

# Honors Philosophy Seminar

## CONTACT INFORMATION

cfranks@nd.edu; Malloy 411; M&W 12–2pm and by appointment

## THIS COURSE

Stanley Cavell has described philosophy as “being awake when everyone else is asleep.” This is my favorite description of philosophy. Philosophy is not a body of knowledge, and it is not a method for acquiring it. So one cannot go look it up in a registry of facts. Philosophy is not the study of any particular subject matter, nor is it constrained to any special group of topics. So one can’t be told in advance where to turn to acquire it. Rather, all texts and phenomena can be approached philosophically. Philosophy begins when, in thinking about some matter or another, something about it that previously seemed ordinary or not particularly important suddenly seems extraordinary, crucial, or unfathomable. These moments of “wonder” can resolve because a close investigation lays everything bare, and the landscape appears ordinary again, though richer and better understood. At other times, nothing resolves, mysteries compound, and one loses sight of how things ever could have appeared to be ordinary. In both cases, we start where we are least inclined to start, where we are most tempted to be asleep, where everyone around us is.

In this seminar we will try to cultivate an ability to recognize philosophical moments in their nascence, we will work on nurturing them into coherent resolutions or profound mysteries, and we will practice articulating the results in discussion and composition.

## TEXTS

Our seminar will focus on these texts, drawn from ancient and modern sources. Other texts might be read in addition to these, in which case they will be circulated in advance.

1. “Euthyphro” by Plato
2. “Apology” by Plato

3. “Crito” by Plato
4. “Phædo” by Plato
5. *Quantum Mechanics and Experience* by David Albert
6. *Patterns of Culture* by Ruth Benedict
7. *The Tree of Knowledge* by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela
8. *The Evolution of the Social Contract*, by Brian Skyrms.
9. *Pale Fire* by Vladimir Nabokov

It does not matter what edition of these texts you use. Much of it is accessible in the public domain. The Hammes Bookstore has copies of some titles under this course number.

#### REQUIREMENTS

There are three requirements for this course.

The first requirement is to be engaged in the class through regular attendance and contributions to our discussion. There are ways to fulfill this requirement consistent with all personality types: make a short presentation, present a text or idea from one of your other classes for our seminar to consider, interrupt me and ask for clarification, answer others’ questions or pose your own. Be creative. Contribute in ways that are helpful to your classmates and in ways that are enjoyable for you.

The second requirement is to compose two essays of philosophical significance. This is an on-going project that you should not expect to fulfill simply by “writing a paper” one day about something that you understand very well. It takes time to uncover a subtle observation that is truly your own, it takes patience to present that observation clearly in written form, and you will have to do both of these things twice. I will advise you continuously as you work on this. I do not expect the process to be the same for every student, and I have no general advice for producing philosophical writing. Rather, I expect to get to know something about your own inclinations and to assist you individually, according to the type of observation that you are prone to make and according to the style of expression that is appropriate for your tasks.

Philosophical thought and philosophical writing each come in a wide array of forms. In order for me to steer you appropriately, I will need snippets of your thought and writing regularly, beginning soon. To that end, as a third requirement, I require you to hand in a piece of writing every two weeks or so (we will establish a class schedule for this), directed by prompts that I shall provide. These will be circulated to the entire seminar who will read what you have written and share their accolades, misgivings, and advice. The purpose of this is not for you to compose drafts of your essays, but to practice formulating philosophical questions, explaining conceptual distinctions, and suggesting textual interpretations. It is natural for this continuous writing to inspire your essays, even to evolve into parts of them, but it is essential to think of your continuous, short writing exercises (and your comments on others') as valuable in their own right.

#### NOTE

Please be aware of the University's policies regarding academic honesty, anti-discrimination, and access to education for students with disabilities.

Here is the web-page of the office for students with disabilities:

<http://www.nd.edu/~osd/NEWHOME PAGE.htm>

Here is the Philosophy Department's web-page devoted to academic honesty, with links to information about plagiarism and the University's honor code:

<http://philosophy.nd.edu/undergraduate-program/honesty/>

In addition I am someone you can approach if you have concerns about discrimination or proper scholarly behavior, whether or not the concern is related to this course.

#### IMPORTANT DATES

September 5	no class	Rosh Hashanah
September 19	no class	Succos
September 26	no class	Shemini Atzeres
October 22	no class	break
October 24	no class	break
October 31	due date	first essay draft
November 26	due date	second essay draft
November 28	no class	Thanksgiving
December ??	we meet	essays due