

Steven G. Smith smithsg  
[home.millsaps.edu/smithsg](http://home.millsaps.edu/smithsg)  
Christian Center 11 ext. 1334  
Home phone 601-354-2290  
Office hours posted

Faith & Work/Philosophy/Religious Studies 2400  
THE MEANING OF WORK  
Fall 2009

“Once upon a time there was a person who didn’t have to do anything . . .”

Excuse me! Isn’t it the most obvious thing in the world that *we all* have to do a *lot*, and that any accurate portrayal of our lives has to reflect our working accomplishments and our experience of working?

But perhaps the second most obvious thing is that it’s not entirely clear *what* we have to do or *how* we should go about it. Work is inescapable—yet it’s negotiable, between us and the world and between ourselves.

Let’s do **the best job** we can, in one semester, of critically examining the available resources (especially, but not only, philosophical and religious resources) for thinking about the place of work in human life, and putting those resources to good use.

The course grade will be based on class participation and homework (20%), a Phenomenology of Work study (25%), a Constructive Essay (25%), and a take-home final exam (25%).

The required books for the course are:

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*  
Studs Terkel, *Working*  
Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*  
Charles Fishman, *The Wal-Mart Effect*

Additional assigned reading will be in handouts or online.

## SCHEDULE

subject to change by announcement

Aug. 25 Introduction to course. What do we need to understand about work?

Aug. 27 Introduction, cont. What are our values relating to work and leisure?  
READ: Bertrand Russell (handout)

Sept. 1 Classic sources in our conflicted culture: the Greeks

READ Plato & Aristotle (handout)

Sept. 3 Classics & conflict: the medievals

READ John of Salisbury, John Calvin, William Perkins (handout)

Sept. 8 Classics & conflict: the moderns

READ John Locke & Adam Smith (handout)

Sept. 10 Classics & conflict: the moderns, cont.

READ Karl Marx (handout)

Sept. 15 The phenomenology of contemporary work experience: ideals

READ Terkel 219-223 (Pommier), 293-298 (Dante), 390-393 (Quaal), 507-510 (Ruiz)

Sept. 17 The phenomenology of work: nightmares

READ Terkel 29-32 (Atkins), 164-168 (Grayson), 289-293 (Clements), 405-413 (Ross)

Sept. 22 Phenomenology of work + the evaluative perspective of Arendt's philosophical anthropology

READ Terkel xlv-xlix (Bates) + Arendt, Prologue & Chapter 1

Sept. 24 Arendt on the public and private realms

READ Arendt, Chap. 2 + Terkel xxxi-xxxviii (Lefevre)

Sept. 29 Arendt on labor

READ Arendt, Chap. 3 + Terkel 299-303 (Carter)

Oct. 1 Arendt on work

READ Arendt, Chap. 4 + Terkel 457-461 (Freeman)

Oct. 6 Arendt on action

READ Arendt, Chap. 5 + Terkel 527-531 (Sweeney)

Oct. 8 Arendt on where we are in the history of the active life

READ Arendt, Chap. 6

Oct. 13 PHENOMENOLOGY OF WORK STUDY DUE. Discussion

**SUMMERS LECTURE: Margaret A. Holmes** (Memphis Theological Seminary),  
**"Race and the Cosmos: An Invitation to View the World Differently"**

**11:30 a.m., Recital Hall**

Oct. 15 Responses to Phenomenology of Work Studies due.

READ Studies by group members

**FALL BREAK**

- Oct. 22 Scuffling in today's America: *Nickel and Dimed*.  
READ Ehrenreich, section 1
- Oct. 27 *Nickel and Dimed*, cont.  
READ Ehrenreich, sections 2 & 3
- Oct. 29 What is our "system"? Moral and technical principles  
READ Benjamin Franklin & Frederick Taylor (handout)
- Nov. 3 Capitalism: the "counterproject" of economic democracy  
READ David Schweickart & Robert Gilman (handout)
- Nov. 5 Capitalism: in defense  
READ Michael Novak (handout)
- Nov. 10 Capitalism: contemporary corporate power  
READ Fishman, Chaps. 1-4
- Nov. 12 Contemporary corporate power, cont.  
READ Fishman, Chaps. 5-8
- Nov. 17 Contemporary corporate power, cont.  
READ Fishman, Chap. 9 & Epilogue
- Nov. 19 Religious interpretations of work.  
READ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (online)
- Nov. 24 Religious interpretations, cont.  
READ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit* excerpts (handout)

CONSTRUCTIVE ESSAY DUE NOV. 25.

### **THANKSGIVING VACATION**

- Dec. 1 Religious interpretations, cont.  
READ Buddhist sources (handout)
- Dec. 3 Conclusion  
READ TBA
- Final exam due Dec. 8. Final Essay revision due Dec. 12.

## DAILY READING RESPONSES

To help you focus on the readings and set up fruitful class discussions, I require you to reflect briefly but thoughtfully in writing, in one or two substantial paragraphs, on some aspect of each day's reading assignment before that class. Your responses may be submitted by e-mail, placed on my office door, or handed in at the start of class. I may announce beforehand a question I'd like you to consider.

## GUIDELINES FOR THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF WORK STUDY

In the first segment of the course we will examine (1) a major collection of first-personal descriptions of American work experience, Studs Terkel's *Working*, and (2) a major theoretical proposal about the meanings of work, Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*, which offers help in evaluating the descriptive material. The Terkel material is now almost forty years old. We recognize that it belongs to our world, but we also recognize that our world is changing. Your assignment is to extend and update our Terkel/Arendt study by collecting fresh descriptions from *two* workers in *dissimilar* lines of work. Your paper will consist of (1) a 4-5 pp. descriptive part with extensive quotations from your Terkelian interviews, and (2) a 2-3 pp. interpretive conclusion relating Arendt's categories of labor, work, and action to your material.

We'll discuss in class how to choose interview subjects and elicit helpful content from them.

Once the interviews are written up, we will synthesize our results in class and discuss what they imply generally about the realities of work in the contemporary world.

## GUIDELINES FOR THE CONSTRUCTIVE ESSAY

This 6-8 pp. paper will be devoted to a work-related conceptual issue. It will be a reasoned position paper. You might be interested in taking a closer look at, for example —

A certain tradition of reflection on work (e.g. Muslim, Marxist, Randian) or a certain thinker who has made a major contribution to reflection on work (e.g. Durkheim, Taylor, Weil)

The organization of work, and justice issues related to that (e.g. Is there a right to work? Is there a supreme value in being one's own boss?)

The effects of technology on human work experience

Efforts to draw a guiding distinction between work and play

How different forms of work are valued differently

Concepts of "job," "career," "profession," "vocation" etc.

How the “needs” assumed by work tasks are defined

Virtues and vices specific to workers

Strategies used in the pictorial and narrative representation of work

How a political or religious ideal might entail a significant change in the ordinary evaluation of work (e.g. democracy, ecological sustainability, no-self)

Criticism of prevalent work notions from a feminist perspective or the perspective of another culture

Your paper needs three main components:

1. *Introduction*: Explain the work-related issue(s) that your study addresses and make it apparent why your choice of materials is appropriate.
2. *Exposition*: Hold a useful focus on your issue and present relevant material selectively. Don't make yourself responsible for too much. Don't support a large thesis haphazardly. Insofar as you deal with texts, be sure you explain the *reasoning* of an author and/or the *logic* of a text; don't merely state an author's view or summarize a text's contents.
3. *Conclusion*: Offer reasoned conclusions that are your own. Don't just pontificate. Don't just agree or disagree with an author.

You will have an opportunity to revise this paper, but don't turn it in as a rough draft. The paper is expected to have a fully developed argument, to be free of writing and typography errors, and to employ correct citation with a complete bibliography.

#### A SELECTION OF SIGNIFICANT WRITINGS ON WORK

Some lists I've developed are posted under “Resources” on the Avodah Institute site:  
<http://www.avodahinstitute.com/resources/books/meaningsofwork.shtml>

More recent works of note:

Alain de Botton, *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work* (New York: Pantheon, 2009)

Matthew B. Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*  
(New York: Penguin, 2009)

Also see Chap. 3, “Work,” of my book *Worth Doing* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

## SOME COURSE RULES

1. ***Class Attendance.*** Being in class, being engaged with the work of the class, and behaving courteously are all expected. One discourtesy to avoid is coming into class late. Better late than never, definitely; but lateness counts as half an absence.

One percent of the course grade will be lost for each absence from class **for any reason**, beginning with the third absence. (For example, someone who missed class 7 times would thereby lose 5% of the course grade, or half a letter grade.) The reason for this: our in-class work is a crucial and irreplaceable part of the substance of the course.

2. ***Late papers.*** Written assignments turned in late will lose a letter grade or equivalent. Homework may not be turned in more than one week after its due date. No work of any kind will be accepted after the last day of final examinations. Exceptions to this policy will only be granted to the victims of unforeseeable and uncontrollable circumstances.

3. ***As a general rule, no e-mail submissions.*** Unless the instructor allows it under specified circumstances (as with the daily reading responses), e-mail submissions of assigned writing are not accepted.

4. ***Plagiarism.*** Using the words or ideas of others without acknowledgment—that is, passing them off as your own—is a fraudulent practice called plagiarism. It also misses one of the main points of being in college, which is to develop your powers of thought and expression. Plagiarized work will receive no credit and will be referred to the college Honor Council.

5. ***Incompletes.*** An “Incomplete” grade for the course will only be given to students who, due to unforeseen and uncontrollable circumstances, find themselves unable to complete course requirements during the term and can reasonably be expected to complete them within a few weeks after the term's end. The “Incomplete” must be requested and appropriately justified *before* the end of final examinations.

6. ***Disabilities.*** Students with documented disabilities should discuss their needs with the instructor at the beginning of the semester.

## ACADEMIC HONOR CODE of MILLSAPS COLLEGE

Millsaps College is an academic community dedicated to the pursuit of scholarly inquiry and intellectual growth. The foundation of this community is a spirit of personal honesty and mutual trust. Through their Honor Code, the students of Millsaps College affirm their adherence to these basic ethical principles.

An Honor Code is not simply a set of rules and procedures governing students' academic conduct. It is an opportunity to put personal responsibility and integrity into action. When students agree to abide by an Honor Code, they liberate themselves to pursue their academic goals in an atmosphere of mutual confidence and respect.

The success of the Code depends on the support of each member of the community. Students and faculty alike commit themselves in their work to the principles of academic honesty. When they become aware of infractions, both students and faculty are obligated to report them to the Honor Council, which is responsible for enforcement.

The pledge signed by all students upon entering the College is as follows:

**As a Millsaps College student, I hereby affirm that I understand the Honor Code and am aware of its implications and of my responsibility to the Code. In the interests of expanding the atmosphere of respect and trust in the College, I promise to uphold the Honor Code and I will not tolerate dishonest behavior in myself or in others.**

Each examination, quiz, or other assignment that is to be graded will carry the written pledge: "**I hereby certify that I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment. (Signature)**" The abbreviation "Pledged" followed by the student's signature has the same meaning and may be acceptable on assignments other than final examinations.

It is the responsibility of students and faculty to report offenses to the Honor Code Council in the form of a written report. This account must be signed, the accusation explained in as much detail as possible, and submitted to the Dean of the College.

### The Honor Council, 2009-2010

Students:

Brooke Furrh, Chair  
Amanda Smith, Vice Chair  
Oliver Galicki, Sergeant at Arms  
Lamees El-Sadek  
Mark Herndon  
Sameer Goel

Faculty:

Dr. Rachel Heard, Faculty Secretary  
Ms. Ashleigh Powers  
Dr. Susan Taylor