

PHIL 1204: Knowledge and Reality
MWF 10:10-11:00, AA 114
Fall 2017

Claudio D'Amato (substituting for Joseph C. Pitt)
Office: MWF 11:15-12:15, Major Williams Hall 214
E-mail: claudio1@vt.edu

TEXTS Renè Descartes, **Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy**
David Hume, **A Treatise on Human Nature**
William James, **Pragmatism**
Friedrich Nietzsche, **Beyond Good and Evil**
Robert Silverberg, **Science Fiction Hall of Fame, Vol. 1**

GRADES 20% midterm (in class) – essay form
20% final (online) – essay form – comprehensive
40% two position papers (20% each) – each must be **at most** two pages
20% attendance and participation

This course is an introduction to philosophy through an introduction to the theory of knowledge and to metaphysics. In many ways it is an experiment -- so if you are leery of experiments, I suggest you find another course. This is a discussion class - you are expected to be ready to participate in discussion right then and there. Philosophy is by nature a dialogue - so while I will offer a few comments at the beginning of class – the rest of the time the burden is on you., I urge you to read the material and be ready to discuss it. If you are not prepared to discuss it, you will not understand what is happening. It is your responsibility to be prepared when you come to class. I also expect your attendance. If you are not prepared and if you do not come to class, you alone will also be responsible for your grade! **While I welcome your visits during office hours, do not expect me to review everything for you if you do not come to class.** If you don't want to work that way - I suggest you find another course. For very specific reasons I do not put notes, handouts or overheads on the web. Coming to class is the best way to ensure your own success. Don't think you can learn what you need by simply reading lectures notes on the web. There lies the road to folly and eventually to academic disgrace.

IMPORTANT ADDENDUM: A Canvas site now exists for this class. It will be used for turning in assignments and uploading readings that are not in the books. Lecture notes will not be posted.

Our job is to learn about philosophy and to learn how to do it - you will find that doing philosophy can be painful - you have to think a lot. Sometimes you may even get a headache - that's OK - it's good for you! You are also going to have to write two papers - that too can be a difficult exercise. But, the thing to remember is, paradoxically, **philosophy is fun!** There is a great deal of satisfaction to be gotten from learning how to identify an abstract problem and then knowing how to attack it and come up with an answer. Sometimes philosophy can even be addictive - you will find yourself asking your roommate and friends "what do you mean by that?" or demanding that they define their terms! In short, you will find that the joy you personally find in doing philosophy is driving your friends nuts - that's a sign of success! Here's to success! Now, let's do some philosophy and have some fun.

WARNING! Go to class!

DOUBLE WARNING!! Turn OFF your cell phones. If I hear your phone ring during class, or catch you texting you will be expelled from the class with a grade of F for the semester. I am serious about this.

TRIPLE WARNING!!!!!!!!!!!!!! You may *not* use any electronic devices, e.g., computers, phones, while in class. It is simply not allowed.

The Honor system is in effect. The Honor Pledge is: "I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on this assignment." Please pledge all your work. **NO LATE WORK ACCEPTED.**

STUDENTS NEEDING SPECIAL ASSISTANCE – If you need adaptations or accommodations because of a disability (learning disability, attention deficit disorder, psychological, physical, etc.), if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible by contacting me or the department's secretary, Ms. Belcher: hollymb2@vt.edu, tel: (540) 231-4564.

READINGS AND DUE DATES

Italicized and underlined readings are not in the books. You may find them on Canvas under “Files.”

8-28 to 9-8		Descartes’ Meditations I-II, “A rose for Ecclesiastes,” “Mimsy were the borogoves”	
September	M 11	Descartes: Meditation III	paper topics assigned
	W 13	Descartes: Meditation IV	
	F 15	Descartes: Meditation V	
	M 18	Descartes: Meditation VI	optional: paper drafts due
	W 20	Boucher: “The quest for Saint Aquin”	
	F 22	Keyes: “Flowers for Algernon”	
	M 25	<u>Plato: Republic (514a-520a)</u>	POSITION PAPER #1 DUE
	W 27	<u>Pollock: A brain in a vat</u>	
	F 29	<u>Dennett: Where am I?</u>	
<hr/>			
October	M 2	Hume: <i>Treatise</i> , pp. 1-25, 66-68 (ideas)	
	W 4	Hume: <i>Treatise</i> , pp. 69-94 (causation)	
	F 6	Hume: <i>Treatise</i> , pp. 94-123 (beliefs)	
	M 9	Hume: <i>Treatise</i> , pp. 155-172 (inference)	
	W 11	Hume: <i>Treatise</i> , pp. 251-274 (identity)	
	F 13	No class. Fall break.	
	M 16	<u>Russell: “On induction”</u>	
	W 18	Exam review	
	F 20	MIDTERM EXAM	
<hr/>			
November	M 23	James: Lecture I	
	W 25	James: Lecture II	
	F 27	James: Lecture III	
	M 30	James: Lecture IV	
	W 1	James: Lecture V	
	F 3	James: Lecture VI	paper topics assigned
<hr/>			
	M 6	<u>Turing: “Computing machinery and intelligence”</u>	
	W 8	<u>Searle: “Can computers think?”</u>	
	F 10	Del Rey: “Helen O’Loy”	optional: paper drafts due
	M 13	<u>Chiang: “Story of your life”</u>	
	W 15	<u>watch movie by today: “Arrival”</u>	
	F 17	continue “Arrival” discussion	POSITION PAPER #2 DUE
	M 20 – F 24	No class: Thanksgiving break	
<hr/>			
December	M 27	Nietzsche: “Of the prejudices of philosophers”	
	W 29	Nietzsche: “The free spirit”	
	F 1	Nietzsche: “We scholars”	
	M 4	Zelazny: “A rose for Ecclesiastes” re-read	
	W 6	Asimov: “Nightfall”	
	F 8	<u>Rorty: “Who are we?”</u>	
	M 11	<u>Le Guin: “The ones who walk away from Omelas”</u>	
	W 13	The Truth	
F 15	FINAL EXAM DUE ON CANVAS BY 5:00 PM		