

PHIL 210 HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

T/R 3 - 430

Rangeview 244

Fall 2009

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

“Those who do not learn from history are destined to repeat it.”

— George Santayana, philosopher (1863-1952)

The course meets to read, discuss, and evaluate critically several classical texts in the history of Western philosophy. Close attention is paid to situating the arguments of these texts in their social, cultural, and historical contexts.

Philosophy is two things. First, it is a cognitive skill consisting of logical, analytical, and critical forms of reasoning that we use to question assumptions, test hypotheses, formulate and evaluate arguments, and justify beliefs. Understanding and practicing this skill consistently can improve the quality of one's thinking, which is useful despite one's area of study. Second, philosophy is a historical tradition, academic discipline, and, for some, a “way of life.” The objective of this course is to develop one's critical thinking skills by studying historical philosophical texts. This is a partial justification for reading sometimes boring and otherwise obscure texts by long dead philosophers. There is another justification for reading texts in the history of philosophy. *They are your history.*

REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. Plato, *Symposium*
2. René Descartes, *Meditations*
3. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*
4. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*
5. GWF Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*
6. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*

The editions and/or translations of texts required for this course can be found in the Occidental College Bookstore (x2630). They are affordable and students must use these editions since this course stresses close reading of the texts.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The course requires *minimally* completing the following. No email submissions of work done in this course are accepted. No unstapled papers are accepted in this course. No exceptions. If a student needs an extension for a given deadline, ask at least 3-4 days ahead of time, not at the last minute by email.

1. (1) Presentation	10 percent
2. (2) Short Papers	60 percent
3. (1) Final Exam	30 percent

1. Each student is responsible for making a 2-3 pp. **presentation** *at least once* on the reading. It should reconstruct the arguments of the text accurately, and provide some questions and/or criticism to get class discussion started. The presentation will be based on these two objectives, as well as the student's preparation. **10 percent.**

2. Each student is responsible for handing in **(2) short papers** that focus on any one of the figures, texts, and their respective philosophical positions. A list of potential prompts will be provided after finishing each text, but students should feel free to write on any topic that interests them. At least one paper must be handed in prior to midterm, which is Tuesday, October 27. The other paper may be handed in at the student's convenience, but by Thursday, December 3. Short papers are 5-6 pp. **30 percent each.**

3. The **final exam** is open at this point. If the course goes well the exam will likely be take-home with one week to finish. If students fail in their duties to engage the course material and participate in class discussion, the professor reserves the right to opt for an in-class final during the final exam period. Students should try to avoid an in class exam by taking the course seriously and getting something out of it. **30 percent.**

Class attendance and participation is expected. There are five basic rules in this classroom: (1) read all assigned material before class, (2) ask questions if you don't understand, (3) participate in the discussion if you have something to say, (4) respect others by directing comments at the arguments of the text rather than at other students, and (5) turn off your wireless devices.

It is the policy of Occidental College to make reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. If you require these accommodations, please see me no later than the second week of class. For information on documentation requirements for such requests, contact the Center for Academic Excellence (x2849).

This syllabus represents a contract. As students you are expected to fulfill your duties in this course, just as the Administration, Faculty, and students of Occidental College have a right to expect me to fulfill my duties as instructor.

ACADEMIC HONESTY:

Plagiarism is misrepresenting the work of others as your own. Plagiarizing material and academic misconduct more generally will be turned over to the Judicial Examiner. It is standard to receive an “F” for the assignment and/or course for students who commit academic misconduct. There is an Academic Code at Occidental College that can be found at the following link:
<http://departments.oxy.edu/studentlife/studenthandbook/academic.policies/academic.ethics.html>

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

1. 9/1 – 9/11 Plato, *Symposium*
2. 9/15 – 9/29 Descartes, *Meditations*
3. 10/1 – 10/15 Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*
4. 10/20 Fall Break
5. 10/22 – 11/3 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*
6. 10/27 Short paper 1 due
7. 11/5 – 11/17 Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*
8. 11/19 – 12/9 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*
9. 12/3 Short paper 2 due