

## PHIL 4385-02: Philosophy of Humor

Sam Houston State University

Spring 2022 — CRN: 24308

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**Instructor:** Dr. Thomas Brommage

**Office:** CHSS 347

**Office Hours:** M/W 1–2:30 PM & by appt.

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**Course Description:** An investigation into the history of philosophical analysis of humor and laughter. Content will include an understanding of the various theories of humor, and the basic terms and distinctions to analyze the funny, progressing as we go into more contemporary accounts of humor. By the end of the course, the student should have a comprehensive overview of the major figures and ideas within the field.

**Course Modality (Remote):** This is designed as a fully online class delivered through SHSU Online. Content delivery will be synchronous but remote, and all assignments will be completed and graded through the Blackboard system.

**Prerequisites:** N/A

### Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

1. *Learning fundamental principles, generalizations or theories:* Students will come to understand the major theories of humor, as well as the relevant terms and distinctions requisite for the analysis of humor.
2. *Learning to apply course material to improve thinking, problem solving and decisions:* The student will expect to consider how the various notions of humor are represented by the variety of practices which we consider to be funny.
3. *Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view:* The student will compare and contrast the various accounts of humor covered, and how they differ in their explanation for why we laugh.
4. *Developing skill in expressing oneself orally or in writing:* The student will be expected to engage the course material in discussion with the other students in the course, as well as in written form through the seminar paper.

**Writing Enhanced:** This is a “W” course, which means that at least 50 percent of your course grade will derive from writing activities designed to help you master course objectives. Writing in this course is one of the tools your instructor will use to help you learn course material. Some writing activities will require you to draft and revise your work, with or without instructor feedback. Others may not receive a grade but are designed to assist you in critical reflection of the course material. You should approach writing in this course as a tool to use as part of your learning as well as a tool your instructor will use to assess your level of learning.

## Reading List:

1. Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relationship to the Unconscious*, ed. James Strackey (Norton, 1990), \$17.
2. Stephen Gimbel, *Isn't that Clever: A Philosophical Account of Humor and Comedy* (Routledge, 2017), \$49
3. Matthew Hurley, Daniel Dennett and Reginald Adams, *Inside Jokes: Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind* (MIT Press, 2011), \$25
4. Victor Raskin, *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor* (Springer, 1984), \$-

## Schedule:

|                          |       |   |
|--------------------------|-------|---|
| Week 1 (Jan 12–14)       | ..... | Course Introduction   |
| Week 2 (Jan 15–21)       | ..... | Plato, <i>Republic XI &amp; Symposium</i> (selections)              |
| Week 3 (Jan 22–28)       | ..... | Aristotle, <i>Rhetoric, Poetics &amp; Nich. Ethics</i> (selections) |
| Week 4 (Jan 29–Feb 4)    | ..... | Cicero, <i>De Oratore</i> & Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> (selections)   |
| Week 5 (Feb 5–Feb 11)    | ..... | Hutcheson, “Reflections Upon Laughter”                              |
| Week 6 (Feb 12–Feb 18)   | ..    | Kant, <i>Critique of Judgment</i> and Schopenhauer (selections)     |
| Week 7 (Feb 19–25)       | ..... | Freud, <i>Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious</i>           |
| Week 8 (Feb 26–Mar 4)    | ..    | Freud (ct'd) & Spencer, “On the Physiology of Laughter”             |
| Week 9 (Mar 5–11)        | ..... | Bergson, <i>Laughter: An Essay on the Comic</i>                     |
| Week 10 (Mar 12–18)      | ..... | <b>Spring Break: No Class!</b>                                      |
| Week 11 (Mar 19–25)      | ..... | Raskin, <i>Semantic Mechanisms of Humor</i>                         |
| Week 12 (Mar 26–Apr 1)   | ..... | Raskin, <i>Semantic Mechanisms of Humor</i>                         |
| Week 13 (Apr 2–8)        | ..... | Hurley, Dennet and Adams, <i>Inside Jokes</i>                       |
| Week 14 (Apr 9–15)       | ..... | Hurley, Dennett and Adams, <i>Inside Jokes</i>                      |
| Week 15 (Apr 16–22)      | ..... | Gimbel, <i>Isn't that Clever</i>                                    |
| Week 16 (April 23–29)    | ..... | Gimbel, <i>Isn't that Clever</i>                                    |
| Week 17 (April 30–May 5) | ..... | Wrap Up   |

## Evaluation:

The following weighting will be used to calculate your course grade:

|                                    |       |     |
|------------------------------------|-------|-----|
| Participation in Weekly Meetings   | ..... | 50% |
| Research Paper (3,000-3,500 words) | ..... | 50% |

Your rounded average of these assignments will determine your grade, based on the following scale:

|   |       |             |
|---|-------|-------------|
| A | ..... | 100 - 89.5  |
| B | ..... | 89.4 - 79.5 |
| C | ..... | 79.4 - 69.5 |
| D | ..... | 69.4 - 59.5 |
| F | ..... | 59.4 - 0    |

**Academic Dishonesty:** Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Please be aware that plagiarized work and any form of academic dishonesty will result in an “F” on the assignment. [SHSU Academic Policy Statement 810213](#) outlines the definition of academic honesty and the related disciplinary procedures.

You should also familiarize yourself with [Academic Policy Statement 900823](#), which outlines the procedures for students to file an academic grievance should you wish to appeal your grade for reasons other than academic dishonesty. Please read through these policies carefully.

**Course Evaluations:** In accordance with University policy every student will have an opportunity at a specified date and time near the end of the semester to complete a course evaluation form from the IDEA course evaluation system.

For University policies on Student Absences on Religious Holy Days, Students with Disabilities, and Visitors in the Classroom you may view the official statements on the SHSU Website, <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>

### **Expectations, Suggestions and Mandates for an efficient class:**

1. Especially true in philosophy more than most other subjects, diligence is important. Some of the reading will be difficult since we are looking at some of the most profound ideas in the history of the world. The difficulty of the subject is indirectly proportional to the amount of work put into the course.
2. Expect to have up to several hours a week of reading and practice in order to earn an “A” for the course. Additionally, for these reasons, attendance is of vital importance. *If you do not regularly log in or keep up with the reading and exercises, do not expect to pass this class!*
3. Please come to class prepared (i.e., any reading assigned read, any questions concerning exercises or lectures prepared, etc.)
4. Please feel free to make mistakes. We all will from time to time—including your omniscient instructor.
5. Please feel free to make an appointment to discuss the material you do not understand. Waiting until the last moment in the semester to catch up is not advisable. I am excellent at fixing small problems, but horrendous at fixing large ones. The only difference between small and large problems is time.
6. Have fun! The material is only as dry as you make it out to be. Sharpening one’s mind can be an exhilarating process.