Duquesne University
McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts
Fall 2017

Honors Philosophy  Instructor: Zach Slanger
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TR 1:40–2:55 pm  Office Hours: TR 12:30–1:30 pm

Course Description
In this course, our primary question will be that of the relationship between philosophy and human lived experience. Some questions we will consider include: What is philosophy? What is the relationship between philosophy and lived experience? Can a philosophy emerging from lived experience be universalized? What makes humans distinct from other animals, and what is the origin of this distinction? Given what we are as humans, how should we live together? In order to embark on what will hopefully be a lifelong journey in pursuit of answers to these questions, we will read texts from the history of philosophy, discuss these texts in class, and develop our own ideas and tentative solutions to philosophical problems through spoken and written discourse.

We will begin by reading Plato and considering the question of what philosophy is before spending the bulk of the semester reading and analyzing works by three philosophers who are particularly concerned with the question of philosophy and lived experience: Augustine, Rousseau, and Freud. We will end the semester by questioning the universality of such connections between philosophy and lived experience through readings of philosophers writing from a minority perspective and dealing with issues like race, gender, and sexual orientation. This will provide us with both breadth and depth in content. The texts range in time from around 400 BCE to the twenty-first century, granting us some variety in philosophical concerns and positions. Many of the texts are narrative in form and highly enjoyable to read and discuss. My hope is that this class will be an engaging forum for the articulation of your own ideas as well as a serious meditation on questions at the core of human existence.

Course Objectives
The primary aim of this Honors Philosophy course is to introduce students to some of the fundamental problems in the history of philosophy. These problems are neither abstract nor trivial, but rather are integral to our everyday lives. Thus, one crucial course objective is to foster the questioning of our everyday lives in order to problematize our assumptions about the world around us and how we interact with it. To this end, different methods of critical thinking will be intrinsic to this course. Another central course objective is the close analysis and careful evaluation of arguments, as this ability is foundational and will be required in most, if not all, classes that you take over the course of your undergraduate career, not to mention your post-university careers. A final course objective is the comparison of philosophical positions across different texts, authors, and cultural contexts.

Learning Outcomes
The primary skills that students should leave this class having refined are the three (C)Rs: (Critical) Reading, (Critical) Reasoning, and (Critical) Writing. Every assignment and activity will be oriented towards developing these fundamental skills and helping students learn to utilize them in whatever they pursue in life. Other skills that will be developed in this class include analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of philosophical positions as well as articulation and argumentation of one’s own philosophical position(s).