**Dr. Nim Batchelor**

**CLASS PREPARATION PROCESS**

Prior to each class meeting where we have readings assigned I will ask each of you to write a few paragraphs in connection with the readings that you were assigned. Initially and as needed, I will post some questions or offer you some guidance as to where you should focus your attention and explorations. But primarily, the goal will always be for you to document the engagement that you’ve done with the assigned text (and any external source that you have utilized). As a default, you could take up: (1) In the passages that we read, what question is the author posing? (2) what answer does the author offer for that question? (3) what is the precise meaning of the central concepts that the author is relying upon? (4) in what ways does this material relate to what we see around us in the world today? and (5) perhaps most importantly, what perplexities, insights, questions, or reactions did you have to what you read?

Our class meetings are an opportunity for us to share and engage with one another in the hopes of helping one another achieve the goals of the course that are listed above. Given that we are so few in number, it is vital that everyone come prepared to participate and to contribute their own thoughts to this collective endeavor. In addition, I will set an alarm to go off about three minutes prior to the scheduled time for the end of class meeting. When that alarm goes off, I will stop the discussion and ask that you write a response to the following prompt: “Today, in class, I learned . . . “ This gives you an opportunity: (1) to document the ***new*** insights that you really want to remember from our discussion, (2) to show me how your thinking has progressed as a result of our conversation, (3) to articulate any residual questions that you might have, and (3) to prove that you were in class and were paying attention. (Yes, I will use these documents to check attendance).

After you have completed your end-of-class paragraph, I will collect your work. I will assign this work a grade on a 10 point scale. If you happen to be absent on a particular day, you are welcome to send me (via an e-mail attachment) your pre-class writing, i.e., your reaction or response to reading for that day. I will accept these late, but after you have been back a few days, I will no longer accept these over-due assignments. Assignments that do not have an “end-of-class” reflective paragraph, will be given a ***partial*** ***score***. This is NOT a penalty. Rather it is an acknowledgement of the FACT that you were not actually present to learn from that day’s conversation. That is, I am actually giving you credit for what you can show me that you’ve learned in class. If you are not there (for whatever genuinely excellent reason) then it is simply not possible for you to have done that learning and thus earned those points of credit.

My grading simply reflects that reality. This should function as a minor incentive for excellent attendance.

The pre-class writing will be graded on the basis of: (1) is it evident to me that you have read and made a good faith effort to understand the material that you were assigned to read? (2) Do your questions reveal a philosophical depth and authentic inquiry or do they only reflect superficial confusions and the minimal goal of getting a grade in the gradebook? As I said before, these will be graded on a 10 point scale. At the end of the term, I will calculate the percentage of available points that you have earned for these class preparation forms and that percentage will count for 20% of your overall course grade. I want you to notice that this is an especially large chunk of your overall course grade. You should take this as a signal that I take these assignments seriously and that they really are designed to contribute in an important way to the learning process of this course.

Here is a recent example:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Class Preparation Form – Rousseau On the Origins of Inequality Part 1

To save space, I’ve compressed the questions. Feel free to expand the space between questions to accommodate whatever length of answer that you have to offer.

1. Rousseau is spinning a narrative here. In doing this—his way—he repeatedly draws a contrast with previous efforts to describe mankind in the state of nature. Essentially, he thinks that they all got off on the wrong foot. Explain what you understand him to be saying about the source and nature of their error.
2. I’d like for you to read between the lines just a bit. What is Rousseau’s general attitude toward the state of nature? How does that compare with his general attitude toward civil society? By “general attitude” I mean is he positive? Does he use extolling adjectives or degrading ones?
3. Once you’ve answered the prior question, I’d like for you to articulate—if you can—why he might have one general attitude over another?
4. Now, take a moment to assess that “general attitude.” Start by comparing it with your own. How do you feel about civil society? Do you, for example, walk around with a default sense of gratitude and awe when you experience modern society? Or are you mostly critical, cynical, and negative?
5. By the way, how much of your own stance is “on you” and how much of it is “on society?”
6. What do you make of his extended discussion of the difficulties that humanity had in developing language? In particular, how does this discussion relate to developing a political theory?
7. What do you make of his discussion of “pity” and “love?”
8. Take a close look at the first full paragraph on p 59. What is he saying here? Do you agree?
9. What questions arose for you as you worked through the material that you read for today? That is, what do you need clarified or what do you find worthy of further exploration?
10. POST-CLASS REFLECTIVE ESSAY [1-2 paragraphs]--What additional information, insight or perspective did you acquire from our work in class?