THE HUMAN PLACE IN THE COSMOS

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.

Learning Outcomes
- Knowledge about different views of the human place in the cosmos in the Western tradition.
- Knowledge of how basic concepts and philosophical approaches to the human being and the world undergo historical transformations and shift in different cultural contexts.
- Ability to access critically and explain different points of view with respect to the human place in the cosmos.
- Increased reflective capacity with respect to our place in the cosmos, i.e. awareness of prejudices due to historical and cultural influences.
- Increased capacity to read closely and understand some seminal philosophical texts.
- Increased capacity to write a short philosophy paper that is clear and well structured.
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 texts:
- Casey, Edward: The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1998)

Course Requirements
A) Three papers, 4-6 pages each. 25% each = 75%
B) Attendance, participation especially in discussion sections, reading quizzes, short homework and in-class writing assignments. 25%

All written homework needs to be printed, font Times New Roman 12, double-spaced, with one inch margins!

Explanation of requirements:
A) You will get a set of questions that you need to answer in the form of a paper. Most of the questions will test comprehension of the text and you will be required to make reference to concrete text passages that you interpret closely. All quotations need to be followed by explanations of what they say.

B) PARTICIPATION POINTS
You will get participation points for regular class attendance and attendance and participation in discussion sections, for completing in-class writing assignments and short homework assignments, 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. 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/](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
March 31  Introduction to the course and to Ancient cosmogonies, cosmographies, and cosmologies.

**Homework:** For next class, read Rémi Brague, *The Wisdom of the World*, Part One, pp.1-25. Bring to class a written question you have regarding the assigned text.


**Homework:** Next week Monday you need to have read Part Two of Rémi Brague’s *The Wisdom of the World*, pp. 29-70. Write 1-2 pages (printed, double-spaced) in which you briefly describe the four models of the world (or cosmos) Brague talks about.

Week Two
April 9:  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.

**Homework for Monday:** Bring to class a written question you have regarding the readings (Timaeus 17a-47e). (Hand in the question to Brock at the beginning of class.)

Week Three
April 14:  Continuation of last class.

Week Four
April 21:  The senses. *Timaeus*, 61c-69a. The third beginning of Timaeus’ speech: The working together of reason and necessity. Continuation. The creation and harmony of human body and soul. (See especially 87b-90d)
April 23:  Lecture on Aristotle’s view of the cosmos.

**Homework for Monday:** Read part III-IV of Brague’s *The Wisdom of the World*, pp. 74-228. Write 1-2 pages summarizing the standard vision of the world in the Middle Ages.

**Friday discussion section: First paper due.**

Week Five
April 28:  Brague’s *The Wisdom of the World*, Parts III and IV.

Week Six
Week Seven
May 12: Continuation of last class and “The World,” *Philosophical Writings* p.79-98.
[Second paper assignment!]

Week Eight
May 19: 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 21: Continuation of last class.
Homework for Wednesday next week: Read Heidegger’s essay “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” and write 1-2 pages on any thoughts you had regarding the text.
Friday discussion section: Second paper due.

Week Nine
May 26: MEMORIAL DAY HOLIDAY! No class.
May 28: Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” part one: building as a way of dwelling (pp. 347-353). [Third and final paper assignment!]

Week Ten
The Ancient City of Cuzco in Peru.

Final papers are due latest Wednesday, June 11 at 3pm. Add a cover page with course information and the name of Brock Baines on it. Please leave them in the appropriate box straight ahead when you enter the Philosophy Department in 211 Susan Campbell Hall.