



FORDHAM UNIVERSITY
THE JESUIT UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Philosophy of Human Nature (PHIL 1000-R03/EP1)
Professor: Christopher R. Myers (cmyers18@fordham.edu)
Fordham University, Fall 2023
Keating Hall 105: TWF 12:30-1:20
Office Hours (Collins Hall B26): WF 3:00-5:00 or by appt.



In this course we will analyze human nature through a variety of philosophical perspectives. We will read the writing of men and women from diverse backgrounds and time periods, all in an effort to consider some of the questions that human beings have continually been brought back to over the course of history. What is unique about human life? What is possible for us? Can we ever become truly free? Can we achieve legitimate knowledge about the world around us? Can we live with one another in a truly just society?

What is the nature of our relations with one another? What is the nature of our relations with ourselves?

Course objectives:

We will be discussing texts from a wide array of time periods and philosophical schools of thought, and it is expected that you will read the assigned materials carefully and thoughtfully. The aims of this course include the following:

- To acquire an understanding of some of the basic problems of human nature in western philosophy
- To cultivate the skills required to interpret, critique, and construct philosophical arguments
- To learn to participate in philosophical discussion, including skills in listening and speaking
- To develop the skills required to form philosophical arguments and positions through writing

Additionally this is an EP (*Eloquentia Perfecta*) course, which means it is writing- and speaking-intensive. We will work to develop your ability to form philosophical arguments in writing and speech, and this is reflected in the course structure below.

Required texts:

- Augustine: *On Free Choice of the Will* Hackett 1993 (Trans. Williams)
- Descartes: *Meditations on First Philosophy* Hackett 1999 (Trans. Cress)
- Plato: *Five Dialogues* Hackett 2002 (Trans. Grube)

Course requirements:

[1] Attendance/participation	15%
[2] Textual analysis coursework	15%
[3] Class presentations (2x)	10%
[4] Midterm exam	15%
[5] Midterm paper (6-8 pages)	15%
[6] Final exam	15%
[7] Final paper (6-8 pages)	15%

[1] Attendance/participation

I will take attendance at the beginning of each class. You are allowed two unexcused absences before I must start taking points away from your overall attendance/participation grade. I will excuse an absence for a religious holiday, a serious illness, a death in your immediate family, or your participation in a university-sponsored holiday. To get an absence excused, you must send me a formal, written explanation *before* the class in question.

Your attendance grade is also dependent on (a) your active participation during class time, and (b) your bringing all required reading materials to class (either by physical copy or computer access). Concerning class participation: I expect that you will follow along during lectures, give others your full attention when it is their time to speak, and contribute your own thoughts during discussion. Philosophy has everything to do with discussion – it is not by accident that this course includes ample time for group discussion. Listen attentively, keep an open mind, and contribute what you think.

[2] Textual analysis coursework

Every week this semester you must contribute to our class' textual analysis coursework in the 'Discussions' section of the course Blackboard page. More specifically, every week you must (a) contribute one analysis of a passage, claim, or concept from the assigned text (at least 200 words) and (b) respond to one of your classmates' textual analyses (at least 50 words).

Your textual analyses must meet the minimum word requirement (200 words) and follow the instructions on our 'Guide for Textual Analysis Coursework' handout. The aim of these analyses is to engage more deeply with the readings. You can write on anything from the text—for example, you might focus on a particular passage, an argument, a concept, or you might pursue a thought that was prompted by what the author discusses—but in every case your task is to first clarify the author's reasoning, and *then* reflect on it. When you comment on a classmate's textual

analysis, moreover, your task is to respond in such a way that you contribute new questions, additional thoughts, or new conclusions to the discussion they have already started. I want these textual analysis discussions to be enjoyable to write (and read!), so challenge yourself and see what new thoughts you can produce.

[3] Class presentations

This semester each of you is required to do *two* in-class presentations. Your task with these presentations is simple: choose a 1-2 sentence passage from the reading that you think gets to the heart of what our author is arguing, and then analyze it. What does 'analyze' a passage mean? First, contextualize your passage by giving a summary of the reading. What is today's reading about? What is the subject matter and central claim of this reading? Where does the passage in question appear? Second, define and clarify the key concepts in the passage. What do these concepts mean? Third, clarify the claim that is being made in this passage. What position is our author defending here? What reasons do they make for this claim? Finally, raise some questions about this claim. Why might someone disagree with this claim? (How *could* someone disagree with this claim?) What 'grey areas' are left unresolved by our author's reasoning?

This will take place at the beginning of the class period, and should run for at least 7 minutes. You will be graded on the accuracy of your presentation, the quality of your delivery, and your ability to answer questions from the class.

I have assigned the presentations randomly across the semester (see our class' 'Presentation Schedule'). You may exchange the date of your assigned presentation with another student in the class, provided both parties agree and you let me know at least a week in advance.

[4] Midterm exam + [6] Final exam

This course includes two in-class exams: one midway through the semester, and one at the end of the semester. The midterm exam will test your comprehension of the readings up to that point in the class. The final exam will test your comprehension of all of the semester's readings. Both will include multiple-choice questions, true/false questions, and short answer questions. I will provide more details on these exams as we get closer to them... but let me reassure you that that these exams will not be aimed at tricking you. The purpose of these exams is to test your understanding of the most central points and claims in our readings.

[5] Midterm paper (6-8 pages) + [7] Final paper (6-8 pages)

Over the course of the semester you are required to a midterm paper and a final paper. The purpose of these papers is to improve your philosophical writing – they are opportunities for you to practice reconstructing philosophical arguments from the text, and developing your own evaluations of these arguments. These papers must be 5-6 pages (12 font, double-spaced). I will give you the prompt for each paper at least two weeks in advance.

Course policies:

Late penalty policy:

For every day (weekend days included) that a paper is late, that paper will be penalized. If you suspect that you will not be able to turn a paper in on time, reach out to me *at least 24 hours in advance* and we can talk about extending the deadline. I am considerably generous about extending paper deadlines - but I will not extend deadlines *immediately before the deadline*. (Unfortunately reading reflections cannot be submitted late.)

Technology policy:

During class time you are permitted to use a computer, laptop, or tablet. Your use of these devices is restricted to class use, however, and I expect that you will not allow these devices to divert your attention or the attention of others away from discussion. Remember: this course revolves around active discussion and participation. If your use of electronic devices inhibits class discussion, I reserve the right to adjust our technology policy accordingly.

Academic integrity:

All students are expected to abide by the rules of academic integrity as laid out in the Fordham Handbook. This especially includes plagiarism. Any assignment that is found to have involved plagiarism will automatically receive a failing grade. Furthermore, your professors (including me) are obliged to automatically report all cases of plagiarism to the Dean. With this in mind, it's a good idea to familiarize yourself with what qualifies as plagiarism.

The Fordham Handbook defines plagiarism as follows: "Plagiarism occurs when individuals attempt to present as their own what has come from another source. Plagiarism takes place whether such theft is accidental or deliberate." In a nutshell, plagiarism involves taking credit for someone else's work in one's own writing – intentionally or unintentionally. Plagiarism might mean copying an idea or quotation exactly as it is written elsewhere (in a book, online article, Chat GPT, a newspaper, etc.), paraphrasing an idea or quotation without properly including a citation, or using an idea that is not your own without citing the author(s) of this idea. To avoid plagiarism make sure you properly cite the sources you use. If you're unsure of whether you are properly citing something, come and ask me before you submit the assignment. Stay on the safe side.

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ChatGPT and GenerativeAI policy::

ChatGPT is capable of many things, but ChatGPT is not you! Having a bot answer

questions or generate essays is not the same as working out your own thoughts. This semester our class will adhere to three guidelines concerning AI technology: (1) If you use ChatGPT/GenAI in any way, you *must* cite it—that is to say, you must cite the AI technology you used, indicate what prompt you gave it, and indicate how you revised it. (2) Submitting ChatGPT/GenAI products without citation is a violation of Fordham’s academic integrity policies. Specifically, it is a form of plagiarism and outsourcing. I will follow our plagiarism policy accordingly. (3) ChatGPT/GenAI are tools and they are here to stay—so we will keep our channels of communication open about their advantages and the best frameworks in which to deploy them. Additionally, we will use the reading skills we develop in this class to reflect critically *on* information that ChatGPT/GenAI provide about the history of philosophy. We will do this during class time, but you might consider doing this also in your textual analyses.

Students with special needs and/or disabilities:

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Fordham University. If you believe that you have a disability that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, classwork, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule a meeting to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services (Phone number: 718-817- 0655). (Locations: Lincoln Center – Lowenstein, Room 207; Rose Hill - O’Hare Hall, Lower Level).

Further study in philosophy

If you enjoy the material we study in this course, you should consider a minor or major in philosophy. The minor requires 6 courses, including the 2 core courses, ‘Philosophy of Human Nature’ and ‘Philosophical Ethics’—so at the end of this course you’ll already be on your way. Gabelli students can also count their BLBU 3443 Ethics in Business course towards the minor as well. The major requires ten total courses, including the two core courses. Philosophy works very well as a complement to other disciplines across the humanities, social sciences, and sciences, so you could also think about double-majoring.

For further information on the major and minor, you can contact the Department Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies: Professor Gschwandtner (gschwandtner@fordham.edu).

Reading Schedule:

[Any readings that are not in the required texts will be available on Blackboard. They are marked below with an asterisk (*)]

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reading:</u>	<u>Notes:</u>
Wednesday Aug. 30 th	(Introduction)	
Friday Sept. 1 st	--- No class ---	
Tuesday Sept. 5 th	Higgins: 'Post-Truth, a Guide for the Perplexed'* + Peters: 'Education in a Post-Truth World'*	

The human being and reality: truth, knowledge, and perception

Wednesday Sept. 6 th	--- No class ---	
Friday Sept. 8 th	Plato: <i>Apology</i>	
Tuesday Sept. 12 th	Plato: <i>Meno</i> , 70a-80e	
Wednesday Sept. 13 th	Plato: <i>Meno</i> , 80e-86d	
Friday Sept. 15 th	Plato: <i>Meno</i> , 86d-100b	
Tuesday Sept. 19 th	Plato: <i>Republic</i> , Selections (Bk. 6 504d4- Bk. 7 521a8)*	
Wednesday Sept. 20 th	Plato: <i>Republic</i> , Selections (Bk. 6 504d4- Bk. 7 521a8)*	
Friday Sept. 22 nd	--- No class ---	
Tuesday Sept. 26 th	(Philosophical writing discussion)	
Wednesday Sept. 27 th	Aristotle: <i>Metaphysics</i> , Selections (Bk. 1 Ch. 1-3)*	
Friday Sept. 29 th	Aristotle: <i>De Anima</i> , Selections (Bk. 1 Ch.1, Bk. 2 Ch. 1-3, 5)*	
Tuesday Oct. 3 rd	Aristotle: <i>De Anima</i> , Selections (Bk. 1 Ch.1, Bk. 2 Ch. 1-3, 5)*	

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reading:</u>	<u>Notes:</u>
Wednesday Oct. 4 th	Mills: "But What Are You Really?", The Metaphysics of Race', p. 41-50*	
Friday Oct. 6 th	Augustine: <i>Free Choice of the Will</i> , Book One	Midterm paper assigned
Tuesday Oct. 10 th	Augustine: <i>Free Choice of the Will</i> , Book Two (p. 29-49)	
Wednesday Oct. 11 th	Augustine: <i>Free Choice of the Will</i> , Book Two (p. 49-69)	
Friday Oct. 13 th	Descartes: <i>Meditations</i> , Letter of Dedication, Meditations One-Two	
Tuesday Oct. 17 th	Descartes: <i>Meditations</i> , Meditation Two-Three	
Wednesday Oct. 18 th	Descartes: <i>Meditations</i> , Meditation Three-Four	
Friday Oct. 20 th	Descartes: <i>Meditations</i> , Meditation Four + Descartes' correspondence with Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia*	Midterm paper due
Tuesday Oct. 24 th	Kuhn: <i>Structure of Scientific Revolutions</i> , p. 160-173*	
Wednesday Oct. 25 th	(Review session)	
Friday Oct. 27 th	>> Midterm exam <<	

The human being and others: justice, identity, and critique

Tuesday Oct. 31 st	Plato: <i>Crito</i>
Wednesday Nov. 1 st	Plato: <i>Republic</i> , Selections (Bk. 4 419a – 445e)*
Friday Nov. 3 rd	Aristotle: <i>Politics</i> , Selections (Bk. 1 Ch. 1-4, Bk. 2 Ch. 1-5)*
Tuesday Nov. 7 th	Aristotle: <i>Politics</i> , Selections (Bk. 3 Ch. 1-5)*

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reading:</u>	<u>Notes:</u>
Wednesday Nov. 8 th	Rousseau: <i>Discourse on Inequality</i> , Selections (p. 43-48, 49-51, 54-57, 59-61, 70-76)*	
Friday Nov. 10 th	Rousseau: <i>Discourse on Inequality</i> , Selections (p. 84-101)	
Tuesday Nov. 14 th	Kant: "Was ist Aufklärung?"*	
Wednesday Nov. 15 th	Rachels' 'The Challenge of Cultural Relativism'*	
Friday Nov. 17 th	Nietzsche: <i>Unfashionable Observations</i> , 'On the Utility and Liability of History for Life' (p. 85-96)*	
Tuesday Nov. 21 st	Nietzsche: <i>Unfashionable Observations</i> , 'On the Utility and Liability of History for Life' (p. 96-108)*	
Wednesday Nov. 22 nd	--- No class ---	
Friday Nov. 24 th	--- No class ---	
Tuesday Nov. 28 th	Arendt: 'Understanding and Politics'*	
Wednesday Nov. 29 th	Césaire: <i>Discourse on Colonialism</i> , p. 31-53*	
Friday Dec. 1 st	Beauvoir: <i>Second Sex</i> , 'Introduction' (p. 3-17)*	
Tuesday Dec. 5 th	Butler: 'Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's <i>Second Sex</i> '	
Wednesday Dec. 6 th	Guenther: 'Beyond De- humanization: A Posthumanist Critique of Intensive Confinement'*	
Friday Dec. 8 th	[OPEN]	
Friday Dec. 15 th	--- No class ---	Final paper due
TBD	>> Final exam <<	