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396 Seminar: Philosophy of Psychology

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Daniel Dwyer

Syllabus Fall 2020

PHIL 396 SEM: Philosophy of Psychology

[This course is being taught 100% synchronous online per the FWA I signed with David Mengel on 7/15/20. All class notes are posted to Canvas and include transcriptions of class discussions immediately after each class. Discussion boards and small groups in Breakout Rooms are being used as I catch up with the technology and as based on student feedback. As is becoming clear throughout the course, the PSYC and PHIL students want to have Small Group Discussions with their peers with the same majors, so we are using those as Zoom Breakout Rooms sometimes.]

[This syllabus is cut and pasted entirely from Canvas Modules.]

Course Introduction

Welcome, Students, to our online Philosophy course! We're all on a steep learning curve with the new online format. So please be patient and always feel free to suggest new ideas about how we can use the online format more effectively. Suggestions for what works best for online discussion are always welcome, especially because this course is a seminar. But the content will be as challenging as any upper-level PHIL elective.

Note: This course is both 1) a PHIL Seminar that fulfills the PHIL major and minor Seminar requirement and 2) an upper-level PHIL elective that fulfills the PHIL 300 elective for the PSYCH major.

REQUIRED COURSE TEXTS

1. George Mandler, A History of Modern Experimental Psychology (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007/2011 paper) 978-0262134750
2. Aristotle, De Anima, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2017) 978-1624666193
3. William James, Psychology: The Briefer Course (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2001) 978-0486416045
4. James J. Gibson, The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception (NY: Classic Edition/Psychology Press/Taylor and Francis, 2015), 978-1848725782

Zoom Office Hours: T/W 4-5:30pm and any other time convenient for you. All Office Hours will take place in “Daniel Dwyer’s Personal Meeting Room. Email: dwyerd@xavier.edu

Readings

Week 1 (August 17-21) Reading: Handouts on Contemporary Psychiatry: Reductionism and Religion? & Open Discussion of Course Themes Part 1 of 3.

Week 2 (August 24-28) Reading & Open Discussion of Course Themes Part 2 of 3.

Week 3 (August 31-September 4) Reading & Open Discussion of Course Themes Part 3 of 3.

Week 4 (September 7-11) Reading: Aristotle's De Anima I.1.

Week 5 (September 14-18) Reading: Aristotle's De Anima, II. 1-6 and 11-12.

Week 6 (September 21-25) Reading: Aristotle's De Anima III. 3-5 and 10-11.

Week 7 (September 28-October 2) James, Psychology: Epilogue (pp. 328-35) and Ch. 11 (pp. 179-82 only)

Week 8 (October 5-9) Reading: James, Psychology, Chs 5 (Conception) and 13 (Reasoning)

Week 9 (October 12-16) Reading: James, Psychology, Chs. 1 (Habit) & Ch. 2 (The Stream of Consciousness)

Week 10 (October 19-23) Let's Take a Breather. Discussion All Week of Course Themes So Far

Week 11 (October 26-30) Reading: Gibson, The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception, Preface and Introduction, follow Reading Guide

Week 12 (November 2-6) Reading: Gibson, Preface and Intro (cont.) & Chs. 1-3 (see Reading Guide for Gibson)

Week 13 (November 9-13): Reading: Gibson, Chs. 4-7 (follow Reading Guide)

Week 14 (November 16-20): Reading: Gibson, Ch. 8 & Conclusion (follow Reading Guide)

Week 15 (11.24 Tues = Last Class of Semester)

Assignments & Grading

Reading Summaries Best 3 of 4 (Complete/Incomplete) (30%)

Participation 1 of 2: Weeks 3-8 (15%)

Participation 2 of 2: Weeks 9-15 (20%)

Final Essay (35%)

[1-page proposal for Final Essay due Sunday Nov 8 11:59pm](#)

[Final Essay due Tuesday, December 1, by 12:30pm \(Final Prompt: A 7-12 page Essay\)](#)

Grade Breakdown:

1) **first half of semester in-class participation and discussion assignments** 15 percent of final grade.

The grade will assigned midway through the semester; you can always ask if you're meeting class expectations by asking me for a rough estimate at any point during this first half of the semester.

2) **second half of semester in-class participation and discussion assignments:** 20 percent of final grade(grade assigned at end of semester)

3) **Reading Summaries:** 30 percent of final grade. There are 4 short essays (with Word Count: 350-425). Only the best 3 of these 4 will count; and they will be graded only as Complete/Incomplete (the nice new way of saying Pass/Fail!). For example, if you get 3 Completes, you'll get the full credit for this part of the final grade.

4) **Final essay:** 35 percent of final grade. You can be working on this essay during the entire semester with minimal stress if you 1) reach out to me for any help you need, and 2) pay attention throughout the first half of the semester, that is, before the prompt is posted, for major course themes.

Reading Summary (RS) Instructions

Preface: Why Reading Summaries?

I joined the Xavier Philosophy faculty in 2004. I had lunch a few months ago with one of my first students, who was a business major, graduated in 2008, and only came to appreciate the value of the Xavier Core Curriculum philosophy requirement until after he took the courses. This student, named Tim, told me at this lunch that the kind of clear, crisp, and concise writing he learned in our class has been praised by his business associates, even to this day (he works for an insurance company, and now works on his own in the same field). His professional colleagues don't usually see the kind of quality writing that Tim still produces. Tim's writing has been honed by writing RS just like these. So consider the skills of clear, crisp, and concise writing as applicable and necessary to all of your career paths, not just to this class.

By the way, it was Tim (and not me) who told me to relate this anecdote to all of my future students.

Overview of Reading Summaries

Reading summaries should be **clear, crisp, and concise writing exercises** that concentrate on understanding the text based solely on the author's argumentation in the text, and not on your own subjective feelings or opinions. (So phrases like "I feel like, according to me, I think that" should not be in a RS.) In a course like this, we have to (a) get clear about the author's arguments before we (b) set out tentatively to critically evaluate them in class discussion.

This kind of writing is called **explicative**, that is, it explains the arguments without injecting our own opinions. Don't worry, the time to engage freely in argumentative critique of the author's views (positive, negative, neutral, and perhaps best of all, with questions) will take place in class discussion and the final essay. You can think of these assignments as "**executive summaries**" that you would write for, say, your boss and colleagues in the first few years in your profession. Your boss or colleagues won't have a long time to read the whole text in question, but they want the gist of it.

Jump right into your reading summary. No introduction to the author or any overview of the entire book is needed. Use one paragraph for one main idea. Do not write these summaries in just one long rambling paragraph: you will lose your reader's concentration and understanding.

Word Count for each Reading Summary: 350-425 words; failing to meet the minimum of 350 words will result in an automatic Incomplete. You may, however, go up to 500 words without explicit permission if you feel constrained by the 425 maximum upper limit, but if you do so, make sure the writing is still concise and clear.

Each RS assignment will be **posted** at least one week before it is due. The RS will usually be **due** the night before the first class of the week at 11:59pm. Any late submissions without the professor's explicit approval beforehand will not be accepted. In a *reasonable* situation in which you need **an extension**, please ask me at least 3 days before the due date; but of course *unpredictable* situations beyond your control may pop up at any time, in which case you can contact me at any time. **No re-writes** are allowed, because your best effort should be manifest in the first submission.

Final Essay Instructions

Write on one specific course theme AND how that theme is articulated in no more than 2 texts (**1 text if you're writing closer to the 7-page minimum**) read in the class (by Aristotle, James, and/or Gibson-- you may also use texts by Descartes, but **for any text(s) you use you must specify in your 1-page proposal (see below) the exact sections/chapters you will draw from**).

Because there is a certain degree of freedom here in following your own interests, **you must email me a brief 1-page outline of your proposed essay topic (as a Word attachment) no later than Sunday, November 8 at 11:59pm** to get both (1) the instructor's approval of your topic and (2) any feedback he will give you to help focus your thoughts. You should save this Word doc in the following format: Your first and last initials in caps, "Final Essay Proposal," and the date you sent it. So for example, if your name is John Smith and you are sending me your proposal on **November 5th**, you should save the Word doc with the title "JS Final Essay Proposal 11.5.20" before attaching it to an email to dwyerd@xavier.edu.

It will be an essay **of 7-12 pages** that you should be working on **as soon as possible**. Although this PHIL Seminar essay is only 7-12 pages, it is quality that counts. That means you must draft, write, re-write, and proofread very carefully before submitting online. **(You will be graded in the exact same way and based on the identical criteria for clarity and depth for a final essay, whether you choose to write**

closer to 7 or closer to 12 pages, but these are the required minimum and maximum number of pages.)

I will have extra office hours to help you with this essay, but I cannot review drafts online. You are free to discuss with me things like short outlines, issues of content and organization, etc. But before you contact me for help, make sure you've done a minimum of your own work on the essay so that our time together can be most productive. We cannot afford to waste time unnecessarily because there are a lot of students from all my courses who will be seeking help at the end of the semester, and we need to be fair to all of you.