ATYP IV:
From Socrates to Smartphones: Literature, Philosophy and Media in the Postmodern World

Course ID: ATYP 4000  Instructor: Bill Brieger
M: 5:00 - 7:50
Phone: (269) 599 - 5477
Sangren Hall 4510  Email: billbrieger@gmail.com

Texts (subject to additions):
Plato, The Trial and Death of Socrates
Plato, The Republic
Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents
Franz Kafka, The Metamorphosis and Other Stories (Dover Edition) or any collection which includes the following: “Before the Law” “The Judgment,” “The Penal Colony,” “A Report to the Academy”
Philip K. Dick, Man in the High Castle

Course Description
ATYP IV will ask students to conduct a critical and philosophical exploration of emerging disruptive technologies and the culture that such technology propagates. The class seeks to explore the relations between self and society within our postmodern culture from an interdisciplinary perspective with particular emphasis on philosophy and the arts. While the very notion of defining “postmodernism” on a theoretical level has proven to be contentious and fraught with disagreements, the existence of a palpably different world view and lifestyle is both acknowledged and largely celebrated by American culture at large. Historically, the origins of postmodernism can be traced to World War II with the emergence of the earliest computers and the atom bomb, yet within the greater culture, this is an era of dualistic Cold War logic and practices; the distinct sense of a rupture with the past only becomes palpable in the late ‘60s, and during the last half century its meaning and significance has been the subject of ongoing debate and little consensus. Yet despite the ongoing climate of debate surrounding the meaning, consequences, and implications of our postmodern world, the existence of a palpably different worldview and lifestyle is both acknowledged and largely celebrated by American culture at large. We will be analyzing the current and developing shifts within our postmodern society, particularly those revealed through the newest and most disruptive technologies.

We seek to explore the implications and consequences of the relationship between mind and machine: What, for example, are the material and ethical implications of our military’s expanding reliance on drones? What is the nature and significance of the relationship between
mind and machine? What happens to issues of privacy in a world that is seemingly contained by the worldwide web?

Our crucial focus, then, lies within contemporary philosophical and cultural assumptions and practices, and how these practices impact the self and society within diverse spheres ranging from economics and politics to ethics, epistemology, psychology, and the arts. The first semester is largely dedicated to establishing the philosophical and literary basis for an understanding of the philosophical and literary precursors of the postmodern world, from Socrates and Plato to essential twentieth modernists such as Nietzsche, Freud, Kafka and Camus. The second semester explores postmodern culture, art, and philosophy more directly: we seek to explain how phenomena such as globalization, the Internet, virtual reality, smart phones, and robotics challenge the received traditions of community, identity and the psyche while examining the relationship between self and society, between the past and present, and between consumerism and creativity in our contemporary life. Through our readings, discussion, informal and formal debates, essays, research papers and creative assignments, we aim to explore and debate postmodernity as lived and perceived through our everyday imagination and experience both on the web and in the world.

**Coursework and Classroom Expectations**

ATYP IV, like other ATYP courses, will require intensive close reading, thorough written analysis and vigorous class participation. Regular attendance is required. Three or more unexcused absences per semester may result in dropping your final mark by one full grade and five or more absences may result in your failure of the course. Students are expected to arrive at class on time and fully prepared, having read (or viewed) the assigned material. The course format will combine lecture (and guest lecturers), open discussion, small group work, formal and informal group presentations, occasional structured debate, and occasional viewing of media.

The student is responsible for obtaining materials and assignments missed during any class absences; the student must contact the instructor by email or telephone in cases of prolonged absence.

The typical work for this class will usually require 1 weekly response paper (one page single space), occasional online responses to selected videos, articles or quizzes, as well as 1-2 creative writings, unit essays or research papers per month. These longer writings should all use 1.5 spacing (unless otherwise noted) and will range from 3-9 pages (most of these will be on the shorter side). There will also be several places throughout the year where will in engage in structured debate or verbal presentation of philosophical arguments. The final project (which may be completed in pairs), will be a professional video documentary (10-18 minutes). These documentaries will possibly be viewed by the public. It is ideal if you have your own video camera and editing software for this project, but we will discuss other options as we approach the second semester.

Like other ATYP classes there will be a final portfolio per semester which will include all of your final work as well as necessary revisions. It is expected, as year four students, that your first drafts will be exceptionally strong and therefore should not require nearly as much revision as previous years. “Plus” papers require no revision, “Check Plus” papers require that about 1/3 of the paper be revised. “Check” papers (of which I would expect few to none) require that
Learning Outcomes
1. Demonstrate an understanding (verbally and in writing) of various, significant philosophical doctrines and ideologies.
2. Through the Ethics Bowl framework that we will utilize, demonstrate varied and rigorous debate skills related to philosophical themes and topics.
3. Communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, through numerous group presentations and individual essays while demonstrating sound independent and critical thinking, especially through the writing and subsequent research projects.
4. Demonstrate an understanding of the underlying philosophical concepts behind major literary works as well as film, art and other media.
5. Demonstrate an ability to analyze the philosophical implications of contemporary life, (that is “to see the water in which we swim”).
6. Apply your acquired understanding to various creative works including, but not limited to, short stories, films, poems and novels.
7. Conduct rigorous analysis and utilize data effectively in shaping insights related to society’s relationship with technology.
8. Synthesize your understanding of these outcomes through a final video documentary that takes style and visual artistry into account.

Course Evaluation
%70 portfolio (in the second semester 20% of this will be tied to your final video project)
%15 presentation, quizzes and “debate”
%15 participation

Schedule (subject to change)
First Semester
* Socrates and his Critics  (Weeks 1-4)
* Empiricism, Rationalism and Skepticism: Exploring Epistemology. (Weeks 5 - 6)
* Virtue Ethics via Kant and Mill  (using debate to explore utilitarian ethics . etc.) (Weeks 7-8)
* American Romanticism (and its relationship to Post Modernism) Thoreau, Emerson Melville (Week 9)
* Prophets of Modernity: Nietzsche, Darwin, Freud (Weeks 10-13)
* Modernism: Eliot, Conrad, Kafka, Camus, Rand  (14-16)

Second Semester
* Postmodern explorations of Epistemology
* Exploration of the philosophical implication of new, disruptive technology
* Emphasis on Debate, Art and Media
* Postmodernism as second nature
* Beyond postmodernism
* Video project
**WMU Policy on Academic Honesty**
You are responsible for making yourself aware of and understanding the policies and procedures in the *Undergraduate Catalog* that pertain to Academic Honesty. These policies include cheating, fabrication, falsification and forgery, multiple submission, plagiarism, complicity and computer misuse. [The policies can be found at http://catalog.wmich.edu under Academic Policies, Student Rights and Responsibilities.] If there is reason to believe you have been involved in academic dishonesty, you will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. You will be given the opportunity to review the charge(s). If you believe you are not responsible, you will have the opportunity for a hearing. You should consult with your instructor if you are uncertain about an issue of academic honesty.

**Online Resources**
Free and full texts of many of the philosophical works:
http://www.gutenberg.org/

Great Resources for exploring and clarifying difficult philosophical concepts:
http://www.plato.stanford.edu
http://www.iep.utm.edu/
http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/millu.html

Recommended Podcasts for clarifying and expanding understanding of philosophical ideas:
*The Partially Examined Life* (If you are on Facebook, I recommend the Facebook group).
*Philosopher’s Zone*