

***COURSE SYLLABUS
COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY***

***DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
SPRING SEMESTER, 2011***

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OFFICE: ROOM 310, LOCKE HALL
OFFICE HOURS: TTH 5:10-6:30
And by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION: A STUDY OF THE CROSS-CULTURAL HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY AS MAXIMUM ABSTRACTION AND REFLEXIVITY, TOGETHER WITH SELF-CONSCIOUS CRITIQUE

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

ON COMPLETING THE COURSE, STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO ASSESS CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CULTURE AND THE PRACTICE OF PHILOSOPHY. OF PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE IS THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF REASONS FOR THE RISE AND FALL OF PHILOSOPHICAL SCHOOLS IN CULTURAL CONTEXTS. THE PRIMARY POINT OF THE COURSE IS TO HELP STUDENTS FOCUS THEIR OWN CHOICES OF PHILOSOPHICAL METHODS AND PROBLEMS.

PART ONE: PHILOSOPHICAL METHODS IN ANCIENT AFRICA, INDIA AND CHINA

Comparing philosophy to other intellectual disciplines, the first part of the course will examine cross-cultural attempts to separate philosophy from science, history, and art. In chronological order we will start with ancient Egyptian, Oromo, Hindu, Buddhist, and Chinese philosophical methodology before making a brief comparison with European systems.

PART TWO: WHAT EXISTS (ONTOLOGY) AND WHAT IS VALUABLE (ETHICS) IN THE OROMO CULTURE IN ETHIOPIA, AND THE HINDU AND DAOIST CULTURES IN INDIA AND CHINA

Of particular interest is the correlation between cosmology and ethics in each of the various systems.

PART THREE: EXPLAINING EVIL

In this section we will concentrate on explanations of evil found in ancient Egyptian and Greek philosophy, as well as modern and contemporary European philosophy, with special emphasis on Leibniz, Rousseau, Kant, Nietzsche, and Freud.

PART FOUR: OVERCOMING EVIL

In this section we will focus on the efforts of contemporary psychologists to comprehend evil as a form of behavior that may be changed. In particular we will examine Ervin Staub's efforts to understand genocide and even to predict its occurrence. We will follow the case studies of Staub taken from Europe, Asia, and Africa. We will close with a brief examination of the attempts of contemporary evolutionary psychologists to understand evil as a behavioral phenomenon.

PART FIVE: EVIL IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

We will close the course with a brief consideration of evil as a rhetorical device used to further political aims.

COURSE READING:

The following books are required.

Collins, Randall. *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.

Staub, E. 1998. *The Roots of Evil: The Psychological and Cultural Origins of Genocide*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Zimbardo, Philip. *The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil*.

The following books are recommended:

Bernstein, R.J. 2002. *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Koller, John. *Asian Philosophies*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall

Neiman, S. 2002. *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Waller, J. 2002. *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wright, R. 1994. *The Moral Animal: Evolutionary Psychology and Everyday Life*. New York: Vintage.

REQUIREMENTS:

PEER GROUPS: You are encouraged to form peer groups to help you rewrite your notes and reading critiques, and to study for exams. If you have missed a class, it is your responsibility to secure replacement notes from several of your peer group members. If you are having difficulty forming a group, please ask for help from your instructor. On appropriate occasions, peer groups will conduct class discussion.

EXAMS: There will be two examinations during the semester. The exams will be essay form, and the questions will be taken from the four parts of the course described above. There will be no final examination. Homework is assigned daily. All work must be completed by the last day of formal classes. The first exam will be scheduled two weeks before the mid-semester grade reports are due in the registrar's office. The second exam will be scheduled for the week preceding the last full week of classes before the final examination period.

READING CRITIQUES: Students must complete no less than ten brief reports on their readings in philosophy and culture as a preparation for writing a research paper. Reading critiques will be graded both by peer groups and the instructor. Both the reading critiques and the research paper should cover the following nine elements, although not necessarily in the order listed. You may not be able to cover all nine steps in your first few reading critiques. If you're having trouble, talk to me or members of your peer group. (1) State the problem you have chosen for your research, and show why you think the problem deserves our attention. You choose your problem out of your own interests, but many other authors will have worked on some aspect of your problem. (2) Show how your approach to the problem will be philosophical. (3) To the degree that you are able, present a brief history of other attempts to solve your problem. This may be difficult to do on your initial reading critiques, but this element should play a prominent role in your final research paper. (4) Present a brief, compelling, clear account of your author's attempt to solve your problem. (5) Show how the author fails to solve your problem--from the author's point of view. This step reveals philosophy's most important first step: showing someone wrong from her own point of view. (6) Show how the author fails to solve your problem--from your own point of view. (7) How might you improve or correct your author's solution? (8) Show how your solution to your problem might be wrong--from your own point of view. (9) Briefly indicate the next steps you need to take to solve your problem.

SUBJECT MATTER OF READING CRITIQUES: The first five reading critiques will be based on five introductory philosophy texts of your choosing. The texts should present five distinctive approaches to defining philosophy. The sixth and seventh reading critiques will be taken from texts that address the connection between philosophy and the discipline that most directly bears on your problem area (for example, philosophy of art, business or medical ethics, philosophy of psychology or anthropology, philosophy and political theory). The last three reading critiques will show how philosophy and another discipline work together to address the specific problem you've chosen for your research paper.

GROUNDS FOR CRITIQUE: You may try to show how someone (including yourself!) may be wrong from her own point of view with the following considerations. (1) Are all the elements of the language the person uses to express her theory meaningful--both to herself and her readers? (2) Do the consequences drawn from the person's theory correspond to her own experience? (3) Are the elements of the person's theory consistent with her own assumptions? (4) Is the person able to use her theory to achieve the results she designed the theory for? (5) Does the theory cover the widest possible range of experience? (6) Does the theory cover its intended range of experience with a minimum number of symbols? (7) Does the theory stimulate new ways of thinking about the problem that led to its development?

SYMBOLS USED FOR WRITING CRITIQUE: Both the instructor and your peer group members will use the following symbols to point out aspects of your writing that you may wish to improve. "S" = Structure, "T" = Transition, "R" = Relevance, "D" = Details, "D/E" = Definition and Explanation, "CA" = Critical Apparatus (citations and bibliography), "Why Φ " = Why Is Your Analysis Philosophical?, "C/A" = Criticism and Argumentation, "?" = Clarity Problem. Other symbols will be used to address the mechanics of your writing. "G" = Grammar, "Sp" = Spelling, "Pct." = punctuation, "SL" = Sexist Language, "A" = Above (point already made above, why repeated?).

JOURNALING: You are encouraged to "freewrite" your responses to class and peer group discussions. You may use a "double entry" form, listing your notes in one column and your responses in a parallel column, or you may reserve separate sections of your notes for your response. Your journal entries should criticize class presentations, discussions, your assessment of what you do and do not understand in class, your peer group discussions, or your readings.

RESEARCH PAPER: A research paper of no less than ten typed pages on the subject of the course must be turned in no later than the last week of class. A provisional topic should be submitted to your peer group after the second week of class. A provisional outline (including a possible annotated bibliography) of this paper must be turned in by the fourth week of class. Submit the outline and bibliography to your peer group before handing in to the instructor. A very rough draft must be presented by the sixth week of class. Students are expected to revise their drafts weekly through the last week of class. Both the instructor and the peer groups will critique the drafts.

RESEARCH PAPER STRUCTURE: The paper should be divided into five sections. The introduction or first section will state the problem you are working on and show how your approach to the problem will be philosophical. The introduction is your only chance to capture your readers' attention, so you should demonstrate to the reader how she is likely to find your research useful. The second section will elaborate on the philosophical nature of your approach to your problem. It should be constructed from the material of your first five reading critiques which will present five distinct approaches to defining philosophy. The third section of your paper will show in general how philosophy works in the context of the discipline you've chosen

to solve your problem. The fourth section will show how philosophy and your chosen discipline work together to solve the specific problem you're addressing. The final section, the conclusion, will summarize your results. If your results are negative, your conclusion may propose promising lines of research for the future.

RESEARCH PAPER MECHANICS: Use bibliography and note cards to construct both your paper outline and rough drafts. See the instructor if you are unfamiliar with these tools.

RESEARCH PAPER STYLE MANUAL: The APA Style Manual is standard. Other style manuals should be chosen only in consultation with the instructor.

RESEARCH PAPER ABSTRACTS: Students will present abstracts of their research papers in the final two weeks of class. Each abstract will be assigned a student commentator, who will write a formal comment. The abstracts together with comments must be e-mailed to the instructor and class members at least one week before the presentation is scheduled.

CLASS NOTES: Because the course does not restrict itself to textbooks, a comprehensive, analytic set of class notes is required. Students will be invited to the instructor's office throughout the semester for a periodic review of their notes. If a student misses a class period for any reason, it is her immediate responsibility to secure competent notes for that period. Class notes will be graded both by peer groups and by the instructor.

PERFORMANCE PORTFOLIO: Students will be expected to bring a portfolio including notes, journal entries, reading critiques, rough drafts, and sample exam essays to the instructor for a comprehensive performance review once a month during the semester.

GRADING: The final grade will be based on the arithmetical average of the two exam scores and the research paper unless scores on reading critiques, classroom performance and notes provide reason for further consideration. Absence of timely reading critiques and rough drafts will yield a grade of "0" or "F" for the research paper.

ATTENDANCE: Because philosophy by its very nature requires a dialogical approach, classroom discussions are essential to apprenticeship in the discipline. Daily attendance is compulsory, a class roll is kept, and students missing more than three class periods or tardy for more than three class periods without excuse will be penalized up to one full letter grade. Subsequent blocks of three absences or tardiness will be penalized by one full letter grade. Written excuses for reasons of health, employment, law, or family are required.

MISCONDUCT: Misconduct on any exam or plagiarism on any written assignment will result in a grade of "F" for the course, not for the exam or assignment. Students must be absolutely certain of the meaning of the term 'plagiarism' before undertaking any writing assignment.

LATE WORK: No late work, whether papers or examinations, will be accepted except in documented cases of medical, financial, legal, or family emergencies.

WITHDRAWAL: Students who are uncertain about the possibility of completing the course successfully should pay particular attention to the last date set by the registrar for dropping the course.