Philosophy of Human Nature  
(Updated 2/11/2015)

Spring 2015 | 9:30-10:20 am TWf | Keating Hall 205

Instructor Information

Instructor
Justin Reppert

Email & Phone
jreppert@fordham.edu  
(904) 316-0655

Office Location & Hours
Collins B7; 3:00-5:00pm T and by appointment. Sign up for appointments at jreppertofficehours.youcanbook.me

General Information

Description
This course is a philosophical investigation into central questions of human nature, tracing the outlines of some of the Western tradition's most influential answers to the questions: "What can we know?" and "What are we?" We will focus on the relationship between these two questions and attempt to identify the implicit answers underlying our own beliefs. In this way, we will begin to appreciate the relevance of philosophical inquiry to our lives.

We may adjust the direction and pace of the course to fit our needs and interests as the semester progresses. Specific questions we might ask are:

- What is the difference between knowledge and true belief?
- Are there limits to human knowledge?
- Do we have free will?
- Does God exist?
- Are we the same people now that we were when we were infants?
- Should we ever believe that an unusual event is in fact a miracle?
- Will a future physics be able to completely explain and describe human beings?
- Is it possible for a computer to think?
- Can we continue to exist after our bodies die?

We will practice approaching these general, foundational, and often difficult questions with rigor and care, stating our ideas precisely and evaluating reasons offered for and against competing answers. The thoughtfulness and precision we will strive for in this course (involving some of the so-called "critical thinking skills") are of demonstrable value in many human endeavors, not just philosophy.

Objectives
A primary goal of this course is to train students in intellectual skills and virtues through an introduction to some of the central problems in philosophy. Students should:

- Cultivate a love for wisdom and the desire to question.
- Recognize and articulate what is at stake in conflicting accounts of human nature.
- Develop the ability to distinguish forms of thought that are truth-preserving from forms that are erroneous or misleading.
- Learn to read closely, charitably, and in a way that seeks understanding of the subject matter, even when texts are difficult or far from our own points of view.
- Improve the ability to share in understanding through dialogue and effective writing.
Course Materials

Required Texts


Other Required Readings

Most of the required readings will be posted on Blackboard. You are expected to bring a printed copy of each reading to class with you on the day on which it is assigned.

Course Policies

Participation

Conversation is central to the practice of philosophy. Everyone, no matter how bored, shy, or sensitive, must participate in class. Boredom, shyness, and sensitivity are often self-perpetuating problems. If you are bored, often the best thing to do is say that you are bored and point out what bores you; if you are offended, let us know how we have offended you. If shyness or anxiety prevents you from actively contributing in class on a regular basis, please let me know; we can work together to make it possible for you to contribute to the discussion even if you are not comfortable speaking up during class.

I expect you to work together to maintain charitable and engaging discussions in class. It is fine to be critical of an idea, but be careful about directing that criticism toward a person. Actually look at all sides of each question, be comfortable exploring the limits of your own view, and be willing to change your mind when the evidence supports it.

Attendance

I will excuse all absences that are officially excused by your dean; I am unlikely to excuse absences that are not officially excused. I advise you to familiarize yourself with the FCRH and GSB student attendance policy: http://www.fordham.edu/student_affairs/deans_of_students_an/student_handbooks/rose_hill_student_ha/university_offices/academic_affairs/student_attendance_p_72157.asp

More than six unexcused absences will result in failure of the course. I reserve the right to mark tardy students as absent if the tardiness is severe or recurring. If you miss a quiz due to an unexcused absence, you will receive a zero for that quiz. If you miss a quiz due to an excused absence, that quiz will simply not count toward your grade.

Communication

If you ask for help, I am glad to provide it; that’s the essence of my job. I will respond to your e-mails by 5:00 pm on the weekday after I receive them. You can also reach me by phone (not text) at (904) 316-0655. You are welcome to come talk to me during office hours, though students who sign up for office hours online at jrofficehours.youcanbook.me have priority.

Electronic Devices

Philosophy requires listening and speaking. In order to facilitate active conversation in class, you may not use electronic devices in class. Please make sure that phones, laptops, Baby Think it Overs, etc., are either not with you or turned off and out of sight during class. After you violate this policy twice, I will reduce your final grade by onethird of a letter grade for each subsequent violation. Note that I will not notify you if I see that you have an electronic device out, but will simply make a notation for my own records.
Submitting Assignments

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day assigned. At the top of each assignment put the word count, your Fordham ID Number (available on my.fordham.edu), my name, and the date. Do not put your name on written assignments. This helps facilitate a blind grading policy that reduces the effect of grader bias. I will have you submit some writing assignments electronically through Turnitin; instructions for creating a Turnitin account will be e-mailed to you near the beginning of the semester.

Late assignments will be docked one letter grade per day (not class meeting) they are late. Computer problems do not excuse late assignments.

Academic Integrity

I advise you to familiarize yourself with Fordham’s academic integrity policy: http://www.fordham.edu/info/21684/regulations/3695/the_fordham_university_undergraduate_policy_on_academic_integrity

Any assignment with plagiarized material will receive a zero, will be reported to your dean, and may result in failure of this course. If you are unsure about what Fordham’s standards of academic integrity require of you, please see me before submitting an assignment. In particular, note the following discussion on plagiarism from Fordham’s academic integrity policy:

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. It is no defense to claim that one has “forgotten” to document ideas or material taken from another source.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

i. Using the ideas of another person, whether or not such ideas are paraphrased, from whatever source including oral, print, broadcast, or computer-mediated communication;

ii. Rewriting borrowed material by simply dropping a word here and there, substituting a few words for others, or moving around words or sentence;

iii. Presenting borrowed material, whether a phrase, sentence, or whole paragraphs without placing quotation marks around the borrowed material in the approved style;

iv. Presenting, as one’s own an assignment, paper, or computer program partially or wholly prepared by another person, whether by another student, friend, or by a business or on-line service that sells or distributes such papers and programs;

v. Failing to use proper citation for information obtained from print sources or the Internet, according to citation criteria specified by the instructor or in cases where instructor guidance is not given by standard manuals of style (e.g. The Chicago Manual of Style).

Notice from the Office of Disability Services

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 disabling condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, coursework, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule an appointment to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services (Rose Hill - O'Hare Hall, Lower Level, x0655 or at Lincoln Center - Lowenstein 207, x6282).

Grading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes and Worksheets</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Responses</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Paper 20%
Midterm Exam 15%
Final Exam 15%

A Note on Grades
In the long run, you will be much better off if you pay more attention to my comments and suggestions than the letter at the top of the page; doing so will make your experience in this class much more satisfying and worthwhile than the slavish pursuit of an A.

Grades in the C range represent performance that meets expectations. Grades in the B range represent performance that is substantially better than expectations. Grades in the A range represent work that is excellent.

Quizzes and Worksheets
Most class sessions will begin with a brief quiz on the assigned reading; the questions may sometimes be difficult, but they are not designed to trick you. These quizzes begin promptly at the beginning of class, and you cannot make up a quiz if you are tardy or absent. I will drop your five lowest quiz grades at the end of the semester.

Worksheets may not be turned in in absentia.

Reading Responses
You are required to turn in one approximately 400 word response paper each week for a total of eight responses (nine responses are listed on the syllabus; you may choose one week to not turn in a response, without penalty to your grade).

The response papers will need to engage with one of the questions that I supply in class. You will need to explicate a portion of the week’s reading and offer a critique or evaluation of it. Response papers will be given letter grades; they will not be graded pass or fail. So, you should take these assignments seriously and try to write clearly and insightfully.

Responses are due to Turnitin by Friday at 9am. Late responses will not be accepted.

Research Paper
The research paper is a formal writing assignment (typically but not necessarily 6-10 pages) that requires you to research philosophical material independently of what we discuss in class and argue for a philosophical position. The best research papers always show evidence of sustained thinking about the subject matter; this takes time and energy, so choose a topic that interests you and devote disciplined and focused time reading and thinking about it. Your paper should have a clear thesis statement that states what you are attempting to prove in your paper. I will provide a list of some possible thesis statements later in the semester; you are welcome to consult with me if you would like to defend another thesis. A rough draft is due on April 10; the final draft is due at 11:59pm on the day of the final exam (TBD, determined by the university).

Midterm Exam
The midterm exam will be held in class on February 24. It will cover all of the material assigned in class up to February 20 and will include a combination of short answer and essay questions.

Final Exam
The final exam will be held at a date and time set by the university. It will cover all of the material assigned throughout the course and include a combination of short answer and essay questions. Exams may not be taken early; do not book a flight that will leave before the exam!

You must complete the research paper, the midterm, and the final exam in order to receive a grade for this course.