humanities 1840 9.0a

existence, freedom, and meaning

the idea of the human in european thought

york university

toronto

2022-23

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: AIMS AND PURPOSES

All experiences are moral experiences….

-Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

What one sees depends upon how one sees; observation is not just a receiving, a discovering, but also a bringing forth, and insofar as it is that, how the observer is constituted is indeed decisive.

-Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*

Humanities 1840 9.0 is dedicated to the reading and discussion of significant works of philosophy, religion, literature, and moral and social thought in the modern European intellectual tradition in order that the idea of the human be made as intense and meaningful as possible. Yet, the course is concerned not only with studying a specific group of texts but also with engaging the very process of learning itself, so that, in keeping with the spirit of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, students in the course learn not only to see but also to see how they see. Those who accept the commitment to learn offered by Humanities 1840 9.0 will thus find, time and again, that ideas, values, and goals once believed certain will be questioned. Taken-for-granted beliefs will be critically examined and, where necessary, their unsupported grounds critically exposed. We shall find, however, that criticism, when sustained within the larger context of a community devoted to human dignity, is one of our highest values. For when one can offer and welcome it as a gift – when one can welcome (being in) error with a good will – such critical insight can serve as a means of liberation, providing the very ground whereby individuals can lead each other out [*educere*] of social and political oppression, through self-consciousness, into a community of free persons, each of whom is valued absolutely (each of whom is accorded absolute value). What is most central, then, to Humanities 1840 9.0 is that those who participate in the course support each other as a community of learners – that we construct a context in which all are supported in testing their ideas and values, a context in which all are encouraged to learn with and through each other.

As a first-year Foundations course, the mandate of Humanities 1840 9.0 is to assist students in becoming thoughtfully engaged in their university education by stressing the acquisition of critical skills in thinking, reading, writing, and speaking. To this end, the course makes use of three different learning formats, each of which is required for all students:

1. weekly two-hour colloquia (bringing together all students and instructors in the course);

2. weekly two-hour tutorials;

3. regular meetings of students with their instructor.

There are no formal lectures in the course: the colloquia replace the lectures and provide an opportunity for students and instructors to initiate discussion of the assigned readings and to deepen one’s understanding of how to write essays at a university level.

It is understood that students who are seriously engaged in their university education will take the responsibility of:

1. attending all tutorials and colloquia, having carefully prepared the assigned reading ahead of time so as to be able to take part meaningfully in the discussion;

2. meeting on a regular basis with their instructor to discuss their reading and writing.

Four essays (including the final, take-home essay-examination, which will be due during the April examination period) are required, each worth 25% of the course. Students are expected to write their essays on a timely basis, for only then can they benefit from the integration of their reading and writing with the tutorials, colloquia, and individual meetings with their instructors.

The course is carefully planned as a whole:

1. the assigned texts are read and discussed in a sequential order so as to assist students in working through, at an ever more sophisticated level, concepts basic to the central theme of the course, the idea of the human in European thought;

2. the assigned papers are intended to help students learn, through writing and by critically interacting with their instructor on a regular basis, to prepare university-level essays.

Please note carefully the following:

1. While participation in tutorials and colloquia are not graded as such, students must understand that only if they attend the tutorials and colloquia and meet with their instructor on a regular basis can they expect to learn effectively in the course.

2. Students whose grades at the end of the year are borderline (when they fall, for example, between A and B+) and who have regularly attended their tutorials and made a significant contribution to the weekly learning process of the class will receive positive credit for class participation.

3. For students who show significant improvement in their writing, their later papers will be weighted more heavily in determining their final grade.

Students in Humanities 1840 9.0 who engage seriously with the course’s assigned weekly readings, with the discussion in tutorials and colloquia, and with the four scheduled sessions on essay writing can expect to emerge from the course with:

* an understanding of the values that underpin and allow them to establish the interconnections among the European traditions of philosophy, religious thought, and literature;
* an understanding of the values that underpin and allow them to establish the interconnections among faith, reason, and atheism;
* an understanding, in other words, of the values that comprise, support, and foster the diversity of human expression and experience – the values of the dignity, equality, and absolute value to be accorded to all human beings;
* the capacity, on the basis of those values, to call into question unexamined and uncritical assumptions, principles, and ideas, whether they be found in the other or in oneself;
* an understanding, therefore, of the dual process of evaluation that is involved in all thoughtful, self-reflexive engagement with texts – an evaluation of the values that one not only finds in but also brings to a text (whether the text be an actual text, a painting, a film, a conversation with another, a conversation with oneself…);
* the capacity to think, ever more self-consciously, about what is most fundamentally human.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The following texts have been placed on order and are available at the York Bookstore and are presented here in the order in which we read them.

Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, tr. Kaufmann (Vintage paper)

Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, tr. Hong and Hong (Princeton paper)

Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, tr. Cress (Hackett paper)

Pascal, *Selections from the Thoughts*, tr. Beattie (Croft paper)

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Barnet (Signet Classics)

Berger, *Invitation to Sociology* (Anchor paper)

Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. Ellington (Hackett paper)

Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, tr. MacAndrew (Signet or Mass Market Paperback)

Buber, *I and Thou*, tr. Kaufmann (Scribner's paper)

Nancy, *God*, *Justice*, *Love*, *Beauty*: *Four Little Dialogues*, tr. Clift (Fordham University Press)

In addition to the above, there is a Course Kit to be purchased from the York Bookstore. The kit contains five selections from the essays of Montaigne (“To the Reader,” “Of the Education of Children,” “Of Repentance,” “Apology for Raymond Sebond,” and “Of Experience”) to be read in weeks 8 and 9 of the fall term.

Finally, an essay by Martin Buber (“Distance and Relation”), to be read in week 9 of the second term, and two short stories by Haruki Murakami (“Samsa in Love” and “Town of Cats”) will be circulated by email to all students registered in the course.

TUTORIALS AND COLLOQUIA

Colloquia Thursday, 4:30-6:30, ACW 303 All instructors and   
 tutorial groups

Tutorial 1 Monday, 10:30-12:30, BC 322 Nicholas Valkanis

Tutorial 2 Monday, 8:30-10:30, MC 212 Colin Lennard-White

THE SPARK (STUDENT PAPERS AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH) WEBSITE

The SPARK website will be truly helpful in regard to many of the issues that students face in initiating their university careers. It can be found at:

<https://spark.library.yorku.ca/#getting-started>

The website addresses and provides guidance for issues such as understanding assignments, time management, and academic integrity. In regard to the last of these, students are responsible for understanding both what does and does not constitute academic honesty at a university level and, in many cases, for recognizing that these might be very different from prior training that they received in high school and/ or college. While it gives no one – students, staff, or faculty – pleasure to have to pursue a breach of academic honesty, it is important to note carefully the following:

“A student who is charged with a breach of the York University Senate Policy on Academic Honesty shall be presumed innocent until, based on clear and compelling evidence, it is determined that the student has violated the policy. Remember, however, that the University does not consider ignorance of the policy to be an excuse for breaches of academic honesty.” Suspected breaches of academic honesty are handled by a committee within the department or faculty in which the course in question is offered. As the SPARK website indicates, the process may include the following steps:

1. an exploratory meeting;
2. a formal hearing at the departmental level and, if required, at the Faculty level;
3. an appeal by the student of the ruling at the Faculty unit level to the Senate Appeals Committee.

In the event that the above process of exploration be initiated, it is also important to remember that “a student accused of academic dishonesty may not drop or be deregistered from the course in question until a final decision is reached.”

COURSE READING LIST AND OUTLINE OF ASSIGNMENTS

## FALL TERM

Week 1 September 8-9: Introduction

2 September 12-16:Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

Please note: the numbers below for the readings in Nietzsche refer not to page numbers but to selected poems and aphorisms in *The Gay Science*. The poems are to be found in the prelude that Nietzsche entitles “Joke, Cunning, and Revenge.” The aphorisms are the numbered sections that are to be found in each of the five books that comprise the text.

Poems: #7, 16, 23

Book I: #2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 19, 21, 24-28, 32, 34, 42, 47, 50, 51, 53, 55,  
 56

Book II: #57, 58, 76, 78, 96, 107

Book III: #108-110, 114-117, 121, 122, 124, 125 (and 1st new paragraph p.   
 307) 126-131, 135, 137-140, 153, 200, 233, 248-250, 254, 255,   
 259-261, 265-275

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303

3 September 19-23:Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

Book IV: #276-278, 283-287, 290, 292, 294, 297, 299, 301, 304, 305, 307,   
 311, 315, 318, 319, 321-325, 327, 334, 335, 337, 338, 340, 341

Book V: #343-347, 352, 354, 355, 357, 359, 371, 374, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303: Nietzsche

4September 26-30: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*

Hong and Hong translation: pp. 1-88, 112-123

Alastair Hannay translation: pp. 39-115, 136-147

First essay assignment distributed in tutorial

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303: Essay Writing I

5October 3-7: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303: Kierkegaard

6 October 10-14: Reading Week – No Classes

7 October 17-21:Montaigne (in the course kit)

“To the Reader”

“Of the Education of Children”

“Of Repentance”

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303

8October 24-28:Montaigne (in the course kit)

“Apology for Raymond Sebond”

“Of Experience”

First essay due at the beginning of your weekly tutorial

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303: Montaigne

9 October 31 – November 4:Descartes, *Discourse on Method*

Parts I-IV (omit Parts V-VI)

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303: Descartes

10 November 7-11:Pascal, *Selections from the Thoughts*

Part I: Sections A-E, G (omit Section F)

Second essay assignment distributed in tutorial

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303: Essay Writing II

11 November 14-18:Pascal, *Selections from the Thoughts*

Part II (complete) and Part III, Section A (omit Sections B-D)

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303: Pascal

12 November 21-25: Nancy, *God*, *Justice*, *Love*, *Beauty*: *Four Little Dialogues*

“God,” pp. 2-18

“Justice,” pp. 35-49

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303

13 November 28 – December 2: Nancy, *God*, *Justice*, *Love*, *Beauty*: *Four Little   
 Dialogues*

“Love,” pp. 65-79

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303: Shakespeare

WINTER TERM

Week 1 January 9-13: Berger, *Invitation to Sociology*

Chapters 1-5

Second essay due at the beginning of your weekly tutorial

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303

2 January 16-20: Berger, *Invitation to Sociology*

Chapters 6-8

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303: Berger

3 January 23-27: Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*

Parts I and II (omit the Preface)

Third essay assignment distributed in tutorial

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303: Essay Writing III

4 January 30 – February 3: Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*

Part III, p. 49-54 (end of the 1st new paragraph), p. 57 (2nd new paragraph),   
 pp. 58-60 (end of the 1st new paragraph), pp. 61-62 (“Concluding   
 Remark”)

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303: Kant

5 February 6-10: Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303: Essay Writing Workshop

6 February 13-17: Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303: Dostoevsky

7 February 20-24: Reading Week – No Classes

8 February 27 – March 3, Buber

“Distance and Relation” (to be distributed by email)

*I and Thou*: Part I

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303

9 March 6-10: Buber

*I and Thou*: Parts II-III & Afterword

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303: Buber

10 March 13-17: Murakami, “Samsa in Love” (to be distributed by email)

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303

11 March 20-24: Murakami, “Town of Cats”” (to be distributed by email)

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303: Murakami

12 March 27-31: Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303: Essay Writing IV

Fourth essay assignmentdistributed by email (Please note: this is a take-  
 home essay-examination and will be due on Thursday, April 27)

13 April 3-7: Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Colloquium, Thursday, 4:30, ACW 303: Shakespeare