

Syllabus – PHIL 1000 Philosophy of Human Nature
Summer 2018, Tues/Wed/Thurs 9:00am-12:00pm
Location: TBD

Instructor: Mr. John Gregor MacDougall

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Office: Collins Hall B12

Office hours: Tues 1pm-3pm, Thurs 1pm-3pm, or by appointment.

Course description and objectives

This course is an introduction to the study of philosophy. Its title can be misleading. “Human nature” sounds like a fairly limited topic, but considering the fact that we *are* humans, for us the question of what we are can be viewed as central because it tells us about our place in the world. We will therefore be studying a variety of topics that get at the question of what it means to be human both directly and indirectly, by trying to place humankind in the grand scheme of things. Topics will include the nature of persons both in relation to physical reality and ultimate reality (including God, if he exists); the nature of human values and ethics; and the nature of human knowledge.

The primary goal of the course is to help students learn to understand and ask questions of ultimate meaning and to provide a set of basic concepts and tools that will help them begin to address these questions. Students will read selections from classic texts in the history of philosophy and will be expected to display critical engagement with the texts as well as a big picture understanding of the general issues addressed in the texts. Students will also develop skills in critical reflection and written communication through a variety of writing assignments on the various course readings and lectures.

Course requirements

There will be five in class **debates** for which students will be divided up into teams. The number of times each student is expected to participate in leading a debate will depend on how many students are enrolled in the class, but there will not be much preparation required besides paying attention in class and doing the readings. Debates are graded by participation, not by quality of performance. More details will be forthcoming when I know how many students are enrolled.

Students will be required to write **four short papers**, all *at least* 800 words in length (about two and half pages, double-spaced). The purpose of each paper is to take up a side on the debate topics. Every student will write a paper either defending or attacking one side or the other on every debate topic, except for one topic that the student may choose to skip. So there are five debate topics, and you will be writing papers on four of them.

Each paper consists of two main sections – you will spend the first section making an argument (or arguments) to support your view and the last section explaining and responding to objections to your argument(s). You are permitted to give more than one argument in the first section if you are unable to fill 800 words with a single argument and objection, but you must give at least one objection to every argument you provide, and a response for every objection. The best papers will almost always be sufficiently detailed that they have no trouble filling 800 words with a single argument, objection, and response. You may sometimes find it helpful to do additional reading in order to get material for these papers.

More details on how to write these papers will be handed out in class.

There will also be **quizzes** given, some of which may be given at the beginning of class and some at the end. Quizzes given at the beginning of class may have up to two questions, one on the reading for the night before and one on the material covered in the previous class period. Quizzes given at the end will cover material discussed that class period, and will usually only have one question. They will not occur every class period but could be given at any time.

Attendance and participation is a significant part of this course. Participation grades will take into account a balance of both the quality and quantity of student’s input into class discussion.

You are expected to write **journal** entries with analysis and reflections for many of the readings, to be turned in before the beginning of each class. You must write one journal entry for each class period except on days when you are responsible for leading debates, and you may select which reading you focus on if there are multiple readings, but you are always expected to read each assigned reading.

Each entry should be *at least* 350 words (about one page double-spaced) and should include your summary of the main points of the reading or your own reflections on the content. Whether you are merely summarizing or reflecting personally, though, it is essential that you focus on what's being talked about in the text itself. Journals will be given full credit unless they are too short, or the student appears not to be taking it very seriously or not attempting to understand what the text is saying.

I may at times also assign **homework** in place of journal entries.

Finally, there will be a **comprehensive final exam** at the end of the class.

Handing in work and late policy

All assignments should be sent via email to jmacdougall@fordham.edu, before the beginning of the class period (9:00am) in which they are due for journals, or before midnight on the due date for papers. Late work will be deducted 1/3 of a letter grade for every day it is late excluding Sundays (so an A assignment that was due on Saturday night becomes an A- if handed in on Monday, a B+ on Tuesday, a B on Wednesday, and so on).

Attendance policy

Absences may be excused only if you bring me a note from a doctor or the dean, or at the very least if you have what I consider a good reason and inform me of it more than 24 hours in advance. If you miss even one class without excuse your participation grade will be significantly affected, because one class is the equivalent of an entire week during the semester. You also may not make up any quizzes for unexcused absences. Homework assignments may be turned in late for reduced credit.

Finally, **PLEASE NOTE:** *According to the school handbook if you have more than two weeks' worth of absences in a semester for a given class, then you automatically fail. Because this class is condensed, missing two full days is tantamount to missing two weeks during a regular semester course (and therefore sufficient for you to fail the course), so be sure you are there every day!*

Grading

10% Attendance/participation
15% Debates
15% Journals/homework
10% Quizzes
5% Paper 1
5% Paper 2
10% Paper 3
15% Paper 4
15% Final exam

Grades will be awarded both on individual assignments and overall based on a graduated GPA scale, as follows:

4.00 ≥ A ≥ 3.80
3.80 > A- ≥ 3.50
3.50 > B+ ≥ 3.15
3.15 > B ≥ 2.85
2.85 > B- ≥ 2.50
2.50 > C+ ≥ 2.15
2.15 > C ≥ 1.85
1.85 > C- ≥ 1.50
1.50 > D ≥ 1.00
1.00 > F ≥ 0

Required texts

Since the readings for each class period are short selections from much larger works, all texts will be distributed in electronic form via blackboard. Go to my.fordham.edu and log-in, then click the blackboard link at the top of the page. Next find the name of this course in the right sidebar, click it, and then click "Content" on the left sidebar once you reach the course pages. You should see the folder for course readings and will find pdfs of the readings listed by date for each individual class.

Note: You will be expected to print these texts out and bring them to each class.

Use of Technology

Important: You may not use computers or phones or tablets or any other internet enabled device during this class. If I catch you with any such device, I will ask you to bring it up to the front of the room and leave it with me for the rest of the class period, and you will lose participation points for the day. If you need an accommodation because of a disability of some kind, please see me after the first class. If some day you have a personal emergency and for some reason you need to have your phone with you, please be sure to come and tell me before class begins.

Note on Americans with Disabilities Act

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, coursework, 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 (Rose Hill - O'Hare Hall, Lower Level, x0655 or at Lincoln Center – Room 207, x6282).

Note on Plagiarism

Plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated. The first offense will result in an immediate F on the assignment in question and a meeting with the dean for possible further disciplinary consequences. The second offense will result in failure of the course, immediate academic suspension, and possibly expulsion from the school. Students are expected to familiarize themselves thoroughly with the school's academic integrity policy, which can be found here:

http://www.fordham.edu/info/25380/undergraduate_academic_integrity_policy

The following is a brief (incomplete) summary of common forms of plagiarism:

- 1) Copying any sentence or any substantial part of a sentence from any source without quotation marks and citation.
- 2) Copying substantial portions of a source even if you do give credit. (Sometimes in academic writing it is appropriate to give extended quotations for the purpose of commenting on those quotations, but that will probably not be relevant in this class.)
- 3) Paraphrasing sentences, i.e., taking material from sources in such a way that the sentence structure is preserved but only some words are changed. If you are summarizing any source, you must completely rewrite it with your own words as well as your own sentence and paragraph structure.
- 4) Failure to cite any source that gave you an idea.

Tentative schedule of classes and readings

Class 1 – 5/29

Introduction

1st hour: Introduction part 1: syllabus and survey

2nd hour: *Reading:* 1) Plato, *Republic*, "The Allegory of the Cave," 514a-518b; 2) Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book I, parts 1-2

Introduction part 2: what is philosophy and why study it?

Philosophical (meta)ethics

3rd hour: *Reading*: McBrayer, "Why Our Children Don't Think There are Moral Facts"
Are there moral facts? Can we know them?

Class 2 – 5/30

1st hour: *Reading*: Plato, *Euthyphro*, 2a-11c
What is the good part 1: what pleases God?

2nd hour: *Reading*: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I, parts 1,7
What is the good part 2: a feature of things?

3rd hour: What is the good part 3: a human creation?

Class 3 – 5/31

1st hour: **Debate 1: Are there moral facts?**

Philosophical method: logic

2nd hour: *Reading*: Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, Basic Logical Concepts
Introduction part 3: what is logic?

3rd hour: *Reading*: 1) Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, Fallacies; 2) Common Fallacies (IEP)
Logic continued

Class 4 – 6/5

Free will and determinism

1st hour: *Reading*: Plato, *Protagoras*, 351b-end.
Determinism

2nd hour: *Reading*: 1) Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, q.6, "On human choice"; 2) *Reading*: William Jaworski, *Philosophy of Mind*, 13.1
Libertarianism

3rd hour: *Reading*: William Jaworski, *Philosophy of Mind*, 13.3-13.4
Classic compatibilism

Class 5 – 6/6

1st hour: **Debate 2: Libertarian free will vs. classic compatibilism**

Philosophy of mind

2nd hour: *Reading*: René Descartes, selections from *Meditations* II and VI
Substance dualism part 1: Descartes's arguments

3rd hour: Descartes's arguments continued

Class 6 – 6/7

1st hour: *Reading*: René Descartes and Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, correspondence (selections)
Substance dualism part 2: objections to substance dualism

2nd hour: *Reading*: Jaegwon Kim, *Philosophy of Mind*, pp.8-17
Intro to contemporary philosophy of mind

3rd hour: *Reading*: René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, Part 1, 63-74; Part 2, 3-4; Part 4, 197-198.
Consciousness and the mind

6/8 (Friday) – Paper 1 due by midnight

Class 7 – 6/12

1st hour: Consciousness continued

2nd hour: *Reading*: 1) Jaegwon Kim, *Philosophy of Mind*, pp.91-98, 121-122
Contemporary physicalism: identity theory and the multiple realizability argument

3rd hour: William Jaworski, *Philosophy of Mind*, pp.136-140.
Contemporary physicalism: functionalism and machine consciousness

Class 8 – 6/13

1st hour: **Debate 3: Are humans merely physical beings?**

Philosophy of knowledge (epistemology)

2nd hour: René Descartes, *Meditations* I-II
The problem of skepticism and the justification of knowledge

3rd hour: Skepticism and justification continued

Class 9 – 6/14

1st hour: *Reading*: William Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief,” section 1
Deontological justification and the ethics of belief

2nd hour: *Reading*: William James, “The Will to Believe,” selection
Doxastic voluntarism and faith

3rd hour: Voluntarism and faith continued

6/15 (Friday) – Paper 2 due by midnight

Class 10 – 6/19

The meaning of life

1st hour: *Reading*: Richard Taylor, “The Meaning of Life”
Does life have meaning?

2nd hour: *Reading*: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q.2 a.8, q.3 a.8 (selection)
Does life have meaning continued

3rd hour: *Reading*: John Martin Fischer, “Why Immortality Is Not So Bad”
Is immortality desirable?

Class 11 – 6/20

1st hour: *Reading*: Shelly Kagan, *Death*, ch. 11, “Immortality.”
Immortality continued

Philosophy of religion

2nd hour: *Reading*: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia q.3 a.7; q.4 a.2
Neoplatonic background: God and transcendentals

3rd hour: *Reading*: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia q.2 aa.2-3
Arguments for God’s existence part I: cosmological and teleological arguments

Class 12 – 6/21

1st hour: **Debate 4: Is immortality desirable?**

2nd hour: Cosmological and teleological arguments continued

3rd hour: *Reading*: René Descartes, *Meditations V*
Arguments for God’s existence part II: ontological arguments

6/22 (Friday) – Paper 3 due by midnight

Class 13 – 6/26

1st hour: Ontological arguments continued

2nd hour: *Reading*: William L. Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism”
Difficulties for God’s existence

3rd hour: Difficulties for God’s existence continued

Class 14 – 6/27

1st hour: Catch-up

2nd hour: **Debate 5: Does God exist?**

3rd hour: Exam review

Class 15 – 6/28

Final exam

6/29 (Friday) – Paper 4 due by midnight