a highest or most complete good?)
- 3 (the nature of our inquiry)
- 4 (another difficulty with our inquiry)
- 5 (common views about happiness, and why they fail)
- 6 (a critique of the Platonic form of the good)
- 7 (the human good)
- 8 (a defense of this account of the good)
- 9 (the sources of happiness?)
- 10 (can we be happy during our lifetime?)
- 12 (what exactly *is* happiness?)
- 13 (introduction of the virtues)

Week of February 4: Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* book II (moral virtue). Focus on the following chapters

- 1 (is virtue by nature?)
- 2 (introduction of the mean)
- 3 (pleasure, pain, and choice)
- 4 (actions themselves are not enough)
- 5 (what kind of thing is virtue?)
- 6 (what sort of active condition?)
- 7 (an application of this account of specific virtues)

Week of February 11: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* book III (choice, moral psychology, responsibility). Focus on the following chapters:

- 1 (how to distinguish voluntary and involuntary actions)
- 2 (decision or choice)
- 3 (deliberation)
- 4 (wish)
- 5 (virtue and vice are under our own power)
- 6 (an example: courage)

Week of February 25: catch-up; Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* book IV (various virtues)

Week of March 4: **Midterm Exam**; Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* book V (*dike* – justice or right). Focus on the following chapters:

- 1 (kinds of justice)
- 2 (special vs. general justice)
- 7 (natural vs. legal justice)
- 10 (*epieikeia* – decency or equity)

Week of March 11: Spring Break

Week of March 18: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* book VI (intellectual virtues). Focus on the following chapters:

- 1 (the mean and intellectual virtue)
- 2 (thought, desire, and decision)
- 3 (the virtues of the intellect, and *episteme*)
- 4 (*techne* – art or craft)
- 5 (*phronesis* – prudence or practical wisdom)
- 6 (*nous* – understanding)
- 7 (*phronesis* vs. *sophia* – wisdom)
- 8 (kinds of *phronesis*)
- 12 (puzzles about *phronesis*)
- 13 (*phronesis* and moral virtue)

Week of March 25: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* book VII (*akrasia* – incontinence), VIII and IX (friendship); In book VII, focus on the following chapters (read all of VIII and IX, but since they are relatively clear, we won't say too much about them):

- 1 (virtue, vice, *akrasia*)
- 2 (puzzles about *akrasia*)
- 3 (*akrasia* and ignorance)

Week of April 1: **Paper proposals and annotated bibliographies due.** Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* book X (pleasure, happiness, politics); St. Thomas Aquinas (on Blackboard). In book X, focus on the following chapters:

- 4 (pleasure as an activity)
- 5 (different kinds of pleasure)
- 6 (conditions for *eudaimonia*)
- 7 (*eudaimonia* and *theoria* or contemplation)
- 8 (*theoria* and other virtues)

- 9 (moral education)

Week of April 8: Aquinas (handout on natural law); Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Introduction and the following chapters from Part I: Of Man

- I (Of Sense)
- II (Of Imagination)
- III (Of the Consequence or Train of Imaginations)
- VI (Of the Interior Beginnings of Voluntary Notions, commonly called the Passions)
- VIII (Of the Virtues Commonly called Intellectual, and their Contrary Defects)
- X (Of Power, Worth, and Honor)
- XI (Of the Difference of Manners)
- Also read chapter XLVI (Of Darkness from Vain Philosophy and Fabulous Traditions)

Week of April 15: Hobbes's *Leviathan*,

- XII (Of Religion)
- XII (Of the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning their Felicity and Misery)
- XIV (Of the First and Second Natural Laws)
- XV (Of Other Laws of Nature)
- XVI (Of Persons, Authors, and Things Personated)

Week of April 22: Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Part II: Of Commonwealth

- XVII (Of the Causes, Generation, and Definition of a Commonwealth)
- XVIII (Of the Rights of Sovereigns by Institution)
- XXI (Of the Liberty of Subjects)
- XXVI (Of Civil Laws)
- XXIX (Of Those Things that Weaken or Tend to the Dissolution of a Commonwealth)
- XXX (Of the Office of the Sovereign Representative)

Week of April 29: XLVI (Of Darkness From Vain Philosophy and Fabulous Traditions), Review and Conclusion; term papers due.

Week of May 6: catch-up

Final Exam: Monday, May 13, 5:00-7:00.