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PHL 311.01: Scepticism & the Good Life - "Not Knowing and Well-Being"

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Phil 311: “Not Knowing and Well-Being”

classroom: GBB 205
 MW 1:40-3:00
 my office: LA 148
 office hours: M 3-4, Th 4-5 and by appt.
 email: bclarke@mso.umt.edu

A child has to believe things before he can prove them, often before he can understand them; it is his way of learning about the world, and the only way. —Edwin Muir, “Wyre” in *An Autobiography* (Graywolf, 1955, 35).

[B]ecause we were all children before being [adults] and because for a long time it was necessary for us to be governed by our appetites and our teachers ... it is nearly impossible for our judgments to be as pure and solid as they would have been if we had had the full use of our reason from the moment of our birth and if we had always been guided by it alone.

—Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, AT 13

And your doubt may become a good quality if you *train* it. It must become *knowing*, it must become critical.... and the day will arrive when from a destroyer it will become one of your best workers—perhaps the most intelligent of all that are building your life. —Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet* (Letter #9).

Texts

Descartes, *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations* (1637;1641)

Robert Fogelin, *Walking the Tightrope of Reason* (2003)

Kathryn Schulz, *Being Wrong* (2010)

You will also need a blank notebook for your response journal.

Schedule**August**

M 26 Getting Started

W 28 Forster, “What I believe”

September

M2 Labor Day, No Class

W4 *Discourse*, Parts I-II and Meditation 1 [M1]

M9 M2

W11 M3/**Journals collected in class**

M16 Film: Gaslight

W18 Gaslight continued

M23 Fogelin, ch. 1

W25 F, ch. 2

M30 F, ch. 3

October

W2 F, ch. 4

M7 F, ch. 5

W9 F, ch. 6-7/**Journals collected in class**

M14 Schulz, 1-2
W16 S, 3

M21 S, 4
W23 S, 5

M28 S, 6
W30 S, 7

November

M4 S, 8
W6 S, 9

M11 Veteran's Day, No Class
W13 S, 10

M18 S, 11
W20 S, 12

M25 **Workshop paper topics**
W27 Happy Thanksgiving, No Class

December

M2 S, 13/**Journals collected in class**
W4 **Workshop papers**

Papers due Monday December 9 at 5p in my mailbox in LA 101 or under my office door.

Requirements

Response Journal: Concisely written responses to each of our readings *in the notebook you have devoted to this*. Approximately 500 words. **30% of final grade.**

You are to write responses to *each* of the assigned readings *prior* to the meeting. I'll grade your journal responses based on their clarity, precision and depth. Missing responses will seriously hurt this part of your grade as will responses that are poorly written, responses that are breezy, or responses that fail to exhibit clear ties to the reading.

Discussion Questions: Two discussion questions, typed and printed on a separate sheet of paper, are due at the beginning of *each meeting*. These will normally come out of your journal responses. We will often take the first 20 minutes of class to exchange and critique one another's discussion questions. I will collect them at random intervals and grade them based on their clarity, responsiveness to the text, and depth. Your final grade goes down 5% every time you come to class without discussion questions. **15% of final grade** assuming you are doing them; there is no limit to how many percentage points you may lose for coming to class without discussion questions. (If you come up empty four times, your final grade will go down 20% and so on.)

Presentations: Everyone will present on at least one of the assigned readings. **20% of final grade.**

Termpaper of 6-8 double-spaced pages, 11 or 12-font, due finals week. **25% of final grade.**

Attendance, Quality of Participation and Anything Not Covered Above. **10% of final grade** assuming you attend regularly. If your attendance is spotty, I'll ask you to drop the class. *Regular attendance is required.*