PHIL 1000-PW1: Philosophy of Human Nature

Summer 2020 Online

Instructor: Michael O. Begun (mbegun@fordham.edu, please allow up to 48 hours for a reply)

Virtual Office Hours: by appointment

Required Texts


3. Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will* (Hackett, 9780872201880)

4. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Hackett-9780872201927)


7. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Grove Press, 9780802143006)

8. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (Routledge, 9780415389556)

These books will be made available to you for purchase or rental at the Fordham University bookstore. You also may purchase them on your own. The editions listed are recommended. Readings from these required texts will be supplemented by readings uploaded to Blackboard.

*Fordham’s Course Description:*

A philosophical reflection on the central metaphysical and epistemological questions surrounding human nature, which includes discussion of some or all of the following problems: the body/soul distinction and the mind/body problem; the problem of knowledge, (relativism, skepticism, the objectivity of knowledge, faith and reason); free will and determinism; and self and society (subjectivity, personhood, sociality, historicity and tradition). At least 60 percent of each section of the course is devoted to readings from Plato, Aristotle, Augustine or Aquinas, and Descartes. Each section includes some writings by at least one contemporary figure.
Course Objectives

Many if not all of the texts that we read in this course will seem strange and difficult to you at first, due to their unfamiliar historical contexts and/or to their unusual philosophical contents. However, you will develop through this course important skills in five areas: critical thinking, reading, listening, speaking and writing. In honing these five skills, you will be better able to…

1. …think critically about the philosophies of human nature that we discuss and evaluate.

2. …read accurately and thoughtfully, in order to assess properly and to understand more fully the philosophical ideas and theories elaborated in the texts that we read.

3. …listen attentively and sympathetically, both to your instructor and to your fellow students, in order to participate in the learning process of the course.

4. …speak articulately and eloquently, in order to participate effectively in online discussions through Blackboard forums and Voicethread.

5. …write carefully and concisely, in order to express yourself clearly and precisely in the papers that you write.

Course Requirements:

Reading & Writing Assignments

This summer course is reading intensive. Through the reading assignments, we will be covering a work of philosophy, or at least a significant portion thereof, at an average pace of one work per every ten days during the summer semester.

In terms of writing, you will be required to complete two 300-500 word-length short essays, one 300-500-word-length abstract, and one 1500-2500-word-length course paper during the semester. Further details will be provided during the course on how to complete these papers.

Participation

Although no physical attendance is required for this online course, active participation in online discussions is expected and required as part of your grade; see breakdown below. You can participate actively in these discussions by asking or answering questions posted on the class Voicethreads, or by making your own audio, video or text-based commentary on these.

Please note that you should limit yourself to three posts per Voicethread (not per Unit), at least one of which should be a considerate reply to a classmate’s post.
**Grading Participation**

Participation in each unit will be graded at the calendar end of that unit’s schedule according to the following rubric: 2.5 points – excellent participation, 2 points – good participation, 1.5 points – barely satisfactory participation, 1 point – failure to participate at all.

**Midterm Exam**

There will be a midterm exam focused on Units 1-4. The midterm exam will consist of short answer questions in various formats, such as true/false, multiple choice, and fill-in-the-blanks. The exam is worth 15 points toward your course grade.

**Final Exam**

The final exam has a multiple choice format and is worth 30 points toward your course grade.

**Final Grade Breakdown:**

Participation: 25 points (2.5 points per unit, 10 units total)

300-500-word-length “Solution Response” Papers*: 10 points (2 total @ 5 points each paper)

1500-2500-word-length “Philosophical Assessment” Paper (due August 5): 25 points

300-500-word-length Abstract for “Philosophical Assessment” Paper: 5 points

Midterm Exam on Units 1-4 (due July 5): 15 points

Cumulative Final Exam (due August 6): 25 points

*One rewrite for a higher grade per paper allowed, rewrites due within one week of feedback

**Total Possible Points: 105/100 (note that no further extra credit will be offered)**

**Course Communication**

Your Fordham email address will be the default and primary means that I will use to reach you both collectively and individually. Please check your Fordham email frequently for course updates and other important correspondence, and allow up to 48 hours for an individual reply.

**A Notice from the Office of Disability Services**

If you are a student with a documented disability and require academic accommodations, you must register with the Office of Disability Services for Students (ODS) in order to request these. Please contact ODS at 718-817-0655 if this applies to you.
A Note on Plagiarism

While you are encouraged to talk with others about your work in this course, all written work submitted for it must be your own. Fordham’s plagiarism guidelines as posted in your Undergraduate Handbook will be followed, i.e. plagiarism or cheating detected on an assignment will result in an F for that assignment, and a second incident will result in an F for the course.

Schedule of Units and Assignment Due Dates

Module 1 – Logic for Philosophy

Units 1: Logical Concepts May 26 – June 1
Read: Selections from the IEP article on "Propositional Logic" (Hyperlinked on Blackboard)

Unit 2: Logical Arguments June 2-8 (overlaps with Unit 3 Part 1)
Read: Louis Pojman, “Excursus: A Little Bit of Logic” (PDF on Blackboard)

Module 2 – Ancient and Medieval Philosophy

Unit 3 Part 1: Plato on Wisdom June 2-June 8 (overlaps with Unit 2)
Read: Theages (Hyperlinked on Blackboard)

Unit 3 Part 2: Plato on Love June 9-June 15
Read: Symposium (N.B., this is the first text you must obtain on your own)

Unit 4: Aristotle on Life and Nature June 16-June 22
Read: De Anima, Book I Ch. 1-5, Book II Ch. 1-4, Book III Ch. 3-5
Submit: first “Solution Response” paper, due June 22, on Blackboard

Unit 5: Augustine on Evil and Free Will June 23-June 29
Read: On Free Choice of the Will, Book I through 1.11.21.76, Book III through 3.4.11.41

Remember to complete your midterm exam, due June 29, on Blackboard.

Module 3 – Modern and Contemporary Philosophy

Unit 6: Descartes on Body and Mind June 30 – July 6
Read: Meditations I-(part of)III & V-VI in Discourse and Meditations
Submit: second “Solution Response” paper, due July 6, on Blackboard

**Unit 7: Nietzsche on Knowledge and Science July 7-July 13**

Read: *The Gay Science*, selections from Books I-IV (pages/sections TBA)

**Unit 8: Freud on Self and Society July 14 -July 20**

Read: *Civilization and its Discontents* (full text, but focus on Chapters 1 and 5)

Submit: Paper abstract due July 20, on Blackboard

**Unit 9: Fanon on Race and Recognition July 21 –July 27**

Read: *Black Skin, White Masks* “Introduction”, Chapters 5, 7 and “By Way of A Conclusion”

**Unit 10: Butler on Sex and Gender July 28 –August 3**

Read: *Gender Trouble*, Both prefaces, Chapter I.i-v, Chapter 3.iv, “Conclusion”

**Remember to complete your final exam, due August 4, on Blackboard.**

Submit: “Philosophical Assessment” paper, due August 5, on Blackboard

*Final Grade Letter Equivalences*

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