COURSE NUMBER AND TITLE
Course Number: PHIL 3553 - 27351
Title: Philosophy of Dreams

FACULTY
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COURSE OBJECTIVES
People have always been fascinated and mystified by dreams, and yet there is still no general consensus as to what they mean or why we have them. Interestingly enough, some of the most pioneering and intriguing writings on dreams have been supplied by philosophers. The purpose of this course is to familiarize students with philosophical topics related to dreams. Although dreaming is a subject that has become commonly associated with psychology and cognitive science, thinking of dreams as simply limited to these fields strips the topic of its proper metaphysical depth. This course will allow students to study questions and complex concepts that arise from examining dreams in a philosophical context. Even though philosophers have been interested in this topic since antiquity, writings about dreams are an often overlooked part of the history of philosophy. Furthermore, philosophical writing on dreams is currently a budding area of contemporary philosophy worthy of attention. By using dreams as our focal point, this course will give students the opportunity to study writings of both classic works of philosophy as well as recent publications. Students will probe into deep metaphysical questions about the nature of the self, the conscious and unconscious mind, phenomenology, and even moral responsibility.

This course will be divided into two components. We will begin by exploring the role of dreams in ancient cultures and religions and see how these cultural views influenced the ideas of famous philosophers. Some of the philosophers that we will study in this section of the course include Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Rene Descartes, and Friedrich Nietzsche. The first component will primarily focus on the writings of ancient and modern era philosophers who have used the topics of dreams as the impetus for philosophical speculation and inquiries. Through philosophical writings about dream-related topics, we will examine questions related to metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. The following are among questions that will be addressed during the first component of the course: Are dreams spiritual events or a naturally occurring phenomenon? Can we be moral/immoral in our dreams? Are we still ourselves when we dream? Can we distinguish reality from dreams?

After the midterm exam, the second component of the course will mostly involve contemporary writings. We will study the works of current philosophers that have written extensively about philosophical questions involving dreams. Philosophers that we will read during this part of the course include Owen Flanagan, Daniel Dennett, Antti
Revonsuo, Jonathan Ichikawa, Melanie Rosen and John Sutton. The questions that we will explore in this section of the course include: Are dreams adaptive or are they epiphenomenal? If dreams are not imbued with meaning or a clear evolutionary function, can they still provide self-knowledge and instances of identity expression? Are dreams conscious experiences that occur during sleep? Are dreams similar to hallucinations or are they more akin to intense daydreams? Do dreams involve real beliefs? Does consciousness disappear during deep sleep? What is the relationship between self-consciousness and dream states? During this component of the course, we will study 20th and 21st century philosophical works that overlap with ideas from psychology, evolutionary biology, and consciousness studies.

The course is a focused look at deep questions that the phenomenon of dreaming provokes. By the end of the course, students should have an increased understanding of the history of philosophy, popular moral theories, philosophical perplexities created by the subject of dreaming as well as the ability to evaluate and think critically about current philosophical writings about dreams.

**BRIEF COURSE OUTLINE**
Class will meet on Wednesday at 4:30-7:10 pm in Tulsa North Hall 248. It is critical that students read the assigned material and come to class prepared to discuss the topics. Students who are absent *for any reason* are responsible for finding out what they missed prior to the next class meeting. You are expected to have read the assigned material and worked through any assigned problems prior to the class meeting wherein it will be discussed. Philosophical readings can be challenging and dense. Make sure you allow yourself enough time to read (and possibly reread) all assigned material, and come to class with questions and comments about the readings. Class participation will also be factored into borderline grades, and productive discussion is highly encouraged. Writing assignments and links to online readings will be available on D2L and discussed in the classroom. A detailed reading schedule and assignment due dates are listed at the end of the syllabus.

**EXAMS AND MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS**

**Quizzes** - Although attendance will not be taken regularly, missing classes will affect your grade. There will be 12 pop quizzes given worth 10 points each. Quizzes are typically multiple choice questions given at the end of the class period. The lowest two quizzes will be dropped, and this includes missing a quiz due to absence. Thus, there is a total of 100 points possible for quiz grades. However, if you are absent due to a school-related function or you are in the ER, have death in the family, etc., and can provide documentation of this, I will allow you to make up the missed points.

**Writing Assignments** - There will be four short writing assignments. These writing assignments will be posted on D2L and discussed in class. These papers need to be in MLA format, double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins, and have a length of at least 3 pages per assignment (around 900-1000 words). These papers should cite the relevant readings frequently. Try to make your papers consist of 15-20% properly cited quotes from our assigned readings and include a work cited page. Contact me immediately if you have any questions about your papers or if you are having trouble
with them. I am always happy to look over rough drafts of your papers and provide feedback. Each writing assignment is worth up to 25 points, giving us a total of 100 points.

**Writing Assignment Topic 1 – Ancient Cultures and the Significance of Dreams in Religion and Philosophy.** This writing assignment will focus on the role dreams have to play in Vajrayana Buddhism and Plato’s *Phaedo*. We will compare and contrast the Eastern and Western philosophy by looking at the importance of dreams in Buddhism and the writings of Plato. This assignment will require citations from Sheldon Nahmod’s article *The Dream Motif in Phaedo* and conversations with the Dalai Lama from our textbook *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*.

**Writing Assignment Topic 2 – Morality in Dreams.** St. Augustine, in his work *Confessions*, worries about whether or not the content of his dreams should be immune from moral evaluation. In other words, Augustine is concerned that his immoral dreams might be sinful acts that require God’s forgiveness. Using virtue ethics, utilitarianism, and Kantian ethics, we will debate Augustine’s conclusion on the matter and familiarize ourselves with moral theories and their applications. For this assignment you will need to include citations from Augustine’s *Confessions* (Book 10; Chapter 30) and our textbook *Dreaming Souls* by Owen Flanagan.

**Writing Assignment Topic 3 – Freud and Plato: The Connective Tissue Between Ancient Greek Philosophy and Early Psychoanalysis.** This assignment will compare and contrast Freud’s theory of dreams and his three-part model of the psyche with Plato’s tripartite soul. Students will be asked to draw their own conclusions about the influence of philosophy on Freud and whether or not Freud’s theory of the mind should be considered science or ideology. This paper will require citations from our textbook *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying* and the online article *Dreams and the Psyche Through an Ancient Lens* by Katherine Joplin.

**Writing Assignment Topic 4 – The Function of Dreams.** Philosopher Owen Flanagan supports a neurophilosophical theory which claims that dreams serve no functional role; they are simply a side-effect of sleep. However, Flanagan argues that dreams can still inspire our creative capacities and give us insights into our character, even though they do not have an evolutionary function. Philosopher Antti Revonsuo supports an adaptationists theory of dreams. Revonsuo argues that dreams do enhance our chances of survival. Both theories will be evaluated. Challenging questions about the role of consciousness and dream mentation will need to be carefully considered. You will need to use *Dreaming Souls* for this paper.

**Research Paper** – One research paper will be required for this course. Since we will cover a wide range of dream-related materials, students will have the freedom to select an area that interests them, and research the topic of their choosing. Paper topics and thesis statements must be submitted and approved, prior to writing. Students will be required to meet with me, or at the very least, correspond through email, when discussing possible topics. Your final papers will need to be double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins, and have a recommended length of at least 6 pages. Research papers must also have a
bibliography with at least 5 sources cited. MLA is also the preferred format. The research paper is worth 100 points.

**Exams** - There will be two in-class exams during the semester. The midterm exam will be worth 100 points. The final exam will be worth 200 points. The exam format will include multiple choice, short answer, and brief essays. Thorough reviews will be given before each exam, and the final will be comprehensive.

**Extra Credit**- Optional dream journals may be done for extra credit. Have something to write with by your bed, and when you wake up, try to write down what you dreamed about during the course of the semester. Even if your dreams seem mundane or completely bizarre, write them down. You may find that your dream content connects to a theory or philosophical question that we cover in the course. At the end of the semester you can submit a paper and/or share in a discussion any insights you had from your dream journals (those that do not remember their dreams or do not wish to share them can do an alternative assignment for the bonus points). This assignment is worth up to 10 points of extra credit.

Total 600 points (610 points with extra credit)

**Grading Scale:**
- A = 600-540
- B = 539-480
- C= 479-420
- D = 419-360
- F = Below 360

**POLICY ON ATTENDANCE AND CHEATING**  
As mentioned, attendance will not be taken, although you take the chance of missing important information and quizzes, if you are absent. You may leave your phones on vibrate, in case of emergency, but please do not use them in class.

Oklahoma State University is committed to the maintenance of the highest standards of integrity and ethical conduct of its members. This level of ethical behavior and integrity will be maintained in this course. Participating in a behavior that violates academic integrity (e.g., unauthorized collaboration, plagiarism, multiple submissions, cheating on examinations, fabricating information, helping another person cheat, unauthorized advance access to examinations, altering or destroying the work of others, and fraudulently altering academic records) will result in your being sanctioned. Violations may subject you to disciplinary action including the following: receiving a failing grade on an assignment, examination or course, receiving a notation of a violation of academic integrity on your transcript (F!), and being suspended from the University. You have the right to appeal the charge. Contact the Office of Academic Affairs, 101 Whitehurst, 405-744-5627, academicintegrity.okstate.edu.

Students should know and understand the University's policies and procedures regarding academic dishonesty. Cheating is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

TEXT MATERIALS
Many of our readings will be available online, and links to those readings will be provided on D2L. You will also need to set up a free JSTOR account in order to access some of the readings. There are two required textbooks for the course.

Dreaming Souls: Sleep, Dreams, and the Evolution of the Conscious Mind, by Owen Flanagan
Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying: An Exploration of Consciousness with The Dalai Lama, edited by Francisco J. Varela

Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying is abbreviated as “SDD” and Dreaming Souls is abbreviated as “DS” on the reading schedule.

This reading schedule is subject to change.

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