2014

390-01 Topics in Political Philosophy: Modern Social Philosophy

Timothy Brownlee

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PHIL390 - 01 – TOPICS IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: MODERN SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

Instructor: Dr. Timothy Brownlee
E-Mail: brownleet@xavier.edu
Office Location: Hinkle Hall 228
Office Phone: 513 745 3697
Office Hours: Wednesday 1:30-3:00PM & Friday 2:30-4PM or by appointment
Class Meeting Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 2:30-3:45PM, Hailstones 5
Section Number: 01

Note: Please include the course number in the subject line of any email correspondence.

COURSE AIMS

With rise of the modern era came an unprecedented confidence in the capacity for the positive transformation of humanity and historical progress. The modern revolution in natural science, in particular, inspired a belief that the mastery of nature and the transformation of human society would make possible an improved condition for humanity. However, in the late modern era in particular, critics sharply challenged the belief that we find genuine progress in modernity. Certain critics rather stressed that the fundamental constitution of society constrained humanity in ways that would make the kind of progress promised by the proponents of modernity impossible.

Our primary aim in this course is to investigate the cogency of the criticisms of human society raised in the writings of Rousseau, Marx, Freud, and Horkheimer and Adorno. We will focus on their conceptions of society itself (what is “society” in the first place? what is unique about the ways in which human beings relate to one another?), and on their views of its relations to the natural world and to human nature. We will devote specific attention to their conceptions of the role of science in society, and of the legitimacy of fundamental (especially liberal) social and political institutions, in particular that of private property. Lastly, we will focus on the possible resolutions to these fundamental problems which human society poses that the authors identify, and what these resolutions indicate about the authors’ conceptions of the human good.

COURSE STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course aims to achieve the following student learning outcomes:
i. Students will be familiar with the unique contributions that social theory, political economy, psychoanalysis, and aesthetic theory make to the development of critical theory.
ii. Students will draw on their experiences in PHIL100 and PHIL290 in reflecting on the character of modern society with a view to understanding the ideas of justice and historical progress.
iii. Students will be capable of identifying, stating, defending, and criticizing arguments drawn from the writings of others.
iv. Students will be confident speakers, capable of conveying an idea or argument orally, and of identifying points of discussion that help to clarify, understand, or problematize such ideas and arguments.
v. Students will be effective written communicators, demonstrating an advanced ability in interpretation and argument, and competence in conducting secondary research into a question of scholarly significance and/or contemporary concern.

REQUIRED WORKS


GRADE BREAKDOWN

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
<td>1st short paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd short paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take-home exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class presentation</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
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SHORT PAPERS

Students will be required to write two short papers, each 4-6 pages in length. The aim of these papers is to provide an indication of the extent to which you understand the works which we study in the course. For this reason, they will be primarily exegetical (or interpretive). You will be asked to restate, in your own words, the position of the author under question on a specific issue, and the argument that that author puts forth to defend that view. The instructor will be happy to discuss the criteria on the basis of which these papers will be assessed during office hours.

Papers should be typed and printed, and submitted at the start of class on the due date provided on the assignment sheet. Papers submitted after class begins will be deemed late. Late papers are subject to a deduction of 0.33 grade points per day for up to three days. Papers not yet submitted after three days will not be accepted, and the student will be awarded a grade of “F” for that assignment.

Students are required to maintain a digital backup of all submitted work until the end of the semester. The instructor reserves the right to request a digital copy of any work submitted by the student.

TAKE-HOME EXAM

For their take-home exam, students will be required to write a 10-12 page paper comparing and contrasting the views of two or more authors whom we’ve studied on a theme of the student’s choosing. Students are encouraged (but not required) to include a review of some secondary literature on their topic. They might also consider some significant contemporary issue in light of the views of the authors about whom they write.

***Students must complete both paper assignments and the take-home exam in order to receive a grade for the course. Failure to complete any one of these will result in the student receiving an “F” for the course.

CLASS PRESENTATION

Each student will be required to provide a brief presentation on a topic drawn from the readings. They will identify an idea or argument of interest, explain that argument or idea to the class, and work to identify its significance for the work in which it appears, or its relevance to some broader course theme. The presenter should raise one or two questions concerning issues of significance raised in their text. Your aim should be both to provide an accurate portrayal of the idea or argument, and to spur discussion.

PARTICIPATION

This portion of your grade will be assigned based on the extent of your participation in class. It will be based on the frequency with which you provide valuable contributions to class discussion, which includes asking relevant or cogent questions, as well as your general attentiveness and engagement with the course material. Since much of the class will proceed by discussion of specific passages in the course texts it is imperative that you bring the week’s readings to class with you.
**TOPICS COVERED**

Students are required to consult the course website through the My Courses tab of the Xavier online portal for detailed breakdowns of the week’s readings. These breakdowns will be updated weekly and will include suggested study questions.

Materials listed in the online schedule that do not appear on the required texts list will be available by electronic reserve through the Xavier portal.

Week 2: Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, 39-60
Week 3: Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, 60-81
Week 6: Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, I, II (*Paper #1 due Thursday, February 20*)
Week 7: Marx, *Capital*, 216-252
Week 8: Spring Break – class does not meet
Week 9: Marx, *Capital*, 252-300
Week 11: Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 77-111
Week 12: Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 113-149 (*Paper #2 due Thursday, April 3*)
Week 14: Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 22-34, 94-115 (*Class does not meet Thursday, April 17*)
Week 15: Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 115-136
Week 16: Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 137-172
Week 17: *Take-home exam due Tuesday, May 6, 1PM*

**COURSE POLICIES**

**ATTENDANCE**

Attendance in class is mandatory. Students are expected to arrive promptly at the start of class, prepared actively to engage with the course material.

Students are permitted up to four (4) absences per semester. *Every two times a student is late to class, they will have one absence counted against this total.* After the fourth absence, each successive class missed will result in a final grade reduction of 0.3 grade points. For example, a student who has earned the grade of B but missed 5 classes would receive a B-, one who has missed 6 classes would receive a C+, and so on.

Any classes missed due to otherwise-sanctioned university activity, minor illness, or any other reason will count against this total of four absences. Students who anticipate missing a number of classes for any of these reasons should take special care to attend otherwise. Exceptions will be issued only in order to observe a religious holiday.

In the event of extreme illness, it is imperative that students make arrangements to meet with the professor to discuss their ability to complete the minimum requirements of the course. While I am willing to make arrangements to enable students to complete the course successfully, in the event that the student has missed a significant portion of the class, it may be impossible for them to complete the course. Concerned students should contact the professor as soon as possible.

*A special note for student athletes:* While students will be excused from class to attend sanctioned athletic events, student athletes must be especially careful not to miss additional, unnecessary classes. While student athletes will be subject to no penalties not applied to other students in the class for absences, frequent attendance is absolutely essential for student athletes to keep up with the remainder of the class.
Equally importantly, student athletes should, in no way, go out of their way to inform the instructor of their performance issues in other classes, or indicate what grade they “need” from this course in order to continue playing the sport in which they choose to participate. The instructor is aware of the university policies regulating student athlete academic performance, and regards any efforts to influence his assessment of student performance in the course as highly inappropriate.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE
Students are expected to arrive for class on time and prepared to contribute actively to the class discussion. Timely arrival and preparedness include addressing bodily needs (such as snacking and restroom use) prior to the start of class.

Use of electronic devices of any kind in class is prohibited, except in cases of documented need.

Obviously unacceptable in-class behaviors include: internet viewing, text-messaging, napping, and conversation of issues not related to the class discussion.

ACADEMIC HONESTY
The Xavier University Catalog states (http://www.xavier.edu/registrar/ugrd_policies.html#Academic_honesty): “The pursuit of truth demands high standards of personal honesty. Academic and professional life requires a trust based on integrity of the written and spoken word. Accordingly, violations of certain standards of behavior will not be tolerated at Xavier University. These include theft, cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized assistance in assignments and tests, unauthorized copying of computer software, the falsification of results and materials submitted in reports or admission and registration documents, and the falsification of any academic records including letters of recommendation.

“All work submitted for academic evaluation must be the student’s own. Certainly, the activities of other scholars will influence all students. However, the direct and unattributed use of another’s efforts is prohibited as is the use of any work untruthfully submitted as one’s own.

“Penalties for violations of this policy may include one or more of the following: a zero for that assignment or test, an ‘F’ in the course, and expulsion from the University. The dean of the college in which the student is enrolled is to be informed in writing of all such incidents, though the teacher has the full authority to assign the grade for the assignment, test, or course.”

Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. The instructor requires that students submit their written work both in hard copy to the instructor on the due date and to TURNITIN.

All students must complete the plagiarism tutorial on the library web site in advance of the due date for their first paper. Links to this tutorial can be found on the course web site in the first week of class.

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT OF WRITTEN WORK
The Philosophy Department has adopted the following standards for the evaluation of all forms of written work:

A = Work that not merely fully and accurately reproduces class discussion, the main thread in the argument or the major philosophical significance under discussion, but which goes beyond these and indicates a contribution of the student, giving evidence of a deeper understanding of the material in question.

B = Work that shows a more or less complete and exact understanding of the issues, texts and/or arguments as explained in class, clearly and logically formulated, but without advancing beyond these explanations.

C = Work that shows a basic understanding of the material but with errors, omissions and confusions of either a formal or contextual nature.

D = Work that shows a minimal acquaintance with the material, or serious logical or conceptual flaws in formulating responses to the question raised, the argument at issue, or the philosophical text under discussion.

F = Work that indicates inadequate acquaintance with texts, issues, or ideas with little or no valid argumentation; or the work is handed in beyond the point of acceptance or else plagiarized. Cases of plagiarism, which involves the use of published work or other written material without proper citation, must be given a ‘0’.