Philosophy and Persons
PHIL 130
Syllabus
Fall Semester 2018
Tuesdays & Thursdays | 3:40-5:55pm
Dr. Moreno Rocchi
Email: mrocchi1@luc.edu
Office Hours: Tue./Thu., 1:30-2:30pm (by appointment)

Course Description

Short Description: The course examines the way philosophy looks for fundamental characteristics that identify life as a properly human life, asks about its ultimate meaning or purpose, and raises questions about the meaning of history.

Full Description: This introductory core course is designed not only to acquaint the student with some of the classical themes and topics in Western philosophy, but also to show how closely Western philosophy has been entwined with all other cultural expressions throughout history. Thus this course has a historical trajectory, which is divided into two blocks. The concept of Enlightenment and the birth of the idea of a secular and ever-increasing Progress during the French Enlightenment mark the divide between the two.

The first block has two sections. The first one is dedicated to the pre-modern age. Our primary goal here is to obtain a basic grasp of three paradigms on human nature that succeeded one another in the Western intellectual tradition: the primacy of contemplative life in ancient Greece, theocentrism during the Middle Ages, anthropocentrism and its primacy of active life during the Renaissance. We will then address the elements that gave birth to the modern age, focusing on Descartes’ rebuttal of all previous pseudo-sciences in favor of a new mathematical method and his ‘invention’ of the Self.

In the second block of the course we will first analyze the idea that a culture unchained from prejudice and authority can and will transform society for the better. We will pay special attention to Condorcet’s paradigmatic philosophy of history before comparing it to Rousseau’s critique of the positive role of culture for the development of humankind, as well as his ground-breaking analysis of the origin of inequality.

This will allow us to appreciate the different but equally fundamental theories of Kant and Marx on human nature, the meaning of history, and the possibility of positive progress for humankind.

In the final classes we will contrast his theory with Freud’s pessimistic view, according to which, on the one hand, egoism is ineradicable, and, on the other hand, discontent is an unavoidable consequence of civilization as such.

The aim of the course is to lead students toward an autonomous judgment of fundamental issues related to the human condition, with special reference to the nature of ideas, truth, human existence (and happiness), justice, equality, cultural and social influences. This will provide students with the basic critical skills for recognizing different philosophical approaches and for judging their feasibility and correctness. By analyzing the philosophies that most consistently influenced the development of Western culture, students will be aided in their understanding of existential and social dilemmas, as well as their construction of philosophically informed decisions.
Learning Outcomes

By the end of this class, students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the various approaches of the philosophical questions related to what it means to be human, with attention to the historical and conceptual development of these questions, and be able to articulate some of the major problems and responses central to this area of philosophy.

By the end of this class, students should also be able to demonstrate:
(a) understanding of the relationships among cultural, economic, political, and social forces, and their impact on human behavior;
(b) understanding of the processes and components of societies, states and cultures;
(c) awareness that human values and behavior, ideas of justice, and methods of interpretation are influenced by culture and time;
(d) ability to differentiate among historical and contemporary perspectives about the world with a view to fashioning a humane and just world.

Students will learn to:
(a) recognize the way in which the basic principles governing how one ought to live are conditioned by one's involvement in (and responsibilities toward) the socially organized community in which one lives.
(b) understand different positions on this issue, look for and appreciate the reasons given in support of the different views, and to assess the forcefulness of the challenge that each poses for the others and for our own culture.

This course enables the student to:
(a) appreciate the profound issues involved in social relations, such as dignity and diversity;
(b) engage in dialogue with great philosophers, paying close attention to their meaning, their reasons, their concerns, their vision;
(c) examine the way different philosophically defended views challenge each other and see how they also challenge unexamined presuppositions in our own culture;
(d) insert their own reflections into the dialogue;
(e) recognize the premises for a given conclusion or viewpoint, identify unexamined presuppositions, appreciate astute insights, expose vulnerabilities in established positions;
(f) distinguish alternative paradigms on human nature.

Required Readings:
- Plato, Aristotle, Salutati, Alberti, Manetti, Pico, Ficino, Galilei, Leopardi, Voltaire, Condorcet, Kant: to be posted on Sakai.
- Augustine, To Simplicianus, The City of God, Confessions (also available online)
- Descartes, Discourse on the Method (also available online)
- Freud, Civilization and its Discontents (also available online)
Attendance Policy
Students should plan to regularly attend the class, since we will often broaden the topics contained in the texts to contemporary issues, and since this class is mainly intended to the rousing of students’ personal thoughts and ideas. No more than three unexcused absences will be permitted. Unexcused absences beyond these will result in a lowering of your final grade.

Evaluation
- Participation 20 %
- Midterm Exam 40 %
- Final Exam 40 %

Grading
94-100: A
90-93: A-
87-89: B+
84-86: B
80-83: B-
77-79: C+
74-76: C
70-73: C-
67-69: D+
60-66: D
59 or lower: F

Academic Honesty
Plagiarism on the part of a student in academic work or dishonest examination behavior will result minimally in the instructor assigning the grade of "F" for the assignment or examination. In addition, all instances of academic dishonesty must be reported to the chairperson of the department involved. The chairperson may constitute a hearing board to consider the imposition of sanctions in addition to those imposed by the instructor, including a recommendation of expulsion, depending upon the seriousness of the misconduct.

Disabilities
Students with documented disabilities who wish to discuss academic accommodations should contact me the first week of class, as well as the Senior Academic Services Advisor.

Proposed Schedule
Tue. 09/04: Introduction to the course

Thu. 09/06: The birth of philosophy and the primacy of contemplative life I (Plato, Republic and Theaetetus, excerpts)

Tue 09/11: The birth of philosophy and the primacy of contemplative life II (Aristotle, Metaphysics, Nicomachean Ethics and Physics, excerpts)

Tue. 09/18: Theocentrism and the linear conception of time II (Augustine, *The City of God* and *Confessions*, excerpts); The dignity of Man I (selections from Italian Renaissance writers: Salutati, Manetti, Alberti)

Thu. 09/20: The dignity of Man II (selections from Italian Renaissance writers: Pico, Ficino); Introduction to the Modern Age (selections from Galilei and Leopardi)

Tue. 09/25: Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, parts 1-2


Tue. 10/02: An optimistic view on progress (Condorcet, *Sketch of a Historical Tableau of the Progress of the Human Kind*, excerpts)

Thu. 10/04: Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*; *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Mankind*, Preface

Tue. 10/09: Review Class

Thu. 10/11: Midterm exam

Tue. 10/23: Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Mankind*, I part

Thu. 10/25: Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Mankind*, II part

**Fri. 10/26:** Kant, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, I part

Tue. 10/30: Kant, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, II part; *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* (excerpt), I part

Thu. 11/01: Kant, *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* (excerpt), II part; Introduction to Marx

Tue. 11/06: Marx, Alienation (manuscript on “Alienated Labor”)

Thu. 11/08: Movie day

Tue. 11/13: Marx, Critique of ideology (*On the Jewish Question*, excerpt (pp. 15-21); *German Ideology*, excerpts (pp. 111-113; pp. 129-132))

Thu. 11/15: Marx, Philosophy of history (*German Ideology*, excerpts (pp. 103-104, 115-126, 132-142; 144-153); *Communist Manifesto*, part I)

Tue. 11/20: Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, §§ 1-2

Thu. 11/29: Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, §§ 6-8

Tue. 12/04: Class debates

Thu. 12/06: Class debates

Thu. 12/13: Final exam