

Fall 2023

# Montgomery College

## Germantown Campus

### PHIL 101.21258/21766 – Introduction to Philosophy

#### Meetings:

21147: MWF, 10:00 AM, HS218

21586: MWF, 11:00 AM, HS218

**Instructor:** Dr. Michael Harding

**Office:** HS181

**Office Hours:** M/W 12:00-1:15, on campus. Tuesday/Thursday 8:00-10:00 AM, online (during these times I will be in front of my computer, and if you email me, you will likely receive a quick reply; we can also arrange appointments via Zoom, etc. Please note that email is *almost always* the best way to reach me (please email me directly, and not through the course shell. Emails through the course shell do not arrive in my mailbox, so there's no guarantee I'll see it in a timely fashion). There is a phone in my office, but the voicemail doesn't usually work, so there's no point in leaving a message. If you talk to me about something after class, I will almost certainly tell you to email me.

**Email:** [michael.harding@montgomerycollege.edu](mailto:michael.harding@montgomerycollege.edu). Please note: the college considers the Montgomery College email account to be the official means of communication between students and faculty. It is recommended that you check this account routinely for official communication or as directed by your instructor(s). Some items you may find there are: course announcements, invoices, important admission/registration information, waitlist status. To check your e-mail, log into your MyMC online account and locate the e-mail icon in the upper right hand corner of the page.

**Course Description:** "Introduction to philosophical analysis of the problem of knowledge, the problem of reality, and the problem of the good. Major philosophical attitudes of Western civilization are introduced. Special attention is paid to some of the philosophical implications of contemporary natural and social science. The basic themes of the course are that the major questions philosophy deals with are present in the lives of all persons; that we must clarify the questions, if possible, before we try to answer them; and that the basic questions are always concerned with the nature and meaning of human existence. (HUMD) PREREQUISITE: Second-year standing or consent of department. Assessment levels: EN 101/101A, MA 097/099, RD 120. Three hours each week."

**Required Texts:** Plato's *Republic* (translated by Allan Bloom)  
Hobbes's *Leviathan* (edited by Curley)

In addition to the required text, handouts may be provided for various topics. I will make these available electronically, and I encourage you to print them out for yourselves in order to bring them to class.

#### Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, the student will be able to:

- Describe humankind's perennial issues and questions in a thematic way: what is real, true and good.
- Begin comprehending basic questions of metaphysics: such as, questions of "God", personal identity, and being in the world.

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- Identify historical and current interpretations of truth and knowledge.
- Analyze ethical concepts such as: what is good, what is right in a multicultural society.
- Distinguish between aesthetic and non-aesthetic experiences.
- Critically evaluate different schools of philosophical thinking.

### Grading Policy

#### Methods of Evaluation:

There will be three exams, the first two will be a mixture of multiple choice and essay; the final exam will be a written take-home exam, to be submitted electronically. You will also have a substantial annotated bibliography assignment due at the end of the term, and ongoing discussion board assignments.

<b>Exam I:</b>	500 points
<b>Exam II:</b>	500 points
<b>Final Exam:</b>	500 points
<b>Annotated Bibliography Assignment:</b>	500 points
<b>Reading Questions</b>	200x10 = 2000 points <sup>1</sup>

#### Grading Scale (from 4000 possible points)

- 3600-4000 points is an A.
- 3200-3599 points is a B.
- 2800-3199 points is a C.
- 2400-2799 points is a D.
- 0-2399 points is an F.

**Expectations:** For each week, you will have reading assignments and you will have reading questions due on Monday at the start of class (ideally, I would like you to type these up and print them out, but I will accept handwritten questions. *Do not email them to me*). Late questions *will not be accepted*; once class has begun, they are late. Do not ask for an exception. Do not hand them to me after class has started. Please note that these will make up about half of your final grade, as well as determining much of the direction of our classroom discussion, so you need to take this seriously.

**Reading Question Requirements:** I want you to submit structured reading questions that indicate you have a) read the material closely enough to *have* questions and b) considered possible ways of answering the questions. Questions that can be answered by opening a dictionary or looking up a mythological reference (which will take you less than two minutes) are not what you should be submitting. This means that your questions must refer to some *specific* element or feature of the text. For example, a question of the form “Socrates says X on pg. Y. I think this might mean Z, but for reasons A and B I am not really sure. Can we talk about this?” is absolutely *excellent*. It is open-ended, and can serve as an opening to classroom discussion. “Who is Zeus?” won’t cut it, and can be answered by Wikipedia. You don’t need me for that. These will be graded on quality, not merely submission.

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<sup>1</sup> There are 13 weeks of reading assignments on the syllabus but you only need to do 10. This means that up to 600 extra-credit points are possible. Obviously, you cannot turn them in after the fact. You cannot realize, in December, that you should need extra points and retroactively turn in more work. Do not ask.

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These will be worth 200 points each, so you need to turn in at least ten. We have 13 weeks of readings, so it is possible to earn extra credit by doing more than 10. The other way to think about it is that if you have a busy week, you can skip one with no ill effect to your grade.

**ChatGPT, etc.**

Don't. Just *don't*. All you're doing is outsourcing your thinking to someone/something else which most likely does not actually have *your own good* in mind. That's not a recipe for long-term success. That's not a recipe for having a free mind capable of seeing through the nonsense that is constantly thrown your way. Additionally, ChatGPT and other generative AI systems do not produce much that is worthwhile, at least not in the context of a philosophy course, because there is no actual *understanding* behind them: they simply guess, based on the body of writing they have already encountered, what the next likely appropriate word is. I have, unfortunately, read a good amount of material produced by these systems, and they tend to be both superficial and dishonest (i.e., they make things up). Practically speaking, even if I do not penalize students for using them, they tend to do poorly simply on the merits of what they submit. I'm aware I cannot insulate you from the temptation to use it. I'm aware I can't stop you from using it. But I can tell you why you should not use it. It's like building a robot to lift weights and jog for you: even if you succeed, it doesn't actually do *you* any good.

**Audit Policy:**

If you are taking the class as an audit, you are expected to do the readings and participate in discussion. You do not have to do any of the written work, however.

**Classroom Behavior (not all of this applies to the online environment, of course):**

The College seeks to provide an environment where discussion and expression of all views relevant to the subject matter of the class are recognized and necessary to the educational process. However, students do not have the right to interfere with the faculty member's right to teach or the other students' rights to learn. Faculty and staff set the standards of behavior that are within the guidelines and spirit of the Student Code of Conduct or other College policies for classrooms, events, offices, and areas, by announcing or posting these standards early in the semester.

If a student behaves disruptively or inappropriately in the classroom, an event, an office, or an area after the instructor or staff member has explained the unacceptability of such conduct and the consequences that will result, the student may be asked to leave that classroom, event, office, or area for the remainder of the day. If the student does not leave willingly, the faculty member may request the assistance of Security. This does not restrict the student's right to attend other scheduled classes or appointments.

Disruptive/inappropriate behaviors include (but are not limited to) the following:

- continuing to socialize once class has begun;
- refusing to complete assigned tasks in the class or labs;
- sleeping in class;
- arguing<sup>2</sup> with the professor (disagreement issues including grading of work should be discussed privately with the professor during his or her office hours);
- participating in any activity that disrupts the class, including the use of cell phones and music players.

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<sup>2</sup> This is a philosophy course, so argument (in the precise sense) is encouraged – provided the argument concerns ideas, and is based in reasoning. I encourage you to question the text, myself, and your fellow students during our classroom time. In other words, arguing about philosophy is perfectly fine. After all, that's what Socrates did.

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If a student is asked to leave the class because of disruptive behavior, the faculty member and the student are expected to meet to resolve the issue before the next class session (See the *Student Code of Conduct*, 07/01/03, for further information).

**Academic Dishonesty/Misconduct:**

Academic dishonesty in college is a very serious offense. Each student is expected to do his/her own work on all tests, papers, and other assignments. Students who engage in any act that the classroom instructor judges to be academic dishonesty or misconduct are subject to sanctions. (See the *Student Code of Conduct*, 07/01/03, for further information.)

Academic Dishonesty or Misconduct can occur in many ways. Some common forms include

- cheating on assignments or examinations;
- plagiarizing from written, video, or Internet resources;
- submitting materials that are not the student's own;
- taking examinations in the place of another student, including assessment tests.

For purposes of this course, any one of the above will result in an automatic failure for the course.

**Classroom Physical Condition:**

Students and faculty are expected to leave the classroom in a neat and orderly condition, including the disposal of all litter and the orderly placement of desks and chairs. Since the classroom is now your home, this seems irrelevant.

**Academic Labs:**

The Computer Writing Center, the Writing & Reading Center, the Language Lab and reading and English tutors are available for MC students.

In addition to course requirements and objectives that are in this syllabus, Montgomery College has information on its web site (see link below) to assist you in having a successful experience both inside and outside of the classroom. It is important that you read and understand this information. The link below provides information and other resources to areas that pertain to the following: student behavior (student code of conduct), student e-mail, the tobacco free policy, withdraw and refund dates, disability support services, veteran services, how to access information on delayed openings and closings, how to register for the Montgomery College alert System, and finally, how closings and delays can impact your classes. If you have any questions please bring them to your professor. As rules and regulations change they will be updated and you will be able to access them through the link. If any student would like a written copy of these policies and procedures, the professor would be happy to provide them. By registering for this class and staying in this class, you are indicating that you acknowledge and accept these policies.

<http://cms.montgomerycollege.edu/mcsyllabus/>

**General Information:**

Be on time, and attend as many classes as possible. Late arrivals are an irritating distraction to both your fellow students and myself; early departures are just as rude. If you must leave early, please tell me beforehand. Bring the assigned texts with you. Be familiar with them beforehand. The instructor *may* drop students accumulating excessive absences; according to the College catalog, an excessive absence is "one more absence than the number of classes per week during a spring or fall semester." Common courtesy is expected. This class is only fifty minutes long: as

an adult, you should not need to leave the room during this period. If you must, be discreet and do not make a habit out of it. Finally, if you are having difficulty in class, contact me as soon as possible. If you don't, there's nothing I can do to help you. If you find the texts and concepts difficult, come talk to me outside of class. If you have questions that are not discussed in class, come talk to me outside of class. If you can't make my office hours, we can make other arrangements or you can email me with questions.

I urge you to get to know one another. This is difficult material, and discussing it with your fellow students will be very beneficial to you. There is a reason that Plato presents Socratic *dialogues* rather than *monologues*.

Lastly, **philosophy is hard**. Students are frequently surprised by this fact, since in contemporary usage "philosophy" simply means one's general point of view. But this is not what philosophy means in an academic context. Likewise, the readings assigned in this class are not "textbook" readings. Often they are translations of works written hundreds, if not thousands of years ago. As such, they are not immediately clear in their meaning. You cannot simply "skim" the text in order to understand it. Instead, you must enter into a conversation with the text: asking the author *why* he or she makes this argument, *what* does it mean or imply, and how does it relate to other parts of the book or to other philosophers. Your goal here is not to learn *about* the philosophers we read, but to learn *from* them. Reading philosophy is very hard work.

As one of my philosophy professors in college said to me: "Philosophic reading is reading, and re-reading, and re-reading, and re-reading." Expect to read the chapters very slowly and carefully. You will need to pore over them multiple times before they start making sense (and they will make sense eventually). While you read, look up words you don't know in the dictionary. I also strongly encourage students to write in their books (whenever possible). Underline passages that seem important. Mark cross-references and write comments, notes, and questions in the margins. To truly engage these philosophers, one must enter into a conversation with them, and not read them passively. Real reading is done seated at a desk with a pen or pencil in hand.

Niccolò Machiavelli's description of his reading habits might serve as a useful illustration:

On the coming of evening, I return to my house and enter my study; and at the door I take off the day's clothing, covered with mud and dust, and put on garments regal and courtly; and reclathed appropriately, I enter the ancient courts of ancient men [*his library*], where, received by them with affection, I feed on that food which only is mine and which I was born for, where I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they in their kindness answer me; and for four hours of time I do not feel boredom, I forget every trouble, I do not dread poverty, I am not frightened by death; entirely I give myself over to them.

And because Dante says it does not produce knowledge when we hear but do not remember, I have noted everything in their conversation which has profited me...<sup>3</sup>

He describes himself as entering his library where he is in the presence of ancient men. Reading is described as a conversation, where he questions those ancients and they, through their books, answer him. Finally, he takes careful notes in order to ensure that he remember what they said and profits from it.

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<sup>3</sup> Machiavelli, Letter to Vittori, 12/10/1513

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Like Machiavelli, you need to read actively and attentively. The liberal arts of reading, thinking, and writing have perhaps always been under assault in one way or another (cf. the popularity of cliff's notes or quickie summaries of various sorts), but on-line resources (frequently unreliable!) have encouraged a cottage-industry of brevity and short-cuts. Such temptations need to be resisted, because ultimately they do not help you do the most important thing, which is thinking for yourself. John Locke writes:

the understanding, like the eye, judging of objects only by its own sight, cannot but be pleased with what it discovers... Thus he who has raised himself above the alms-basket, and, not content to live lazily on scraps of begged opinions, sets his own thoughts on work, to find and follow truth, will (whatever he lights on) not miss the hunter's satisfaction; every moment of his pursuit will reward his pains with some delight; and he will have reason to think his time not ill spent, even when he cannot much boast of any great acquisition.<sup>4</sup>

In one important sense, philosophy is all about learning *how* to learn, and that begins with fully developing our powers of reading comprehension, analytical and logical reasoning. This in turn creates opportunities for self-reliance, and, as an old friend of mine likes to say, “self-reliance is a superpower.”

Your mind is like a muscle, and you cannot build muscle without tension. With sufficient time, effort, blood, sweat, and tears, you can draw out the deep meaning that is to be found in the difficult texts we will wrestle with this term, and with that comes enormous satisfaction, as you will find out.

It is best not to think of this class as a series of discreet and unconnected texts (they are not—they have been selected because of their relation to one another), but as your opportunity to participate in a great conversation that has been going on for thousands of years, and which has shaped the world around you. As John Maynard Keynes famously wrote:

The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas.<sup>5</sup>

Keynes' point stands today. We live in a world shaped by the thinkers we will read in this class (as well as others); to understand these thinkers is to understand that world, and those who have been shaped by it—including ourselves.

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<sup>4</sup> John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Epistle to the Reader

<sup>5</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, 383

### **Rough Schedule of Readings**

(if we fall behind because we're having good discussions, I won't mind)

- Week of August 28: syllabus; how the class will work, introduction to the reading of Plato
- Week of September 4: Labor Day (so bring your questions for Wednesday's class). Read Plato's *Republic* book I.
- Week of September 11: read *Republic* book II.
- Week of September 18: read *Republic* book III-IV.
- Week of September 25: read *Republic* book V-VI.
- Week of October 2: read *Republic* book VI (continued)-VII.
- Week of October 9: read *Republic* book VIII-IX.
- Week of October 16: read *Republic* book X. **First Exam will be posted this week (October 16); It will be due by 11:59 PM on Sunday, October 23.**
- Week of October 23: read Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I and II (posted as PDF files).
- Week of October 30: read excerpts from St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* (posted as PDF files).
- Week of November 6: read Hobbes, *Leviathan*, introduction, chapters I-X.
- Week of November 13: read Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapters XI-XVI. **Second Exam will be posted this week (November 13), and will be due by 11:59 PM on Sunday, November 20.**
- Week of November 20: read Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapters XVI-XXV.
- Week of November 27: read Rousseau, *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (posted as PDF file).
- Week of December 4: Catch-up. no specific reading assignment. **Annotated Bibliography Due** Wednesday, December 6. **Final Exam Questions given out.**
- **Final Exam**: due date will be announced in class.

Note: the instructor reserves the right to change this syllabus as deemed necessary.