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PHL 210E.80: Moral Philosophy

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PHIL210: Moral Philosophy, Velasco

Class Info and Office Hours:
- Dr. Melodie Velasco Stenger, melodie.velasco@umontana.edu (Please call me Dr. Velasco or Dr. V)
- **Office:** Eck Hall/Liberal Arts Building, Room 145
  - **Office Hours:** Wednesdays, 11:30-12:15; Thursdays, 12:30-1:15

Course Description:
This course is the gateway requirement to both the philosophy major and minor. Why? What about moral philosophy suggests that it should be such an essential requirement? The answer explored here is an extension of what was developed in PHL 110; namely, that a moral philosophy is systematic thought about what it means and what it takes to be a person of character. In this class, we will look at the sort of thinking that seems to characterize the person of character, and in so doing, will find that the intensive focus on clear writing in this course performs this sort of thinking. We will begin with Arendt’s essay “Thinking and Moral Considerations” and a few other short pieces that help us explore what we might mean by “thinking,” and to help us ground the most obvious question: can the person of character be defined by the presence of a type of thinking if they do not also engage in a type of acting? We will then take up the three foremost canonical works of western ethical thought, Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Kant’s *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, and Mill’s *Utilitarianism* in light of that exploration.

Learning Outcomes:
As an intensive writing course, some familiarity and comfort with *reading* exceedingly complicated and nuanced texts is expected. The central objective of the course is that a student learn to *write* in such a way that her complicated and nuanced understanding—her *reading* of the text—is communicated in a clear and persuasive fashion.

As a course in moral philosophy, the central objective is to leave this course certain of the basic argument structure in the three central works of moral philosophy, named above.

Lastly, as a course that is part of the University-wide Program-level Writing Assessment (UPWA), this course requires an electronic submission (via Moodle) of an assignment stripped of your personal information to be used for educational research and assessment of the university’s writing program. Your paper will be stored in a database. A random selection of papers will be assessed by a group of faculty and staff using a rubric developed from the following Writing Learning Outcomes:

- Compose written documents that are appropriate for a given audience of purpose
- Formulate and express ideas in writing
- Use writing to learn and synthesize new concepts
- Revise written work based on constructive feedback
- Find, evaluate, and use information effectively
- Begin to use discipline-specific writing conventions (largely style conventions such as APA or MLA)
- Demonstrate appropriate English language usage

The assessment completed by the UPWA in no way affects your course grade or progression at UM.

At the conclusion of this course, the successful student will be able to:
1. Demonstrate habits of a successful reader (vocabulary, marginalia, Spark Points);
2. List and define the chief parts of a Problem Synopsis and an Argument Analysis;
3. Define each of the Key Terms identified in each lesson’s Text Map;
4. Recognize and identify the outline of an argument within a text;
5. Construct their own Problem Synopsis and Argument Analysis in response to a given text;
6. Construct a clean and organized prose presentation of their own argument, once formulated.

The excellent student will, in addition, be able to:
1. Provide articulate and helpful feedback to other student authors within the course.
2. Complete a brief literature review of articles pertinent to their own argument;
3. Incorporate information from these pertinent articles into their own writing;

Texts:
I respect that many of you are working while in school. If financial hardship prevents you from printing and purchasing/renting your books, please contact me.

Some readings will be made available on Moodle; it is expected that students print these readings and use as a hard copy unless a learning difference makes this unfeasible.

The following two texts are required in hardcopy unless a learning difference requires another medium. **Do not wait to purchase these:** do it now. Do not purchase a different translation of the Aristotle.

Requirements:

Papers (80%):
Three papers will be workshopped throughout the course and will count for 80% of your final grade (counting for 15%, 25%, and 40% respectively.). The process of workshopping a paper will be a portion of these grades.

Participation (20%)
This portion of your grade takes into account (a) your attendance and the quality of your comments in class; (b) the quality of your workshop and editing comments; (c) other short assignments (occasionally on Moodle) and, potentially, pop quizzes on the readings.

In determining final grades I will take into account the extent to which your work improves over the course of the term.

Policies:

Attendance and Missed Assignments:
Every absence beyond two will diminish your participation grade and more than four will decimate it.

Please note: **All assignments are due according to deadline. As I rule, I will not accept late work.**
If you have to miss a class or anticipate difficulties in completing an assignment on time, talk to me about the situation as soon as you can. I am also more likely to be lenient if I have proof that you read this syllabus. To prove it, email me a picture of yourself and your favorite corny joke.

No Grade Option:
If you would like to forego looking at your grades during the semester to instead focus on your own feeling of satisfaction with your progress, I am happy to provide extra cschedule additional online or in-person meetings to help you assess your understanding of the material. For more information, email me.

Academic Honesty:
All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by myself (at least the failing of the assignment in question, perhaps the failing of the course in its entirety) and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. Written work may be screened by various plagiarism-screening websites. For more, please review the University of Montana Student Conduct Code.

Accessibility:
Students with disabilities will receive reasonable accommodations. Please place your request with sufficient advance notice and be prepared to provide verification of disability and its impact from Disability Services. See the Disability Services for Students website.

Please note that I understand that not all disabilities fall into a neat diagnostic category, and that not everyone with a disability can comfortably go through the process of getting it institutionally recognized, so please feel free to speak to me confidentially about any special needs or accommodations that you feel would help you learn effectively and display what you have learned in this class. My goal is to help you learn and do well in the class, not to hold you to a specific set of rules and institutional norms that does not suit your needs.

Parenting and Working Students:
I recognize that students who are also parents or who are working more than a few hours a week face considerable challenges in finding the kind of uninterrupted time in which deep thought flourishes. Given those challenges, please don’t hesitate to ask me if there is anything I can do to support your academic life.

ESL Students:
This course is expected to be difficult for those for whom English is the primary language; it will be exceedingly difficult for those for whom English is a secondary language. I encourage ESL students to contact me early in the term to discuss how I might best support their success in the class. ESL students are permitted the use of a hardcopy dictionary during in-class assignments, and are encouraged to find translations of our required texts to use as additional support in reading and studying their assignments.

Further Changes:
If necessary, changes may be made to this syllabus during the course of the semester. Students are expected to note these changes as they are announced.
PHL 210 Assignment #1:

- Definition of philosophy
- Definition of philosopher
- Habits of a successful philosopher
- Definition of a philosophy paper versus other types of papers
- Directions on how best to write a philosophy paper
- Buy a notebook for this class
- Buy a journal
- Buy books for the class