PHIL 4318: Contemporary Philosophy  
Spring 2017 Syllabus  
Instructor: Dr. Stephen Striby  
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stribys@stthom.edu  
Office Hours: M, W, F: 11:00-1:30  
T, Th: 8:30-9:30, 11:00-12:00


**Course Content:** Because most of the students who take this course have not taken a modern philosophy course, we will begin with a concentrated survey of the ideas of Descartes, Hume, Kant and Hegel. This survey is necessary, since 20th century philosophers cannot be understood without an acquaintance with the views of these great modern predecessors. Following this survey will be a discussion of existence, language, and truth using as our guides thinkers primarily within the analytic tradition, such as Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein. We will then undertake a study of Husserlian phenomenology, principally through the reading of much of Dr. Sokolowski’s book. Next, we will study the thoughts of both atheistic and Christian existentialists, before ending the course with a look at notions of empathy and personhood in the writings of Catholic phenomenologists like Edith Stein and Karol Wojtyla. These last parts of the course will serve to bring contemporary philosophical ideas into dialogue with religion.

**Course Learning Outcomes:** By the end of the course, the successful student will be able to:

1) Show an understanding of the human person as fulfilled through relationships with other persons, by applying notions found in the philosophies of Edith Stein, Karol Wojtyla, and Joseph Ratzinger. This outcome advances *Goal Four* of the
Core Curriculum Student Learning Outcomes, which calls for students to “affirm the dignity of the human person.”

2) Articulate various positions that are taken in the debate between correspondence and coherence theories of truth, and articulate arguments against the possibility of a private language.

3) Show an understanding of the basic terms and tenets of the phenomenological school of philosophy. This outcome will help to advance Goal One of the Core Curriculum Student Learning Outcomes, which relates to “the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake,” the forming of “habits of mind through which knowledge can mature into wisdom,”

4) Better articulate and defend, by both written and oral means, philosophical positions on a number of issues. Thus, the student should have developed their skills in writing argumentative essays, and be more competent in speaking clearly and intelligibly on philosophical matters. This outcome helps to advance Goal Five of the Core Curriculum Student Learning Outcomes, which calls students to “develop competence in critical thinking, critical reading, effective writing, and oral communication.”

Grading and Attendance: There will be two essay tests, each worth 15% of the final grade, and a comprehensive final exam worth 20% of the final grade. The student will complete two papers: one, a short essay on Descartes worth 10% of the grade, and the other, a longer research paper worth 20% of the grade. There will be eight quizzes on the readings worth 20% of the final grade. These will occur at the beginning of class and will not be previously announced. There will be no makeup quizzes, but provisions can be made to make up a test if the student is excused for his or her absence. For the possibility of an absence being excused, the student must contact Dr. Striby by the end of the day of the absence, and have a sound reason for his or her absence. Students may gain or lose up to six percentage points based on their attendance and participation in class discussions. More than three unexcused
absences will cause the student to lose points on the final grade, with each unexcused absence causing a one percent reduction in the grade.

**Grading scale:** A: 94-100, A-: 90-93: A grade of A reflects excellent work on the part of the student. To earn a grade of A, the student must excel on all or most of the assignments and tests, show considerable understanding of concepts and arguments presented in class and in the readings, produce well written, diligently researched papers, and have good attendance and participation. B+: 87-89, B: 83-86, B-: 80-82: To earn a grade in the B range, the student must complete all of the assignments and tests, show good understanding of the aforementioned concepts and arguments, produce well written papers, and have good attendance and participation. C+: 77-79, C: 73-76, C-: 70-72: To attain a grade of C, the student must complete all of the assignments and tests, show some understanding of concepts and arguments, write a good paper, and consistently attend class. D+: 65-69, D: 60-64: To attain a grade of D, the student must complete the assignments and tests, show some understanding of concepts and arguments, and show some consistency in attending class. F: Below 60: A grade of F is given when the student fails to complete assignments, fails to show any consistency in attending class or in understanding the material, plagiarizes on a paper, or cheats on a test.

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**Course Calendar**

**Week One (Jan. 19):** Grading, syllabus, and Realism  
**Week Two (Jan. 24, 26):** Descartes’ *Meditations* I and II; *Meditations* III-V  
**Week Three (Jan. 31, Feb. 2):** Hume: selections from *A Treatise of Human Nature*  
**Week Four (Feb. 7, 9):** Kant on phenomena and the *noumenon*, and on God  
**Week Five (Feb. 14, 16):** Hegel’s dialectic; Kant and Frege on existence  
**Week Six (Feb. 21, 23):** Review for test one; **TEST#1 (23rd)**  
**Week Seven (Feb. 28, Mar. 2):** Wittgenstein and Strawson against solipsism  
**Week Eight (Mar. 7, 9):** Correspondence vs. Coherence theories of truth  

*Spring Break*
Week Nine (Mar. 21, 23): *Introduction to Phenomenology*, chs. 1-4
Week Ten (Mar. 28, 30): *Introduction to Phenomenology*, chs. 5-8
Week Eleven (Apr. 4, 6): *Intro. to Phenomenology*, chs. 10-12; Review for test
Week Twelve (Apr. 11): TEST #2(11th); Easter Break
Week Thirteen (Apr. 18, 20): Sartre and Camus; Kierkegaard and Marcel
Week Fourteen (Apr. 25, 27): Stein and Wojtyła
Week Fifteen (May 2, 4): Ratzinger on personhood; Review for Final Exam

**FINAL EXAM:** Tuesday, May 16th, 8:30 AM

**PAPER DUE DATES:** Short Paper: Thursday, Feb. 9th; Research Paper: Tuesday, April 25th (Tuesday, April 18th: +2 pts.)