

**GUIDED READING IN PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS:  
DESCARTES' *MEDITATIONS ON FIRST PHILOSOPHY***

Dr. Adrian Sackson

Fall Semester

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Office Hours: TBA

**Short description:**

In this class, students will engage in a close and careful examination of one of the central texts of modernity, Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Close reading of this text, in conjunction with guiding questions and class discussion, will enable students to reach a solid understanding of important elements of Cartesian philosophy and Descartes' writing. But the course revolves around another central objective: to help students advance in their ability to read and interpret philosophical texts, to understand and analyze various forms of philosophical argument, and to articulate their own ideas clearly. Our study of Descartes' canonical text will thus model various strategies which can be employed when approaching philosophical texts in general. We will attempt to draw out the logical and argumentative structure of the text, its implicit assumptions and presuppositions, its use of rhetoric, its appeal to linguistic devices, as well as examining its historical and philosophical context. The course stresses the importance of *actively* partaking in the "philosophical experience" by reading, writing, and conversing about the text and its arguments.

**Assessment:**

Weekly reading & guiding questions (10%)

This is a guided reading course, and therefore preparing the weekly reading is *essential* to succeeding. Each week, students will be assigned a segment of text to read, and a set of guiding questions to answer. Students are expected to prepare *written* answers to the questions. The quality of the written answers themselves will not be assessed—they are for you, to assist you in grappling with the text. However, the task is compulsory: Students are required to submit their answers by email every week in advance of class. Proper and timely submission of answers that show engagement with the texts and the questions will ensure a full grade for this element of the course.

Midterm paper [3-4 pages] (30%)

The task will be given out in the first week of class. The paper will be due mid-semester.

Final paper [6-8 pages] (50%)

The task will be given out in the first week of class. The due date is set by the program.

Participation (10%)

Attendance is mandatory. Active participation in class discussions is encouraged. Students are expected to be present—both physically and mentally.

**Attendance:**

Attendance is mandatory. Students are permitted a maximum of three absences without penalty. Any additional absences will affect the final grade and may result in failure of the course.

**Academic conduct:**

Plagiarism is taken extremely seriously. Any instance of academic misconduct which includes: submitting someone else's work as your own; failure to accurately cite sources; taking words from another source without using quotation marks; submission of work for which you have previously received credit; working in a group for individual assignments; using unauthorized materials in an exam and sharing your work with other students, will result in failure of the assignment and will likely lead to further disciplinary measures.