HON 171: The Human Event

Spring 2011 / Cereus Hall 201 / TTh 12:00 – 1:15 or 1:30 – 2:45.

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Office Hours: T & Th 10:30 – 11:30, or by appt. (Sage South 167)

“[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 Jaspers

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 the relationship between 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 the poet Alfred Lord 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 that would see the beginning of the “Scientific Revolution”.

Learning Outcomes

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

Required Texts

The following works are required for purchase and are available at the ASU Bookstore or online. Only purchase these editions. All additional readings will be made available online. Failure to bring a text – or use of the wrong edition - counts as an absence. (See below for the policy regarding absences). Do not leave purchasing books to late in the semester; if the Bookstore runs out of copies, the onus is on you to obtain the correct edition before class.
Online readings are available on the Blackboard site under “Content”. For each reading there will usually be background information – often with study questions and links to further information – posted at the class website (see below). Readings are to be completed for the class in which they are to be discussed.

No laptops or other e-reader devices are allowed in the classroom. Not only do they distract during discussion, using them also means that you will not adequately prepare when reading the texts. While some readings will be made available in electronic form (to cut down costs to you), you must print them out before reading them and bring the printed (and annotated!) copy to class. Failure to do so will result in an absence.

Reading Texts

THE is a reading-intensive course and you are expected to come to each class having read assignments carefully. The text is central to the class, and your discussions should always balance close-readings of the text with the wider implications of the ideas contained therein. 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 any in-class quizzes or written assignments; 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?
To aid you in your active reading, I ask that you maintain a notebook (of questions, thoughts, ideas, outlines, and, as a minimum, answers to the above four questions) while doing the reading. *I can ask to see this notebook (and your textbooks) at any stage during the semester and will adjust your participation score depending on the quality of your work.* In addition, should I feel that students aren’t adequately prepared for class, I reserve the right to initiate a series of unannounced quizzes or in-class written assignments which will remove points from your participation grade.

**Supplemental Resources**

- We will use Blackboard (http://my.asu.edu) to submit papers and store readings.
- The class webpage is at http://lynch.faculty.asu.edu/site/hon171.html (this can be accessed through BlackBoard/Content). You will need to check this regularly for the definitive schedule of classes, review questions, and other pertinent information. Note that this is a dynamic resource that will change as the semester progresses.
- The Barrett Writing Center will be available during the semester to assist students with their papers for all their classes. Directed by BHC faculty and staffed by writing tutors who themselves have completed THE, the Center offers individual tutoring on writing papers for THE and other courses. Its goal is to help you improve your lifelong writing and critical thinking skills, so please take advantage of its services. Go to the BWC website at http://honors.asu.edu/ and click on "Resources for Current Students." Under Barrett Writing Center, you then can access tutoring schedules, appointment information, and academic background on the staff.

**Required Work**

- Participation – 50% (includes in-class participation, reading journal, quizzes if required)
- Papers – 50%

Please see the class website for more explicit guidelines as to grading standards for both participation and written work.

**Participation (50%)**: This class is a seminar; you are thus expected both to have *carefully* read the assigned reading and to engage in discussion during class-time. As participation is worth 50% 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 does not count as participation*; you must contribute to the discussions. In addition, disruptive behaviors such as sleeping during class or conversing with neighbors will immediately (and without warning) result in a zero for participation during a given class, no matter how much you may talk at other times during that period. Failure to actively use your text in class will also result in a penalty. You should aim for a balance between active *contribution* and active *listening* – the classroom should not be dominated by single voices.
Here are some of the things you should be doing to maximize your potential as a contributor to discussions: bring in questions about the reading, respond analytically to questions posed by the instructor or fellow students, support your claims with textual evidence, pose and/or address counter-arguments, and interact respectfully with class members by supporting or challenging their ideas. Please read the online guide to seminar participation for further guidelines and tips.

Papers (50%): Papers should be 1250 to 1500 words in length (i.e. approximately five to six pages in length, double spaced). Your paper 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.

I am a fair grader who expects you to pay close attention to both 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.

Note that the standard expected increases with each assignment; for example, work that received a ‘B’ in the first assignment would only receive a ‘C’ for the second assignment. The goal here is for you to continually improve your writing skills, even if you are initially an A/B grade writer.

Important Dates

- February 19\textsuperscript{th}: Paper #1 due.
- February 25\textsuperscript{th}: Self-assessment #1 of participation due.
- March 11\textsuperscript{th}: Mid-semester participation indicators posted.
- April 9\textsuperscript{th}: Paper #2 due.
- April 10\textsuperscript{th}: Course Withdrawal Deadline.
- April 16\textsuperscript{th}: Self-assessment #2 of participation due.
- May 3\textsuperscript{rd}: Complete Withdrawal Deadline.
- May 11\textsuperscript{th}: Paper #3 due.

Other Issues

Attendance: In accordance with Barrett policy, you are allowed two absences (excused or otherwise) without penalty. Three absences will result in loss of 10% from your final grade (i.e. a B will become a C); four absences will result in a zero for participation. Note that arriving late for class or not bringing your printed text to class both count as an absence.

Plagiarism: You are obviously expected not to engage in any form of plagiarism, which
Grades: Final numeric grades will be converted to plus/minus grades. No extra credit will be offered, so don’t ask. During the semester, grades for individual assignments will be posted on Blackboard (along with a running total of absences). Final grades will be available on myASU after finals week.

Grade Appeals: Grades can only be contested in writing (not by e-mail) and not before the class period following return of the assignment. 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. In case of further action, you are directed to the “Procedure on Student Academic Grievances” that is available on the Barrett website.

Incomplete: The grade of “I” (Incomplete) can only be given when a student, who is doing otherwise acceptable work, is unable to complete a course (i.e. in this case the final paper) because of illness or other conditions beyond the student’s control. Documentation of this is required before the assignment is due.

Cell Phones: I switch my phone off when I come to class; you should do so as well. If you’d rather be texting or surfing the Internet while class is in session, please do so elsewhere. It is insulting both to the instructor and your classmates.

Food: In accordance with ASU policy, eating will not be allowed in the classroom as it distracts others. Feel free, however, to bring any required beverage.

E-mail: Please ensure your ASU mailbox (or wherever it is being forwarded to) is not full. If an email gets returned to me, I will not attempt to resend the message. It is your responsibility to ensure that communication is possible.

If you have not received a reply to an email within two working days (i.e., excluding weekends), please resend the message. While I usually reply promptly, I generally do not deal with email in the evenings (after 5pm) or over the weekends.

If you are emailing me a document (e.g. a thesis and/or topic sentences) for feedback, do not attach the document in its native format. Instead, cut and paste the text into the email body. That way I can more easily offer feedback. I will - without warning - ignore e-mails that contain attachments.
**Appointments:** If I set up blocks of appointments to discuss papers, you need to honor the appointment that you make. If you fail to turn up without notifying me 24 hours in advance, your paper will be docked one grade point. Coming to the meeting unprepared will result in a lesser penalty.

**Last Word**

Please read this syllabus carefully as it is a contract between you and I. By attending the next class you declare that you have read and understood all the above and associated online documents. I, for my part, will attempt not to change any of the major policies or deadlines without sufficient due notice and discussion with the class as a whole. In addition, I will treat your in-class and written work with all-due seriousness and attention.