THE HUMAN PLACE IN THE COSMOS
CRN: 37475
Instructor: Dr. Daniela Vallega-Neu
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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:00-3:00 and Wednesdays by appointment in PLC 328.
Class meets: Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:00-1:50 in VOL 307

Course Overview
The aim of this course is to deepen a philosophical understanding and questioning of the human place in the cosmos through close reading of seminal texts in the Western tradition. This requires that we question what defines humans and how we understand what we call “cosmos.” It also requires that we reflect on the notions of “place” and “space” more generally and how we understand ourselves in the context of space and place. We will see how throughout the Western philosophical and scientific tradition, the understanding of our place in the cosmos has undergone significant shifts, which occurs together with radical changes in how we understand ourselves and the physical world as well as ourselves in relation to the physical world.

We will focus on three main thinkers from the Western tradition. First, we will read Plato’s Timaeus, an Ancient Greek text that has had a vast influence in Medieval philosophy. Next we will read Descartes Principles of Philosophy on the background of the birth of modern science, which occurs in conjunction with the rising of new astronomical theories. Lastly, we will read Heidegger’s “Building, Dwelling, Thinking”, a text from his last period in which he develops a cosmology of being that differs radically from modern scientific conceptions of our place in the cosmos. These texts will be supplemented with introductory lectures on Ancient cosmology, medieval cosmology, as well as lectures that highlight the fundamental change in the Western understanding of our place in the cosmos through the mathematization of nature, which occurred in the 17th century along with the new astronomical theories of Kepler, Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton.

The course will consist in lectures, close reading and text analysis, as well as discussions on main ideas and concepts. It will lead to the critical comparison of different approaches to the question of the human place in the cosmos, as well as to questioning ourselves with respect to how we view or might view our place in the cosmos today.

Course Texts

Required:
- Plato’s Timaeus (Newburyport: Focus, 2001)
- Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, translated by Joan Stambough (SUNY Press 2010), §§ 22-24 will be made available on Blackboard.
- Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” in Basic Writings, ed. by David Farrell Krell (Harper San Francisco, 1993). Text will be made available on Blackboard.
Recommended:

- Casey, Edward: *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1998)

Course Requirements

A) Weekly journal (1-2 pages each week, single spaced)  
B) One final term paper (6-9 pages, double spaced)  
C) Attendance, participation, reading quizzes, short writing assignments.

ALL REQUIREMENTS NEED TO BE FULFILLED IN ORDER TO PASS THIS COURSE.

Explanation of requirements:

A) The weekly journals will be collected three times during the trimester, once at the beginning (in order to make sure that you understood the assignment), once in the middle, and at the end of the trimester. Two thirds of the journal need to be summaries of the main points we discussed in class and on third should contain your own critical reflections and/or questions and ideas you have relating to the course material.

B) The final term paper needs be about five pages long (no less than 4 and a half, no more than 6, double-spaced, font Times New Roman 12 with standard margins) and needs to be comparative such that it includes at least two of the main philosophers we discussed. It should also include reflections on how we do or might understand our place in the cosmos today.

C) You will get participation points for regular class attendance, for completing in-class writing assignments, reading quizzes, and for contributing significantly to class discussions. Participation points will be added up at the end of the term and converted into grades. Frequent absences will lower your participation grade.
Course Policies

1. **Handing in an assignment late** will lower your grade. Homework that is more than a week late will not be accepted, unless this was for demonstrable (documented) reasons beyond your control.

2. In order to avoid disruptions in class you are asked to avoid exiting and entering the classroom while lectures and discussions are going on.

3. **If you miss a class** it is your responsibility to keep up with the course material. Instead of basing your journal on what was said in class, you need to summarize the assigned reading for the day you missed.

4. The **uses of electronic devices like** laptops, cell phones, iPods, iPads, Blackberries, etc. during class is **not allowed** unless you needs a specific device because of a disability. If the latter is the case, please let me know.

5. Please retain the original copy of all work returned to you during the term until the final course grade has been posted. In the event of any question concerning whether grades have been accurately recorded, it is your responsibility to provide these original copies as documentation.

6. The **uses of electronic devices like** laptops, cell phones, iPods, iPads, Blackberries, etc. during class is **not allowed** unless a student has a documented need for using a specific device (note from the Accessible Education Center). If the latter is the case, please notify your instructors right away.

7. You are expected to follow the **rules of academic honesty**. Failure to do so will result in **failure of the whole course (“F”)**.

   **Plagiarism**: Plagiarism is the inclusion of someone else’s product, words, ideas, or data as one’s own work. When a student submits work for credit that includes the product, words, ideas, or data of others, the source must be acknowledged by the use of complete, accurate, and specific references, such as footnotes. By placing one’s name on work submitted for credit, one certifies the originality of all work not otherwise identified by appropriate acknowledgements. Verbatim statements by others must be enclosed by quotation marks or set off from the regular text as indented extracts.

   In order to find out how to avoid plagiarism, see http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/

   **Fabrication**: Fabrication is the intentional use of information that the author has invented when he or she states or implies otherwise, or the falsification of research or other findings with the intent to deceive.

   **Cheating**: Cheating is an act of deception by which a student misrepresents or misleadingly demonstrates that he or she has mastered information on an academic exercise that he or she has not mastered, including the giving or receiving of unauthorized help in an academic exercise.

**Grade Rubric**:

A = excellent. No mistakes, well written, and distinctive in some way or other.
B = good. No significant mistakes, well written, but not distinctive in any way.
C = OK. Some errors, but a basic grasp of the material.
D = poor. Several errors. A tenuous grasp of the material.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week One
April 3  Introduction to the course.


Homework: For next class, read Plato’s *Timaeus* 17a-47e.
You need to have read the rest of Rémi Brague’s *The Wisdom of the World* by WEEK FIVE.

Week Two
April 10: Plato’s *Timaeus*. 17a-47e. Structure, nature, and setting of Timaeus’ discourse on the creation of the cosmos. Three beginnings. The first beginning: What is brought into being through the intellect according to a perfect model. The creation of the world body and the world soul. The creation of the stars, and of human beings.

April 12: Continuation.

Week Three


Week Four
April 24: The third beginning of Timaeus’ speech: The working together of reason and necessity. The creation and harmony of human body and soul. (See especially 87b-90d)

April 26: Continuation. Lecture on Aristotle’s view of the cosmos.

Week Five
May 1: Reading Quiz. Discussion of Brague’s *The Wisdom of the World*.


Week Six
May 8: Continuation. *Philosophical Writings*, 208-222.

Week Seven

**Homework:** For next class, read Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §§ 22-24.

Week Eight
May 22:  Reading of Heidegger’s account of Dasein (the being-there of humans) and spatiality in *Being and Time* ( §§ 22-24). The difference between objectified space and “lived” space.
May 24:  Continuation of last class. **Final paper assignment.**

Week Nine
May 29:  Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” part one: building as a way of dwelling (pp. 347-353).

Week Ten
June 7:  Discussion of final paper topics.
        **Introductory paragraphs of final papers are due in class.**
        [JOURNALS DUE in class]

**The FINAL PAPER is DUE Tuesday, June 12, 3:00 pm** in the Philosophy Department PLC 338.