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2020

### 200-16 Philosophical Perspectives: Modern Christian Philosophy

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*Xavier University*

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**Daniel Dwyer**

**Syllabus Fall 2020**

**PHIL 200-16 Philosophical Perspectives: Modern Christian Philosophy**

[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.]

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

Welcome, Students, to our online Philosophy course!

Whereas the **content** of this course will be the same as any of the introductory philosophy courses that I've taught at Xavier since 2004, 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.

Your suggestions on what works best for **online discussion** are especially welcome.

**Note:** This course does not presuppose any knowledge of Christianity and it is not a theology course in disguise. It is what philosophers call "Philosophy of Religion." But if at any point you need resources for minimal background in Christianity, simply ask me.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

1. Augustine, Confessions, trans. F.J. Sheed, ed. Michael P. Foley, Second Edition (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006) 978-0872208162

2. Rene Descartes, Philosophical Essays and Correspondence, ed. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000) 978-0872205024

3. Robert Sokolowski, Christian Faith and Human Understanding: Studies on the Eucharist, Trinity, and the Human Person (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006) 978-0813214443

**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](mailto:dwyerd@xavier.edu)

## **Readings:**

Week 1 (August 17-21)Reading: Overview of Course / DC Schindler excerpt

Week 2 (August 24-28) Reading: Overview of Course / DC Schindler cont.

Week 3 (August 31-September 4)Reading: Pope Benedict's "Regensburg Address"

Week 4 (September 7-11) Reading: Augustine's Confessions, Introduction

Week 5 Reading: Augustine, Confessions, Books 1-3

Week 6 (September 21-25) Reading: Augustine's Confessions, Books 4-5

Week 7 (September 28-October 2) Reading: Augustine's Confessions, Books 6-8

Week 8 (October 5-9) Reading- Descartes, Discourse (click here to see the page numbers and guide).docx

Week 9 (October 12-16) Reading: Descartes, Discourse, Part 5, pp. 64-67 & 71-73 only

Week 10 (October 19-23) Reading: Descartes, Discourse, Parts 1-2

Week 11 (October 26-30):Reading: Descartes, Discourse, Part 4, esp. 60-mid 62 & top 228

Week 12 (November 2-6): Sokolowski, Christian Faith & Human Understanding, Ch. 2, "Philosophy and the Christian Act of Faith"

Week 13 (November 9-13) Reading: Sokolowski, Christian Faith & Human Understanding, Ch. 2 (cont.)

Week 14 (November 16-20) Reading: Sokolowski, Christian Faith & Human Understanding, Ch. 10 "Soul and the Transcendence of the Human Person"

Week 15 (11.24 Tues = Last Class of Semester): Reading: Sokolowski, Christian Faith & Human Understanding, bot p. 46 - p. 50 only

Final Essay due Tuesday, December 1 by 10:30am Sokolowski (4-6 pages) [Now with Guide posted 11.12 Tues]

## **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: Sokolowski on the Transcendence of the Human Person (35%)

### **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.

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## 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.