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## PHIL 250-01, Visions of Human Nature, Spring 2007

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Rhodes College  
*Visions of Human Nature*  
PHIL 250-01: MWF 2:00 – 2:50  
Buckman 325

Prof. Stephen Faison  
Clough 402  
[faisons@rhodes.edu](mailto:faisons@rhodes.edu)  
Office Hours: MW 3:00 – 4:30

Philosophy is primarily defined as love and pursuit of wisdom through intellectual means. Despite a more academic definition which defines philosophy as the study of aesthetics, epistemology, ethics, logic and metaphysics, philosophy tends to return to the study of the human being, the human being's relation to the rest of reality, the meaning of human existence, and so forth. Metaphysics involves the human effort to grasp reality. Epistemology is concerned with the human ability to identify, obtain and effectively utilize the truth. Logic is concerned with the truth value of propositions expressed by persons. Moral philosophy and social and political philosophy are particularly involved with human affairs, and their hypotheses explicitly or implicitly rest upon respective theories of human nature. Is the human being by nature good or evil? Is there an essential human nature, or is the human being a unique creature without an essential nature? In this course we will inspect various visions of human nature including Platonic, Cartesian, Christian, Marxist and existentialist conceptions.

COURSE TEXTS

Plato: *Republic* (trans. Grube)  
0872201368 Hackett

Aristotle: *The Nicomachean Ethics*  
0140449493 Penguin

Descartes: *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*  
0872204200 Hackett

Fromm: *Marx's Concept of Man*  
0826477917 Continuum International Publishing Group

Kierkegaard: *Fear and Trembling*  
0140444491 Penguin

Jean-Paul Sartre: *Existentialism and Human Emotions*  
0806509023 C Trade Paper

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Gain factual knowledge

Learn fundamental principles

Learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view

Develop skill in expressing oneself orally and in writing

Gain a broader understanding and appreciation of intellectual/cultural activity\*

## GRADING

- 15%: Quizzes, homework
- 15%: Attendance, participation
- 15%: Team debates (6)
- 25%: Mid-term exam
- 30%: Final exam (includes one cumulative question)

## QUIZZES AND HOMEWORK

There will be a quiz each week. Quizzes are intended to motivate students to keep current with reading assignments. If the class demonstrates superior knowledge of the material through class discussion, this measure may be reduced or eliminated. Homework will mainly consist of provocative questions intended to stimulate thought about ideas and arguments raised by our thinkers.

## ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

You *are* required to attend class. Rhodes administration does not make a distinction between excused and unexcused absences. Excessive absence will adversely affect your grade. Each absence in excess of three (3) will result in a one-step grade reduction. Missed quizzes can be made up before the next class period. Missed exams cannot be made up unless special circumstances warrant such considerations. Discussion and exchange of ideas are essential components of learning, particularly in philosophy courses, so these factors are deemed important to your grade for the course. You are cordially invited to participate in the great intellectual conversation. In other words, you are expected to attend class prepared to intelligently discuss assigned reading and class topics. If you are unusually shy about speaking in class, please see me and some reasonable accommodation can be made.

## DEBATES

Students will be assembled into teams for the purpose of challenging and defending arguments explicitly or implicitly offered by the thinkers for the course. I will solicit volunteers, but each student is required to participate in at least one debate. You are encouraged to select a topic that you find enlightening, appealing, intriguing, frustrating or inflammatory. Each debate topic will be selected at the end of the section devoted to that thinker. (See debate format below.)

## CLASS RULES for writing and class discussion

- 1 Always answer the question you are asked.
- 2 Do not evade the spirit or letter of the question.
- 3 Do not assert or deny premises insincerely, unless you acknowledge that you are doing so. Avoid engaging in sophistry.
- 4 Avoid using "I believe," or "In my opinion."
- 5 Do not emote; offer reasons for your position.
- 6 All written assignments are due in class on the required date, and are to be delivered in hard copy, unless specific permission is granted to do otherwise.

### Debate format

The class will receive an affirmative statement, and teams will be solicited to defend and challenge the claim. A member of the affirmative team will offer a brief summary of the team's argument, a member of the opposing team will do likewise. A member of the opposing team will pose a challenging question, and a member of the defending team will respond. A member of the defending team will pose a challenging question, and a member of the opposing team will respond. These rounds will continue as time permits, and may include questions from the class. Finally, one member from each team will offer closing remarks.