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PHIL 486-01, Senior Seminar, Spring 2007

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SPRING 2007

OFFICIAL VERSION
PHIL 486: SENIOR SEMINAR

Pat Shade

Office: 402 Clough

Hours: WF 11:00-11:50, TR 10-10:50 & by appt.

Unofficial Office Hours: I'm usually in my office MW 10-11 & 2-3

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I. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS:

The course culminates in the production and presentation of your final capstone paper. The paper has the following general criteria:

- a. You are required to write an approximately 30 page paper that you present to the class and revise in light of class discussion and written feedback.
- b. The paper should be written in dialogue with the philosophic tradition, especially contemporary voices such as those we will study in the 1st part of the semester. The paper should represent a culminating experience of your work in philosophy (and it should be informed by what you've learned in other disciplines).
- c. Although you will not be expected to generate an absolutely novel perspective, your paper should articulate your own genuine informed and thoughtful position.

Our work throughout the semester requires us to be:

- honest, with ourselves and with the class, about what we truly believe. This encompasses matters of methodology and content.
- courageous and resourceful in inviting and responding to critical commentary on our views.
- self-directed, developing and articulating an agenda that helps you generate a substantial philosophical discussion on a significant topic.
- hardworking, keeping up with the readings and completing papers on time. Since this course represents the capstone experience for your major and so a consummating moment in your philosophical (and hopefully educational) life, senioritis is, though understandably tempting, something to actively set aside.
- creative in community. This means realizing each of the above without retreating to the uninformative conversation-stopper: "well, that's just my view."

II. COURSE OUTLINE:

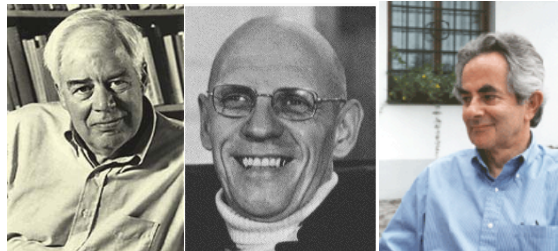
A. Contemporary Voices:

1. Rorty's *Philosophy & the Mirror of Nature*
2. Foucault essays
3. Nagel essays

B. Group Research

C. Wokshopping your papers

D. Presentations of Your Papers



III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

40% 2 Papers (@ 20%)

20% Participation (Discussion Participation, Prompt, Update, Final Paper Commentary)

40% Final Paper (Presentation & rewritten Paper)

A. Papers Two papers (approximately 6-8 pages) worth 20% each. The first paper will focus on our work with the common philosophers noted in part A of the Course Outline. It is tentatively due in my office by **Friday, February 16** at 5:00 PM. The second paper should grow out of the work you do in your additional reading during subsequent weeks; it will likely be closely related to your final paper (since I expect that the reading you do during part B of the Course will be personally focused). It is tentatively due in my office by **Friday, March 16** at 5 PM.

B. Participation: Since engagement with the contemporary discussions at the senior level is the goal, your active and ongoing class participation is expected. Your Participation grade will be the *average* of items 1 and 2. Items 3-5 will not be given a grade but each must be completed. They are necessary conditions of the participation grade, and so failure to complete them will result in a 0 for participation.

[1] Discussion Participation: Actively participate by (1) contributing your own views, questions, and reactions to the reading and class discussion and (2) carefully listening to, questioning, and responding to the views of others. It's vital that you come prepared to share your insights clearly (though there will be plenty of room for searching and exploring as well).

When determining your discussion participation grade, I will look at the *quality* and *pattern* of your participation over the course of the semester. The *quality* of your work is gauged in terms of its (i) **clarity**, (ii) **insight**, and (iii) **sophistication**. In assessing the *pattern* of your work, I will look at (i) **consistency**, (ii) **effort**, and (iii) **improvement** and **progress** (or regress) you have made in critically discussing materials. Minimal participation, low attendance, and disruptive or dominating class-room behavior will result in a low participation grade. If you are concerned about your performance, please don't hesitate to talk with me about it.

Attendance of all classes is expected. If you must miss a class, you are responsible for all material covered and assignments distributed or collected. Since I consider attendance a factor of participation, I don't distinguish between "excused" and "unexcused" absences. (If you're not present, you can't contribute.) If you miss more than 2 classes (which is the equivalent of a week), your prep/participation grade will drop 1/3 letter grade per additional day missed.

Minimal participation, low attendance, tardiness, inattention, and disruptive (e.g., leaving the class) or dominating class-room behavior will result in a low participation grade. If you are concerned about your participation performance, please don't hesitate to talk with me.

[2] Student Prompt and Assessment: Each of you will pair up to prepare and present a prompt for class discussion **once** during the semester (both members should contribute equally). The prompt itself (2a) should be the result of your work together as a pair. The follow-up assessment (2b) should be done individually by each partner.

(2a) The Prompt itself: Prompts are not mere summaries of the reading. Instead, they are focused *explorations* of a key idea, position or argument (hereafter, simply "argument"). (You may pursue a creative alternative so long as you discuss it with me at least two days prior to prompting.) The traditional prompt itself has three parts: an explication of a key idea, a discussion of its significance, and then consideration of a key challenge to it.

• **Explication of a key argument:**

(i) Identifying and developing a key *argument* is the usual route to pursue in prompts. You'll want to present the argument as clearly as you can, identifying key ideas as you go and drawing the relevant distinctions. In the process of clarifying a key idea, consider (a) explaining the chief meaning of the term as it's used in the reading, (b) explaining whether its meaning is controversial, (c) offering examples to illustrate it, and/or (d) showing its relation to (and/or difference from) other key ideas.

• **Responses** are intended to be thoughtful explorations of the position or argument (not mere reactions). Respond by:

(ii) discussing the *significance* of the argument. Likely ways of doing this include considering the relation of the argument to: (a) the philosopher's work as a whole, (b) the history of that idea, (c) some real life scenario that to which the position/argument is or should be relevant, and/or (d) your own philosophical project.

– and –

(iii) discussing an important *objection, question, or problem* concerning the argument.

Here you might argue that one of the premises is dubious, or you might object that a key idea is hopelessly vague or confused. Part iii may also arise out of part ii; for instance, in considering a pertinent real life scenario, you may find yourself unsatisfied with the position or argument. Or in considering an argument's place in the philosopher's work as a whole, you may find that it generates a tension or inconsistency with one of his earlier positions. Or, in considering the history of an idea, you may find its opponents far more convincing (or roundly defeated).

Finally, and very importantly, sketch at least two *possible responses* to the objection, question, or problem. If the response is presented in the text, then you haven't dug deeply enough to find an important objection, question, or problem.

(2b) Follow-up Assessment of your Prompt: (*Note:* Each student should write his or her own assessment of the prompt.) After prompting, write an assessment of your prompt in which you:

(i) Present the key points made in class discussion of your prompt, explaining the main comments and questions made in response to your prompt. Explain clearly how you did (or now would) respond to these.

(ii) Explore how your view has changed (or deepened) as a result of discussion and further study. For instance, have you changed your mind about the argument's significance? Do you think that your objection exposes a serious flaw in the philosopher's position, or are you now convinced that he can adequately respond to it. You might also indicate whether this is a topic you would want to pursue more fully, e.g., in a paper (your assessment does not commit you to writing a paper related to the prompt).

• **Suggestions:**

-Prompts should be a *well-written* piece. Draw relevant *distinctions* that help clarify your issue or idea. Also, provide *examples* (from the readings, your experience, or your imagination) where appropriate to develop or illuminate your points.

• **Submission deadlines and Grading:**

Prompts need to be carefully written, typed and no more than 2 pages (single spaced, no more than 1000 words) long. Email the class (27304@rhodes.edu) your prompt **no later than 7 p.m. the day before your prompt.**

Your **follow-up assessment** is due no later than the 1st class meeting after we finish studying the philosopher on whom you prompted.

Your prompt and assessment will be graded on (i) **clarity** and **accuracy**, (ii) **significance** and level of **insight/sophistication**, and (iii) representation of **effort** and **intellectual growth**. Both partners will receive the same evaluation for the prompt itself; I will give a unique evaluation for the follow-up assessment.

If it appears that you and your partner will *miss* your scheduled contribution, you may make it up so long as (1) there is an opening on the schedule, **and** (2) you discuss the matter with me at least *24 hours before* class (unless this is legitimately impossible).

[3] Student “Update:” After completing our reading of contemporary voices, you will work in groups on readings that interest you. We will meet once a week as a class during this time so that you can give updates of our work. The goal is to maximize exposure to new materials and also give you an opportunity to ask questions and get feedback from people not in your smaller group. Each group will present a written update that does one or more of the following: defines key ideas and issues, articulates the argument (premises/conclusion) of a central issue in your reading, raises substantial interpretive questions or objections concerning your reading. Which of these you focus on in your weekly updates depends in part on the nature of your reading material; it also depends on your individual projects. If members of a group have different projects, each may provide his or her own update.

[4] Workshopping: There will be a series of handouts that must be completed before you can present your paper to the class. Completion of these handouts is a necessary condition for being able to present; no handouts, no presentation (and so failure of the course).

[5] Final Paper Commentary:

(a) *General commentary:* Each of you will provide a general commentary (typed, please) for *each* paper. This commentary needs to identify and evaluate (positively and critically) *at least* one substantive point from the paper. It should be brought to class and given to the presenter during class on the day he presents. Please be sure to include your name on the commentary. Your commentary may take the form of a list of individual points, a ¶ discussion, or a mixture of both.

(b) *Sustained commentary:* Each of you will give a more detailed response to *two* final papers (you will sign up for this). This commentary needs to be more sustained¹ than the commentary in part (a), though it too should be typed and ready to submit during the appropriate class. Each person giving a sustained commentary will present his comments at the beginning of the class (immediately following the presenter’s summary). I recommend following a rubric akin to:

- Stating what you take to be the key idea or thesis of the paper.
- Identifying the method used and/or primary argument the presenter offers.
- Articulating and explaining your comments with enough detail so that (a) the presenter can make viable changes in light of your comments and (b) the class as a whole can discuss your comments. (It is likely that praise will be less detailed than questions and criticisms, but this shouldn’t mean that praise isn’t offered in some detail.)
 - Beginning with praise tends to be preferable to beginning with criticisms, since this sets a more positive, constructive tone for the discussion.
 - Articulating clear questions and/or objections/criticisms is more informative (for the presenter and for the class) than being vague or ambiguous to avoid being controversial. Be diplomatic, but also be clear and constructive.

¹ By “more sustained” I mean more in depth and more comprehensive, so that while a general commentary may address only one or two substantive points, a more sustained one will address most if not all of the most important points. My evaluations of your papers provide one model you might follow.

C. Final Paper: The main goal of the course is the production of a 30-page paper that presents the chief features of your comprehensive philosophical perspective. This is a daunting task, and 30 pages really isn't very long. As the semester progresses, we will discuss this paper more extensively. See "Criteria for Final Paper" (to be distributed in class later) for further details.

We will devote half of a class period to the discussion of each paper. The paper itself needs to be completed prior to this time (at least 2 calendar days prior to class) so that everyone can read it. The goal of your class presentation/discussion will be to celebrate strengths, address weaknesses, and understand more fully your philosophy. Afterwards, you will be required to *revise* the paper, especially in light of class discussion. More details will be provided later.

The paper will be assessed via the following general criteria:*

- (i) **clarity, accuracy, and organization** presenting (both in the paper and in class) your position. Use of clear definitions/explanations as well as examples (where appropriate) is important here;
- (ii) success in **developing** and **defending** your paper. To succeed, your paper needs to be **insightful** and **sophisticated** and to thoughtfully address **comments** and **objections** raised in class.

*NOTE: Exceptions will be made when warranted by the specific nature of your project, though these criteria are both generic enough and also of general philosophic import that it's difficult to imagine a good paper that fails to meet them.

We will also have an end-of-the-semester departmental banquet on **Wednesday, April 25** from 6-8 PM. At the banquet, each of you will present a synopsis of your philosophy (in 5 minutes or less) to department faculty and other majors. This will be a time of sharing and celebrating your achievement. Please keep your schedule clear.

IV. MISCELLANEOUS:

• **Grading Criteria:** See "Grading Criteria for Written Work" handout for specifics.

A	94 and up	B+	87-89	C+	77-79
A-	90-93	B	84-86	C	74-76
		B-	80-83	C-	70-73 etc.

• **Computer Component:** You are responsible for any notes, assignments, etc. that I send out via e-mail. In addition, you will be expected to check documents left on the Academic Server (Fac Folders → Shade → PHIL 486). I will announce new documents which need to be read; if you are absent, you are responsible for reading these.

• **Honor Code:** The Honor Code stipulates that the all work you submit is to your own. In this class, you may incorporate materials that are not your own in prompts, updates, or papers (no other uses of additional materials are allowed) so long as these are properly cited. If you have questions, please ask.

You are encouraged to discuss topics and assignments with your colleagues, but the work you hand in must be your own, i.e., it must be formulated and written in your own words and style reflecting your own thoughtful treatment.

******This syllabus is subject to revision (but don't worry; I'll discuss any changes with the class before I make them).******

CALENDAR

Tuesday	Thursday
	1/11 Reviewing Philosophy; Rorty's view of Philosophy – Introduction to <i>Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature</i> (pp. 3-13)
1/16 Rorty, Chapter 1 (pp. 17-69, summary on 68-69)	1/18 Rorty, Chapter 2 (pp. 70-127, summary on 125-127)
1/23 Rorty, Chapter 3 (pp. 131-164)	1/25 Rorty, Chapter 4 (pp. 165-212)
1/30 Rorty, Chapter 7 (pp. 315-356)	2/1 Rorty, Chapter 8 (pp. 357-394)
2/6 Foucault “Truth & Power” (selection), “The Subject and Power”	2/8 Foucault “The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom”
2/13 Nagel <i>The Last Word</i> , Chapter 1 “Introduction” (+ a likely supplement)	2/15 Nagel <i>The Last Word</i> , Chapter 2 “Why we can't understand thought from the outside” Paper 1 Due 5:00 p.m. on 2/16
2/20 Group Meeting	2/22 Update Meeting
2/27 Group Meeting	3/1 Update Meeting
3/6 Group Meeting	3/8 Update Meeting Paper 2 Due 5:00 p.m. on 3/16
3/13 SPRING BREAK	3/15 SPRING BREAK
3/20 Workshop	3/22 Workshop
3/27 Workshop	3/29 Workshop
4/3 Workshop	4/5 EASTER
4/10 Presentations	4/12 Presentations
4/17 Presentations	4/19 Presentations
4/24 Presentations Senior Banquet 6-8 p.m. 4/25	4/26 Presentations