

HON 171: THE HUMAN EVENT

SPRING 2009

Meeting: TTh, 1:30 – 2:45 / 3:00 – 4:15.

Dr. John M. Lynch

Office Hours: MW 10:00 - 11:30 (LSC 268), TTh 11:30 - 1:00 (Irish A 219), or by appointment.

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"[Socrates] taught them to discover the difficulties in the seemingly self-evident; he confused them, forced them to think, to search, to inquire over and over again, and not to sidestep the answer ... The significance of Socrates' approach is that one must know one's ignorance and embark on the journey of thought" Karl Jaspers

This course provides us with an opportunity to discuss some of the classic questions that humankind has wrestled with over the millennia, such as - what is our place in the Universe? Is the Universe an impersonal one? What is our relationship to the sacred and profane? How does the individual relate to the community? Is there such a thing as free-will, or are we mere puppets in a divinely scripted play? Why do bad things happen to good people? In examining these questions by reading a selection of works from philosophers and other writers, we will aim not to solve these eternal problems, but to examine what the poet Alfred Lord Tennyson described as "the thoughts that shake mankind."

Chronologically, we will cover the period from ancient times to the middle of the 17th Century, a period which would see the beginning of the "Scientific Revolution".

Learning Outcomes:

- Broadening of your cultural background and historical awareness, particularly with relation to philosophical and religious modes of thought
- Cultivation of multi-disciplinary perspectives
- Development of frameworks for self-directed learning and working within a pluralist society
- Improvement of skills in close reading, critical discussion and evaluation & construction of oral and written arguments.

Schedule of Readings:

The complete schedule of readings (along with study guides and other material) is at <http://www.public.asu.edu/~jmlynch/171>.

Required Texts:

The following works are required for purchase and are available at the ASU Bookstore or online. Please only purchase these editions. All additional readings will be made available online; please *print them out* and bring them to class. Failure to bring a text will automatically result in a zero for participation for that class period.

- Hesiod, Works & Days / Theogony (Hackett, 1993, 0-87220-179-1)
- Homer, The Essential Illiad (Hackett, 2000, 0-87220-542-8)
- Robert Alter, Genesis (Norton, 1996, 0-39331-670-X)
- Raymond Scheindlin, The Book of Job (Norton, 1998, 0-39331-900-8)
- CDC Reeve, The Trials of Socrates (Hackett, 2002, 0-87220-589-4)
- Sophocles, Oedipis Tyrannus (Hackett, 2000, 0-87220-492-8)
- Lucretius, On the Nature of Things (Hackett, 2001, 0-87220-587-8)
- Edward Slingerland, The Essential Analects (Hackett, 2006, 0-87220-772-2)
- Dante, The Divine Comedy: Inferno (Penguin Classics, 1984, 0-14-044441-6)
- De Las Casas, Destruction of the Indies (Hackett, 2003, 0-87220-625-0)

Supplementary Resources:

- There is a class website at <http://www.public.asu.edu/~jmlynch/171> - you will need to check this **regularly** for updates, announcements, links to readings, review questions, and other pertinent information. Information contained on the website supersedes information contained herein.
- The Barrett Writing Center will be available during the semester to assist students with their papers for all their classes. Directed by BHC faculty and staffed by writing tutors who themselves have completed both HON 171 and 27x, the Center offers individual tutoring on writing papers for the Human Event and your other courses. Its goal is to help you improve your lifelong writing and critical thinking skills, so please take advantage of its services. Go to the BWC web site at <http://honors.asu.edu/> and click on "Resources for Current Students." Under Barrett Writing Center, you then can access tutoring schedules, appointment information, and academic background on the staff.

Reading Texts:

The Human Event is a reading-intensive course and I am willing to guarantee that you will do more reading of primary sources than in any other course you possibly take in your early college career. You are expected to come to each class having read the assignment carefully. Many of the works we shall study are philosophical in nature, and thus require close and concentrated reading. Casual skimming will (a) not be helpful to you in discussing these works, (b) will inhibit you from developing strong paper topics, and (c) cause you to fail any in-class quizzes or written assignments; thus your final grade will suffer. As a minimum following completing a reading, you should be able to answer the following questions:

1. What is the key question being addressed in the work you have read?
2. What are the main inferences/conclusions of the author?
3. What are the main assumptions made by the writer?
4. What are the implications if we take the author seriously? What if not?

To aid you in your active reading, I ask that you maintain a notebook (of questions, thoughts, ideas, outlines and, as a minimum, answers to the above four questions) while doing the reading. I can ask to see this notebook at any stage during the semester and will adjust your participation score depending on the quality of your work.

Assignments:

- Participation – 45% (includes in-class participation, discussion leading, reading journal, pop quizzes)
- Papers – 55% (three papers worth 15, 30 and 10% respectively)

Participation: (45%)

The Human Event is, by design, a seminar course; you are expected both to have carefully read the assigned reading and to engage in discussion during class-time. As participation is worth 45% of your final grade, it is obvious that failure to participate will result in a grade no better than a 'D' no matter how good your written work may be. Remember, *coming to class and having read the assigned reading do not count as participation*; you must contribute to the discussions. In addition, arrival to class late, sleeping during class, failure to bring your text to class (or not actively using it!), or conversing with neighbors will all immediately and without warning result in a zero for participation during a given class, no matter how much you may talk in that class.

A: The student receiving this grade participates *extensively in the majority* of class discussions. She arrives in class each day thoroughly prepared with written comments and questions on the assigned reading. At least occasionally she initiates the discussion, without waiting for the instructor to do so. If towards the end of a discussion the instructor asks for further comments, she almost always has some. She does not, however, try to dominate the class. Instead she listens carefully to the remarks made by fellow class members, and responds as readily to these as she does to the instructor's questions. Her comments are almost always backed up by direct reference to the text under discussion.

B: The student in this grade range participates in most discussions, although not as fully or reliably as the student described above. She gives evidence of having done the reading. At least part of the time she helps the discussion along by raising her own questions. She pays attention to the comments of her peers.

C: This student participates only intermittently during class periods (perhaps only every second or third class). She is more willing to discuss broad, general questions than to engage in concrete analysis of an assigned text. She is sometimes unprepared, and lacks engagement with the ideas of other members of the class. Comments rarely are backed up by direct reference to the text under discussion.

D: This student seldom contributes to class discussions. While her contributions may be useful, they are infrequent.

E (0%): Student never (or only occasionally) speaks.

I do understand that some individuals are, by nature, quiet and perhaps feel uncomfortable talking in group situations. I **do not** cold-call students, so the onus is on you to participate or risk being awarded a 'D' or 'E' grade.

Please also note, that you should aim for a balance between active *contribution* and active *listening* – the class room should not be dominated by single voices.

Papers: (55%)

Papers should be 1500 to 1750 words in length (i.e. approximately six to seven pages in length, double spaced) and no longer. Your paper must present a clearly organized and persuasive **argument** relating to the material we have read. You must develop an opinion about the work and use evidence from the text to substantiate your claims. As this course aims to have you think critically about primary sources, i.e. our assigned readings, no secondary material may be utilized in your papers, as you are being judged on the quality of your ideas, the form in which you present those ideas, and your use of textual evidence. Guidelines for thesis development will be discussed early in the semester.

Easy ways to lose grade points on a paper:

- Submission of a paper that is above the length requirement loses one letter grade.
- Submission of a paper that is below the length requirement will result in failure of the assignment (0%).
- Excessive grammatical and spelling errors (including misspelling author names, places or the title of works) will be punished to varying degrees depending on severity.
- Late papers will not be accepted and will receive a zero grade (0%) for the assignment.
- Failure to provide a completed draft for peer review will result in a zero grade for the assignment.

Beyond these requirements, I am a fair grader who expects you to pay close attention to the content and form of your written work. In general, I tend to return papers with more negative than positive comments – this does not mean that your paper was excessively “bad,” merely that given time and space constraints I am identifying the issues which I feel you can address and thus improve your future writing.

Some clarifications:

A: An A paper is outstanding in **every** way: in the originality of its thought, in the persuasiveness of its argument, and in the clarity and power of its writing. There are no grammatical and spelling errors. The thesis goes beyond what has been discussed in class and everything in the essay relates to that thesis. Each paragraph has a clear topic sentence.

B: A B paper is approximately what is to be expected of a student in an honors course. The prose is generally clear and readable, but there may be some grammatical problems and some sentences may be awkward. The essay shows serious thought beyond class discussions, and for the most part is well organized.

C: An essay in this range is neither especially bad nor distinctively good, It may have a promising thesis but the argument is unconvincing, confusing, or often unclearly forecasted. Textual evidence is often not clearly integrated into the argument. The paper may show little or no original thought.

D: D papers have serious weaknesses in content and style. There may be no argumentative thesis and no movement beyond superficial concepts. The writing style is often difficult to read.

Other Issues:

Attendance: You are allowed two absences (excused or otherwise) without penalty. Three absences will result in **immediate failure** of the course. Note that arriving more than five minutes late counts as an absence.

Plagiarism: As a student, you are expected not to engage in any form of plagiarism, which according to the ASU Student Code of Conduct, means representing the words or ideas of another as one's own. Plagiarism is an act of *fraud* - it involves both stealing someone else's work and lying about it afterward. *Note, that for an act to count as plagiarism, the representation does not have to be intentional.* See <http://provost.asu.edu/academicintegrity> for ASU policies regarding academic dishonesty. As a minimum punishment, detection of plagiarism will result in failure of the course, and can lead to expulsion from Barrett and an XE grade. An 'XE' grade on your transcript denotes failure due to academic dishonesty and will preclude you from entry into any reputable graduate or professional school. The bottom-line is, DON'T PLAGIARIZE!

Please see the "Policies" section of the class webpage for further policies.

This syllabus is a contract between you and I - by attending this class you declare that you have read and understood all the above.