



FORDHAM UNIVERSITY
THE JESUIT UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Philosophy of Human Nature (PHIL 1000-R03-EP1)

Instructor: Christopher R. Myers, PhD (cm Myers28@fordham.edu)

Fordham University, Fall 2026

Keating Hall Rm 204: TWF 10:30am-11:20am

Office Hours (Collins Hall Rm 121): TW 4:00pm-6:00pm 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 relationships with one another? What is the nature of our relationship with ourselves?

Course Objectives:

We will be discussing texts from a wide variety 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](#). Trans. Williams. Hackett, 1993. [ISBN#: 978-0872201880]
- Descartes, René. [Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy](#). Trans. Cress. Hackett 1999. [ISBN#: 978-0872204201]
- Plato. [Five Dialogues](#). Trans. Grube. Hackett 2002. [ISBN#: 978-0872206335]

Course Requirements:

[1] Attendance/Participation	10%
[2] Coursework (on Blackboard)	20%
[3] Class Presentation	10%
[4] Reading Quizzes (5 Total)	25%
[5] Midterm Writing Exam	17.5%
[6] Final Writing Exam	17.5%

[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: our in-person class meetings will be devoted *entirely (100%)* to discussion about the assigned readings, and this means that your active participation during class time is absolutely essential. My expectation is that you will not only maintain strong attendance throughout the semester, but also contribute your thoughts during class discussions and act respectfully toward your classmates. Listen thoughtfully, keep an open mind, and contribute what you think. Philosophy is most worthwhile when it is enlivened by discussion and exchange.

[2] Coursework (on Blackboard)

Every week this semester you must contribute to our class's coursework discussions in the 'Discussions' section of the course Blackboard page. More specifically, every week you must (a) submit a discussion post which identifies a passage from the assigned reading and contributes a reflection on it (at least 150 words); and also (b) respond to one of your classmates' discussion posts with a substantive response, follow-up question, counter-reading, or objection (at least 150 words).

Your discussion posts must be submitted before 5:00pm on the day of your selected reading, and these posts must follow the instructions laid out in our 'Guide for Coursework on Blackboard' handout (including the minimum word requirements above). Your discussion post should begin by quoting a 1-2 sentence passage from

the text (with page number). Then you should proceed to reflect on and analyze the passage in a way that stays anchored to the exact wording of the passage, and raises a reflective question or consideration of your own. You can choose any passage from the text—for example, you might focus on a particular claim, example, or concept—but in every case your task is to first clarify our author's reasoning, and then reflect *on* it by raising a question or problem (hint: try applying our author's reasoning to a real-world example). When you comment on a classmate's coursework paragraph, moreover, it is not enough to simply agree with their reflection or repeat their reasoning back to them. Push the conversation forward by reflecting on your classmate's question and offering a response or raising a new question or concern. I want these coursework discussions to be enjoyable to write (and read!), so challenge yourself and see what new thoughts you can produce.

[3] Class Presentation

This semester each of you is required to do one in-class presentation. Your presentation will take place at the beginning of class (following our warm-up discussion), and should run for at least 8 minutes, not including the time for discussion afterward.

The purpose of these class presentations is to provide an overview of our author's argument in the text, and then analyze a 1-2 sentence passage from the reading that you think gets to the heart of this argument. You should start with a brief summary of the assigned reading (1 or 2 minutes), and then turn to analyze your selected passage (which you will have written on the board). Please consult our class' 'Guide for Class Presentations' handout for more detailed information and requirements.

You will be graded on the accuracy of your presentation, the quality of your delivery, and your ability to lead class discussion. 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] Reading Quizzes (5 Total)

If you look at our reading schedule below, you will see that there are five reading quizzes scattered over the course of the semester. These quizzes will be short, and they will only include questions about the general features of our readings: main arguments, key concepts, etc. We'll talk more about these reading quizzes as we approach them. But if you are completing the assigned readings, reviewing our class PP presentations, and participating in class discussions, you have nothing to worry about.

[5] Midterm Writing Exam + [6] Final Writing Exam

We will have two writing exams this semester: a midterm writing exam (Friday Oct. 16th) and a final writing exam (Friday Dec. 11th). The purpose of these writing exams is to demonstrate your comprehension of the main philosophical positions of our class, as well as your ability to compare and evaluate these positions. These writing

exams will be conducted in class and they must be written in line with the requirements laid out in the provided writing prompts. I will provide the writing prompt for each of these exams 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 coursework paragraphs 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) Uses of ChatGPT/GenAI without citation will be penalized. Submitting ChatGPT/GenAI products without citation is a violation of Fordham’s academic integrity policies—specifically, it is a form of plagiarism and outsourcing. (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 coursework paragraphs.

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 Specker-Sullivan (lspeckersullivan@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. 26 th	(Introduction to Philosophy of Human Nature)	
Friday Aug. 28 th	The Guardian: "Post-Truth Named Word of the Year by Oxford Dictionaries"* & McIntyre: <i>Post-Truth</i> , pp. 1-15*	

THE HUMAN BEING AND REALITY: TRUTH, KNOWLEDGE, PERSPECTIVE

Ancient philosophy and the search for a truth beyond death

Tuesday Sept. 1 st	Plato: <i>Apology</i>	
Wednesday Sept. 2 nd	(Unknown): <i>Katha Upanishads</i> Selections*	
Friday Sept. 4 th	Laozi: <i>Daodejing</i> Selections*	
Tuesday Sept. 8 th	Plato: <i>Meno</i> , 70a-80e	
Wednesday Sept. 9 th	Plato: <i>Meno</i> , 80e-86d	
Friday Sept. 11 th	Plato: <i>Republic</i> , Selections (Bk. 6 504d4 - Bk. 7 521a8)*	
Tuesday Sept. 15 th	Plato: <i>Republic</i> , Selections (Bk. 6 504d4 - Bk. 7 521a8)*	
Wednesday Sept. 16 th	Aristotle: <i>Metaphysics</i> , Selections (Bk. 1 Ch. 1-3, 6, 9)*	
Friday Sept. 18 th	Aristotle: <i>De Anima</i> , Selections (Bk. 1 Ch.1, Bk. 2 Ch. 1-3, 5)*	
Tuesday Sept. 22 nd	Spelman: "Woman as Body"*	Reading Quiz #1
Consciousness and the subjective turn of modern philosophy		
Wednesday Sept. 23 rd	Augustine: <i>Free Choice of the Will</i> , Book One	

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reading:</u>	<u>Notes:</u>
Friday Sept. 25 th	Augustine: <i>Free Choice of the Will</i> , Book Two (p. 29-49)	
Tuesday Sept. 29 th	Augustine: <i>Free Choice of the Will</i> , Book Two (p. 49-69)	
Wednesday Sept. 30 th	Descartes: <i>Meditations</i> , Letter of Dedication & Meditations One-Two	
Friday Oct. 2 nd	Descartes: <i>Meditations</i> , Meditations Two-Three	
Tuesday Oct. 6 th	Descartes: <i>Meditations</i> , Meditations Three-Four	
Wednesday Oct 7 th	Nagel: "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?"*	
Friday Oct. 9 th	-- No class meeting ---	
Tuesday Oct. 13 th	-- No class meeting ---	
Wednesday Oct 14 th	(Discussion about philosophical writing)	Reading Quiz #2
Friday Oct. 16 th	-- Midterm Writing Exam --	

THE HUMAN BEING AND OTHERS: JUSTICE, VALUE, TIME, CRITIQUE

Power and justice in ancient and modern civilization

Tuesday Oct. 20 th	Plato: <i>Crito</i>
Wednesday Oct 21 st	Confucius: <i>Analects</i> Selections*
Friday Oct. 23 rd	Mbiti: <i>African Religions and Philosophy</i> pp. 1-5 & 15-28*
Tuesday Oct. 27 th	Plato: <i>Republic</i> , Selections (Bk. 4 419a-445e)*
Wednesday Oct. 28 th	Plato: <i>Republic</i> , Selections (Bk. 4 419a-445e)*
Friday Oct. 30 th	Aristotle: <i>Politics</i> , Selections (Bk. 1 Ch. 1-4, Bk. 2 Ch. 1-5)*

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reading:</u>	<u>Notes:</u>
Tuesday Nov. 3 rd	Aristotle: <i>Politics</i> , Selections (Bk. 3 Ch. 1-5)*	
Wednesday Nov. 4 th	Rousseau: <i>Discourse on Inequality</i> , Selections pp. 43-51, 54-57, 59-61, 69-75*	
Friday Nov. 6 th	Rousseau: <i>Discourse on Inequality</i> , Selections pp. 84-101*	
Enlightenment and the critique of rationality		
Tuesday Nov. 10 th	Kant: "Was ist Aufklärung?"*	Reading Quiz #3
Wednesday Nov. 11 th	Kant: "Was ist Aufklärung?"*	
Friday Nov. 13 th	Marx: "Alienated Labor", pp. 58-72*	
Tuesday Nov. 17 th	Nietzsche: <i>Joyful Science</i> Selections & <i>Will to Power</i> Selections*	
Wednesday Nov. 18 th	Freud: <i>Civilization and its Discontents</i> , Selections pp. 722-742 & 753-756*	
Friday Nov. 20 th	Césaire: <i>Discourse on Colonialism</i> , Selections pp. 31-53*	
Tuesday Nov. 24 th	Beauvoir: <i>Second Sex</i> , "Introduction"*	
Wednesday Nov. 25 th	-- No class meeting ---	
Friday Nov. 27 th	-- No class meeting ---	
Tuesday Dec. 1 st	Arendt: <i>Eichmann in Jerusalem</i> , "Postscript" pp. 280-298*	
Wednesday Dec. 2 nd	(OPEN)	
Friday Dec. 4 th	(OPEN)	Reading Quiz #4
Tuesday Dec. 8 th	(Philosophy of Human Nature trivia game)	
Friday Dec. 11 th	-- Reading Quiz #5 --	
	-- Final Writing Exam --	