HON 171: THE HUMAN EVENT, I

FALL 2004

TTh 9:15-10:30, 10:40-11:55, 12:15-1:30, 1:40-2:55

Office Hours: TTh 3:00 – 4:00.¹ Other times by appointment only.

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“[Socrates] taught them to discover the difficulties in the seemingly self-evident; he confused them, forced them to think, to search, to inquire over and over again, and not to sidestep the answer ... The significance of Socrates’ approach is that one must know one’s ignorance and embark on the journey of thought”

Karl Jaspers²

This course provides us with an opportunity to discuss some of the classic questions that humankind has wrestled with over the millennia, such as - what is our place in the Universe? Is the Universe an impersonal one? What is our relationship to the sacred and profane? How does the individual relate to the community? Is there such a thing as free-will, or are we mere puppets in a divinely scripted play? Why do bad things happen to good people? In examining these questions by reading a selection of works from philosophers and other writers, we will aim not to solve these eternal problems, but to examine what Tennyson described as “the thoughts that shake mankind.”

Chronologically, we will cover the period from ancient times to the middle of the 17th Century, a period which would see the beginning of the “Scientific Revolution”.

Aims:

- Broadening of your cultural background and historical awareness
- Cultivation of multi-disciplinary perspectives
- Development of frameworks for self-directed learning and working within a pluralist world
- Improvement of skills in close reading, critical discussion and evaluation & construction of oral and written arguments.

Texts:

The following works are required for purchase and are available at the ASU Bookstore or online. Please only purchase these editions. Additional readings will be made available online.

- Lao-Tzu (S Addiss trans., 1993), Tao Te Ching, Hackett.
- Dante, Inferno (Mark Musa, ed.), Penguin Classics.

¹ There will be no office hours on Aug 31, Sep 21, Oct 19, Nov 18 & Nov 23.
Supplementary Resources:

- The class “encyclopedia” at http://darwin.bc.asu.edu/mediawiki/ will include links to online readings as well as reading guides, supplemental information, and background materials.
- The online discussion board is at http://darwin.bc.asu.edu/ib/. You will need to register with the Webboard before the end of the first week or you will be penalized.
- The Barrett Writing Center is directed by BHC faculty and staffed by BHC writing tutors who themselves have successfully completed The Human Event. Its goal is to help you improve your lifelong writing and critical thinking skills, so we hope you will take full advantages of its services. Please see http://darwin.bc.asu.edu/bwc/ for updated tutoring and workshop schedules, appointment information, academic background on the staff, and internet links related to academic essay writing.
- The teaching assistants are there to help you with formulating theses and devising strategies for class participation. Use them!

Reading Texts:

The Human Event is a reading-intensive course and I am willing to guarantee that you will do more reading of primary sources than in any other course you possibly take in your freshman and sophomore years. You are expected to come to each class having read the assignment carefully. Many of the works we shall study are philosophical in nature, and thus require close and concentrated reading. Casual skimming will (a) not be helpful to you in discussing these works, (b) will inhibit you from developing strong paper topics, and (c) cause you to fail in-class quizzes; thus your final grade will suffer. As a minimum following completing a reading, you should be able to answer the following questions:

1. What is the key question being addressed in the work you have read?
2. What are the main inferences/conclusions of the author?
3. What are the main assumptions made by the writer?
4. What are the implications if we take the author seriously? What if not?

Assignments:

- Participation – 35%
- Quizzes – 5%
- Papers – 60%

In-Class Quizzes: (5%)

Assigned readings are subject to unannounced quizzes held promptly at the beginning of class. Quizzes will be graded on a pass/fail basis. Students who pass every quiz will receive a final quiz grade of 5; those who miss or fail one quiz will receive a 4; two, a 3; three, a 2; and so forth. No more than five quizzes will be given. If you appear in class while a quiz is being taken, you will not be allowed enter until the quiz has been graded. A missed quiz counts as a failed quiz, and quizzes cannot be made up.

Participation: (35%)

The Human Event is, by design, a seminar course; you are expected both to have carefully read the assigned reading and to engage in discussion during class-time. As participation is worth 35% of your final grade, it is obvious that failure to participate will result in a grade no better than a ‘D’ no matter how good your written work may be. Remember, coming to class and having read the assigned reading do not count as participation; you must contribute to the discussions. In addition, arrival to class late, sleeping during class, failure to bring your text to class (or not actively using it!), or conversing with neighbors will all immediately and without warning result in a zero for participation during a given class, no matter how much you may talk in that class.
I do understand that some individuals are, by nature, quiet and perhaps feel uncomfortable talking in group situations. I do not cold-call students (unless they ask me to do so as a means of forcing them to participate), so the onus is on you to participate or risk losing grade-points. To help such individuals to obtain participation points an online forum is available. To have any hope of gaining “virtual participation” credit in a given week, you should aim to provide at least two substantive posts per week (Posting a large number of messages in a week will not undo loss of marks due to failure to post in prior weeks). A student who posts ten messages a week is no better off than one that posts two; quality is important. The phrase “substantive posts” implies the following: (a) if you are not initiating a thread, you constructively engage with the comments of your peers, (b) your posting goes beyond comments that were previously made either in class or online, and (c) you quote or refer to textual evidence from our readings. A good post moves beyond class concepts, integrates diverse ideas and texts, and provides an opportunity for others to critically discuss your ideas. It is important to remember that online participation alone will not get you an ‘A’ or ‘B’ for overall participation, and only contributes to the 1% of your grade that is allocated weekly. If you don’t talk in class, the best you can hope for is 14% (out of 35%, see below) and a ‘C’ overall.

A total of 35% of your final grade is going for participation. One percent (1%) will be given each week (excluding Week’s 1 & 16) if you participate to any meaningful degree either online or in-class (i.e. 1% x 14 = 14%). This is your quantitative grade. The remaining 21% will be a qualitative assessment of your participation using the criteria given below. This will be distributed in two parcels – one at the end of Week 8 and another after Week 15).

A: The student receiving this grade participates extensively in the majority of class and online discussions. She arrives in class each day thoroughly prepared with written comments and questions on the assigned reading. At least occasionally she initiates the discussion, without waiting for the instructor to do so; in particular she regularly initiates online discussions. When towards the end of a discussion the instructor asks for further comments, she almost always has some. She does not, however, try to dominate the class. Instead she listens carefully to the remarks made by fellow class members, and responds as readily to these as she does to the instructor’s questions.

B: The student in this grade range participates in most discussions, although not as fully or reliably as the student described above. She gives evidence of having done the reading. At least part of the time she helps the discussion along by raising her own questions. She pays attention to the comments of her peers.

C: This student participates only intermittently during class periods (perhaps only once a week). She is more willing to discuss broad, general questions than to engage in concrete analysis of an assigned text. She is sometimes unprepared, and lacks interest in the ideas of other members of the class.

D: This student seldom contributes to class and/or online discussions.

E: Student probably doesn’t realize that they are attending this class and never speaks.

Papers: (60%)

Papers should be 1250 to 1500 words in length and must present a clearly organized and persuasive argument relating to the material we have read. You must develop an opinion about the work and use evidence from the text to substantiate your claims. As this course aims to have you think critically about primary sources, i.e. our assigned readings, no secondary material may be utilized in your papers, as you are being judged on the quality of your ideas, the form in which you present those ideas, and your use of textual evidence. Guidelines for thesis development are provided at the class website, and we will discuss these early in the semester.

Easy ways to lose grade points on a paper:

- Submission of a paper that is outside the length requirement loses one letter grade.
Excessive grammatical and spelling errors (including misspelling characters names, places or the title of works) will be punished to varying degrees depending on severity.

Failure to provide a completed draft for peer review will result in immediate failure of the assignment.

Failure to submit a printed copy of a paper by the due time and date (usually noon on Friday) will result in failure of the assignment.

Beyond these requirements, I am a fair grader who expects you to play close attention to the content and form of your written work. In general, I tend to return papers with more negative than positive comments – this does not mean that your paper was excessively “bad,” merely that given time and space constraints I am identifying the issues which I feel you can address and thus improve your future writing.

A plea for understanding. HON 171/172 professors grade papers from nearly eighty students every assignment. Each paper takes approximately 45 minutes to read, digest, comment upon and grade. This amounts to sixty hours of continuous work. Add to this our regular amount of time spent in class, on class preparation, university service, breaks and home life (yes, we have a life outside the BHC) and I think you can appreciate that papers cannot be returned as rapidly as we all would like, and certainly not within a week. Please don’t bother to ask me when papers will be returned – I work as fast as I can! This also puts a time constraint on the level of detail I can put in written comments. I strongly suggest that you come see me if you need further guidance; improving your writing (and thus your final grade) depends on a working relationship between you, me and the Human Event Writing Center (the latter being especially important).

Some clarifications:

A: The paper is outstanding in every way: in the originality of its thought, in the persuasiveness of its argument, and in the clarity and power of its writing. There are no grammatical and spelling errors. The thesis goes beyond what has been discussed in class and everything in the essay relates to that thesis. Each paragraph has a topic sentence. On average, perhaps five to ten percent of the papers in any given assignment will deserve an A grade; I will leave you to work out how many that is within a class of 20 students.

B: The paper is approximately what is to be expected of a student in an honors course. The prose is generally clear and readable, but there are some grammatical problems and some sentences may be awkward. The essay shows serious thought beyond class discussions, and for the most part is well organized.

C: An essay in this range is neither especially bad nor distinctively good. It may have a promising thesis but the argument is unconvincing or confusing. It may show little or no original thought.

D: D papers have serious weaknesses in content and style. There is no clear thesis and no movement beyond class concepts. The writing style is difficult to read.

**Assorted Policies and Procedures:**

*Plus/Minus Grading:* ASU has initiated the use of plus/minus grades. Please note that your paper and participation grades will not feature +/- grades. Your final numeric grade for the course will be converted into a letter grade according to the following scale: A+, A, A- 90, B+, B 80, B-, C+, C above 70, D above 60, E less than 60

*Attendance:* You are allowed two absences (excused or otherwise) without penalty. Further absences require medical documentation. Three absences result in a 50% reduction of your participation score for the semester. Missing four classes (i.e. two weeks of the semester) will result in immediate failure of the course. **Arriving more than five minutes late counts as an absence.**
**Cell Phones:** I switch my phone off when I come to class; You should do so as well. If your phone rings during class, you will (without notification or comment) receive a zero for that week’s participation. I’m not joking.

**Plagiarism:** As a student, you are expected not to engage in any form of plagiarism, which according to the ASU Student Code of Conduct, "means representing the words or ideas of another as one’s own."³ Plagiarism is an act of fraud. It involves both stealing someone else’s work and lying about it afterward. Note, that for an act to count as plagiarism, the representation does not have to be intentional. With the advent of the Internet, it has become easier for students to plagiarize. However, somewhat ironically, it has become easier for instructors to detect this form of dishonesty. The faculty of the Barrett Honors College have initiated the use of internet-based services to detect plagiarism. As such, we have a high probability of detecting fraud, and regularly catch plagiarists using it. You will be required to submit printed and electronic copies of all papers. Upon detection of plagiarism, you will automatically be assigned a course grade of XE which “denotes failure through academic dishonesty and may not be appealed through the grade appeal process.” ⁴ Thus, as a minimum, you will fail this course, will not be able to repeat it, and will be thus unable to graduate from the Barrett Honors College. An ‘XE’ grade on your transcript will also preclude you from entry into any reputable graduate or professional school. Professors can initiate a grade change for plagiarism up to two years after the completion of a course. The bottom-line is, DON’T PLAGIARIZE!

**Grade Appeals:** Grades can only be contested in writing (not by e-mail) and not before the class period following return of the paper. Please enclose all relevant material (i.e. the paper as I returned it to you) with your appeal which should engage the comments and criticisms I have made. Avoid claiming that because you worked hard, you deserve an ‘A’ – it is assumed that you worked hard.

**Further Action:** Students are directed to the Barrett Honors College’s Procedure on Student Academic Grievances at http://www.asu.edu/honors/docs/GradeAppeal.doc.

**Miscellanea:** BHC professors do not grade on a curve nor do we engage in any grade inflation. No extra credit is available. This syllabus is a contract between you and I - by attending this class you declare that you have read and understood all the above.

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⁴ [http://www.asu.edu/studentlife/judicial/integrity.html](http://www.asu.edu/studentlife/judicial/integrity.html)
**Schedule of Classes:**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 24</td>
<td>Introduction to Course</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 26</td>
<td>Writing Papers for the Human Event.</td>
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<td>Register with webboard. Read guidelines provided online.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 31</td>
<td>Enuma Elish (online)</td>
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<td>Sep 2</td>
<td>Bereshit (online)</td>
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<td>Sep 7</td>
<td>Homer, Iliad</td>
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<td>Sep 9</td>
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<td>Sophocles, Oedipus Tyranus</td>
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<td>Sep 16</td>
<td>Aristophanes, The Clouds</td>
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<td>Sep 21</td>
<td>Dhammapada</td>
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<td>Sep 23</td>
<td>Peer Review for Paper 1</td>
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<td>Sep 28</td>
<td>Tao</td>
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<td>Sep 30</td>
<td>Confucius, Analects</td>
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<td>Oct 5</td>
<td>Plato, Euthryphro</td>
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<td>Oct 7</td>
<td>Plato, Apology</td>
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<td>Oct 12</td>
<td>Plato, Crito</td>
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<td>Oct 14</td>
<td>Plato, Republic</td>
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<td>Oct 19</td>
<td>Plato, Republic</td>
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<td>Oct 21</td>
<td>Plato, Republic</td>
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<td>Oct 26</td>
<td>Aristotle, Ethics (online)</td>
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<td>Oct 28</td>
<td>Ethical Teachings of Jesus (online)</td>
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<td>Nov 2</td>
<td>Thucydides &amp; Aquinas (online)</td>
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<td>Nov 4</td>
<td>Peer Review for Paper 2</td>
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<td>Nov 9</td>
<td>Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods</td>
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<td>Nov 11</td>
<td>Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods</td>
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<td>Nov 16</td>
<td>Dante, Inferno</td>
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<td>Nov 18</td>
<td>Dante, Inferno</td>
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<td>Nov 23</td>
<td>Dante, Inferno</td>
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<td>Nov 25</td>
<td>No class - Thanksgiving</td>
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<td>Nov 30</td>
<td>Montaigne, Of Cannibals (online)</td>
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<td>Dec 2</td>
<td>Milton. Paradise Lost (online)</td>
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<td>Dec 7</td>
<td>Evaluations and Final Discussion</td>
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