HUMA 11500/10: Philosophical Perspectives I

Time and Place: Tuesday/Thursday, 3:30-4:50, Classics 405

Instructor: Ryan Simonelli

Email: simonelli@uchicago.edu

Office Hours: Wednesdays 3:00-5:00 or by appointment in Rosenwald 216. Link for sign up sheet here (if you're looking at this digitally) and on the Canvas site under "Pages".

Writing Specialist: Mike Ossman

Email: mwo@uchicago.edu

1 Course Overview

What is the value of knowledge or understanding? From Socrates's famous pronouncement that "the unexamined life is not worth living" to Aristotle's claim that the contemplative life is the happiest, the idea that knowledge or understanding is a distinctive human good—indeed, perhaps the highest of all goods—is a founding thought of Ancient philosophy which animates the whole of the Western philosophical tradition. In this course (the first in a sequence of three courses jointly aimed at introducing students to this tradition), we will explore this thought as it is developed in the work of the three greats of Ancient Greek Philosophy: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. We will also look at a tragic counterpoint to it in Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*. Classical readings will be supplemented by several more recent writings relevant to or reflecting on the Ancient philosophical tradition.

2 Course Requirements and Expectations

Papers: There will be four 4-5 page (1,000 - 1,500 word) papers, but only the top three count for your grade, each one being worth 20% of the total grade. If you do the first three, and you're happy with your grades for those, you don't need to do the forth. Alternately, you're free to not do any one of the four papers, if you're happy accepting the grade you get for all of the other ones. However, if you can, I recommend doing all four not just to better your grade, but also to practice your philosophical writing skills. We will discuss the expectations for these papers in class a week before the first paper is due, and you will have chances to discuss and workshop them throughout the quarter in the writing seminars.

- **Extensions and Late Work Policy:** I understand that things (both academic and non-academic) can come up that make it difficult to complete work by the designated due dates and that a few days of extra time can sometimes make the difference between a bad paper and a good one. So, if there's a legitimate reason you cannot turn in your paper on time, I'm generally willing to grant an extension. The amount of extra time granted will be decided on a case by case basis, based on needs. If you do need an extension, please let me know as soon as you know you'll need it. Late work submitted without an extension having been granted will be penalized by 5 points for each day that it is late.

Group Presentation: There will be one group presentation on contemporary interpretations of *Oedipus Rex*, worth 10% of the total grade. Each group of 3-4 students will read one article by a contemporary philosopher and prepare a 10 minute presentation on it, followed by a 5 minute Q&A session with the class. Sign ups will be posted a week prior to the presentation.

Participation: Participation is worth 30% of the total grade. This comes in three forms, each worth 10% of your total grade. First, for *one of the two* classes each week you are expected to submit a discussion post—either a question initiating a discussion or a follow-up to a posted question—prior to 8am that class day. These can be very simple questions or thoughts, and you don't need to spend a lot of time constructing them. The point of these discussions is just to get you thinking critically about the texts before class and to give us a jumping-off point in class discussion. Discussion questions and responses are to be submitted in the "Discussions" section of the Canvas page. The second 10% is participation in class discussions. A significant portion of each class will be dedicated to class discussion. Your grade for engagement in these discussions is based not just on how often you speak but also, and to no less of an extent, how well you listen to your fellow classmates when they speak. I find it to be helpful for my own moderation to deploy the following convention:

- **Hand:** Raising a new question or making a new comment.
- **Finger:** Directly responding to or building on what someone else has just said.

Finally, 10% of your participation grade is participation in writing seminars, explained below.

Writing Seminars: Writing is the main medium of philosophy, and a principle aim of this course is to bring you to the point where you are able to do philosophy yourself in this medium, critically reconstructing and evaluating philosophical arguments in writing. The assignments are geared towards this end and, to aid you in achieving it, there is a dedicated writing specialist, Mike Osserman, who will help you learn the ropes of academic and specifically philosophical writing. Mike will hold three writing seminars throughout the quarter in which you'll receive instruction on how to write philosophy essays and have the chance to workshop your essays with Mike and your classmates.

Readings: The three books that you need to purchase for the course are the following:

- Plato. *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo,* Second Edition (Hacket Classics). Translated by G.M.A. Grube and Revised by John M. Cooper. Hacket: 2002.
- Sophocles. *Theben Plays* (Hacket Classics). Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Peter Meineck and Paul Woodruf. Hacket: 2003.
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford World Classics). Translated by David Ross with an Introduction and Notes by Lesley Brown. Oxford University Press: 2009.

It is important that you get these specific editions of these texts. They are all available at the Seminary Co-op bookstore, and it's recommended that you get them there if you can. All other readings will all be posted on the Canvas site under the "Files" section.

3   Policy on AI Use

The aim of this course is to get you thinking and writing about philosophical topics yourself through your own engagement with classic philosophical texts. Given this aim, and given the limitations of current systems, this course has a strict *limited use* policy on AI tools like ChatGPT and Claude 2. Of the following four possible kinds of use cases, only the last is permitted, with specific instructions:

- **To Write One's Essays or Discussion Questions:** *Prohibited* (obviously). With regard to your essays, I expect more from you in your writing assignments than anything that large language models are currently capable of producing.[1] With regard to discussion questions, once again, these can be simple expressions of things that you wondered about or were unclear about in doing the readings, and so you shouldn't feel any need to use a large language model for them. Nevertheless, just as it is a violation of academic integrity to plagiarize another person, it a violation of academic integrity to attempt to pass off something produced by a language model as one's own work. Any instance of academic dishonesty will result in a zero for the assignment and, in the case of discussion questions, a zero for that whole portion of the grade.
- **As a Secondary Source:** *Prohibited.* This course is designed in such a way that no secondary sources are necessary in order to do the assignments, and appeal to such sources is discouraged insofar as it might prevent you from properly engaging with the philosophical texts yourself. This point applies to secondary sources generally, but it especially applies to the use of large language models like ChatGPT. Unfortunately, current models are

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[1]I have tried, with hours of prompt engineering, and I can't get the best models (GPT4 or Claude2) to write a coherent 4-page philosophical essay that would score above a B-.

not capable of the careful reconstructive work that is required in philosophical interpretation, nor are they even capable of reliably producing factual information about philosophers and philosophical topics. So, while use of secondary sources in general is discouraged, the use of AI as a secondary source is prohibited (for your own good!).

- **For Brainstorming Essay Ideas:** *Prohibited*. Once again, the aim of this course is to get you thinking about philosophical issues and developing arguments on your own, without guidance from external sources. Using an AI to guide you in your essay writing, even if it is not literally writing the essay for you, defeats this aim. Moreover, given that current AI systems are prone to saying misleading or straightforwardly incorrect things and producing faulty lines of reasoning, all in a very convincing tone, if you use a such a system to guide you in your philosophical thinking and writing it's very likely to lead you down a long path of pseudo-reasoning that only results in confusion and despair. So, once again for your own good, this use of AI is prohibited.

- **As a Spelling/Grammar/Clarity Check:** *Permitted, with specific instructions*. Most word processing programs have spelling and grammar check, but current AI tools are reasonably good at identifying additional grammar mistakes and places where clarity can be improved. The only case in which AI tools can be used in this class is to suggest minor corrections of typos, spelling errors, grammar issues, clarity issues, and readability issues. Claude 2 is the best free tool to use for this: https://claude.ai/. The one prompt that you are permitted to use is the following:

  Here is (a paragraph of) my philosophy essay:

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  insert essay/paragraph here

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  Please provide corrections that address typos, spelling errors, grammar errors, clarity issues, and readability issues in this essay. Do not rewrite the essay. Just provide a list of corrections that should be made.

  Do not blindly make the corrections it suggests, but check all of them and see if they make sense before making the changes (sometimes they don't). Though this one use is permitted, it is still more helpful, in order to improve the clarity of your writing, to read the essay out loud to a friend.

If there are any other kinds of possible uses of AI tools in connection with the coursework for this class that you are wondering about, you are required to ask me and get my approval before you actually use it. Note also that this technology is developing quickly, and so these policies may be subject to change as new technology comes about.

4 Diversity and Accessibility

Diversity: As an instructor, I am actively committed to creating an inclusive classroom environment where diverse backgrounds and viewpoints are recognized, respected, and valued. If there is anything you believe I should be doing differently, I welcome any feedback both during and outside of class. I pledge to take any comments regarding my teaching or content seriously and without defensiveness.

Accessibility: The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring equitable access to our academic programs and services. Students with disabilities who have been approved for the use of academic accommodations by Student Disability Services (SDS) and need a reasonable accommodation(s) to participate fully in this course should follow the procedures established by SDS for using accommodations. Timely notifications are required in order to ensure that your accommodations can be implemented. Please meet with me to discuss your access needs in this class after you have completed the SDS procedures for requesting accommodations.

Phone: (773) 702-6000
Email: disabilities@uchicago.edu

Class Schedule

Class 1, Tuesday 9/26: Introduction

No Assigned Reading

Class 2, Thursday 9/28: The Euthyphro

Reading: Plato, "Euthyphro"

Class 3, Tuesday 10/3: The Apology

Main Reading: Plato, "Apology"
Optional Background Reading: Aristophanes, "Clouds" excerpt

Class 4, Thursday: 10/5: The Crito

Reading: Plato, "Crito"

Class 5, Tuesday 10/10: Obedience and Disobedience

Readings:

King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"
Frankel, "Is It Ever Right to Break the Law?"

First Essay Due Before the Start of Class 6

Class 6, Thursday 10/12: Phaedo

Reading: Plato, "Phaedo," Beginning to 87c (p. 126)

Class 7, Tuesday, 10/17: Phaedo, Continued

Reading: Plato, "Phaedo," 87d (p.126) to end

Class 8, Thursday, 10/19: Republic

Reading: Plato, *Republic*, end of Book Five (473d) through book Six

Class 9, Tuesday, 10/24: Republic, Continued

Reading: Plato, *Republic*, Book Seven and a bit of Book Eight

Class 10: Thursday, 10/26: Neo-Platonism and Vedanta

Readings: Selections from Plotinus's *Enneads* and Śaṅkara's *Upadeśasāhasrī*

Sign Up Link for Group Presentations Posted

Class 11, Tuesday, 10/31: Oedipus

Reading: Sophocles, Oedipus Rex, lines 1-862
Optional Background Reading: Lev, *A Short Introduction to Greek Theatre*, excerpt

Second Essay Due Before the Start of Class 11

Class 12, Thursday, 11/2: Oedipus, Continued

Reading: Sophocles, Oedipus Rex, lines 863-1530
Additional Reading: Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* excerpt.

Class 13, Tuesday, 11/7: Oedipus, Modern Interpretations

Readings (only required to read the one you signed up for, others optional):

Carroll, "Oedipus Tyrannus and the Cognitive Value of Literature"
Reeve, "The Killing Feet: Evidence and Evidence-Sensitivity in Oedipus Tyrannus"
Leer, "Knowingness and Abandonment"
Dodds, "On Misunderstanding the Oedipus Rex."
Hagberg, "In the Ruins of Self-Knowledge."

Class 14, Thursday, 11/9: Ethics: The Human Good

    Reading: Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book One

Class 15, Tuesday, 11/14: Ethics: Moral Virtue

    Reading: Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book Two

Third Essay Due Before the Start of Class 16

Class 16, Thursday, 11/16: Ethics: Intellectual Virtue

    Reading: Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book Six

Thanksgiving Break

Class 17, Tuesday, 11/28: Ethics: Happiness

    Reading: Aristotle, *Ethics*, Book Ten

Class 18, Thursday, 11/30: Wrapping up

    Reading: Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics"

Final Essay Due Friday, December 8 at 11:59pm