Philosophy of Human Nature (PHIL 1000-R21 – EP1)
Fordham University, Summer 2020

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Office: Collins 133
Office hours: Tues, Wed, Thurs, 12:00-1:00, and by appointment
Class Times: Tues, Wed, Thurs, 9:00-12:00

Description: What is the nature of a human being? What are the consequences of any answer we might give to this question? In this course we will explore some of the most influential engagements with this question found in the Western philosophical tradition, and we will do this by foregrounding questions related to the nature of learning and education. The aim of the course is to introduce you to critical thinking and analysis, and develop your ability to express yourself philosophically in presentations, discussion and writing.

Texts: Available at the Fordham University Bookstore.


Make sure you purchase these editions from these publishers.

Additional readings are available on Blackboard.

Assessment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>10%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Drafts</td>
<td>2%  each</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Short papers</td>
<td>12% each</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Long papers</td>
<td>24% each</td>
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I will use the following guidelines for grades:

- A (93-100) Excellent. Honors-level work, outstanding.
- A- (90-93) Still excellent.
- B (83-87) Good. Solid and above average level of performance.
- B- (80-83) Good. Still above average.
- C+ (77-80) Average level of performance.
- C- (70-73) Minimally acceptable.
- F (0-60) Failure. Inferior performance.

Readings: Philosophical texts are hard to read. But one of the goals of the course is to teach how to read philosophical texts, and how to read philosophically, so my hope is that the readings will get easier as the weeks pass.

To facilitate the development of your reading skills, I’ve tried to keep the readings at a manageable length, and, in addition, each class we will spend some time focusing on short portions of
that day’s reading. I will let you know what these portions are in advance, and starting in the third week you'll each get a turn at leading this part of the class (see the details below in “Presentation”).

I recommend that you do each reading at least twice during the time we are studying it—once before class and a second time after we’ve discussed it. Each class, as well as the papers, will assume that you have done the reading. Also, it is essential that you bring the text under discussion with you to class.

**Participation:** This is based on your attendance and your participation in class discussions. You are allowed 1 unexcused absence across the session. Excused absences are allowed for religious holidays, serious illness, a death in your immediate family, or participation in a university-sponsored activity, and must be accompanied by a formal and valid written explanation. In accordance with university policy, you are allowed a maximum of 2 unexcused and excused absences combined. For each absence exceeding these limits you will lose 2% from your 10% participation grade. It is your responsibility to talk to your classmates and catch up on any work you might have missed when not in class, and feel free, of course, to come and talk to me in office hours about anything that remains confusing.

With respect to your participation in class discussions, you are not being graded on the correctness or profundness of the things you say, but on your willingness to say them. Everyone will be expected to speak in class discussions, every week. So don’t be shy – speak up! Philosophy works best when you risk yourself a little.

**Presentation:** Starting in Week 3, each student is required to do 1 presentation during the course. The presenter’s task is to lead the class through a close reading of a portion of the text that I will nominate in advance. I’ll give more instructions on how best to do this in the first few sessions of the course.

Your presentation should run for around 15 minutes, and be interactive, asking questions and soliciting input from your classmates. As a part of the presentation, you must also prepare a handout of at least ¾ of a page to give to your classmates, as a complement to what you say. The handout should contain helpful information about the passage, such as an outline of the text’s main points or structure, and/or key quotes. If you would like me to print out the copies of the handout needed, you must email me a copy of it in Word or PDF format so by 7:30am of the day of your presentation.

I have assigned the presentations randomly across the course across the semester (see the schedule below). 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 two days in advance.

As you prepare your presentation, I encourage you to discuss it with me ahead of time.

**Paper drafts:** For each of the papers there will be an anonymous in-class draft swap the day before they due, to give you a chance to give and receive feedback on your work. Each draft swap is worth 2%, and you receive the credit for participating, that is, coming to class with a substantial draft and reading and commenting on the work of one of your classmates.

**Late papers:** Penalty for lateness is a third of a letter grade per day, including weekends (A- becomes B+, C becomes C-, etc). The clock starts counting at the end of the class in which the paper is due, and the change is rounded up (that is, if you hand it in 1 hour after the class in which it is due, that counts as 1 day late, 25 hours after it’s due, 2 days late, and so on).

**Academic integrity:** The most common form of cheating in academic situations is plagiarism. This occurs when you present someone else’s work or ideas as your own, whether it is intentional or not. There are extremely good reasons for thinking that plagiarism is unethical. Further, it is a sign of poor scholarship and in professional environments can result in litigation. It is your responsibility to know and understand Fordham’s position on plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct as it is stated in the Student Handbook. If you are caught plagiarizing in a paper, you will, at minimum, receive 0 for the assignment,
and at maximum, fail the course. If you are in doubt about whether something constitutes plagiarism or not, ask me.

**Electronic devices:** Cell phones must be turned silent and put away during class. If I see you checking your phone, I’ll ask you to bring it to the front of the room for the remainder of the class. If on a particular day you know you will need to check your phone (for example if you know someone needs to contact you for a serious matter), please let me know in advance.

I will let students use tablets or laptops for the purpose of taking notes and accessing the readings during class, but you are not to use these for anything else (writing emails, checking Facebook, surfing the web, watching videos, etc.). In a small class like ours it’s usually pretty easy to tell when someone is using a computer for the wrong purpose.

**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 – Room 207, x6282).

In addition to speaking to someone in the Office of Disability Services, please also come and see me to discuss your situation. I want everyone in this course to succeed, so it would be good for us to get together as soon as possible to come up with strategies for adapting assignments to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

**Inclusive language in the classroom, exams, and papers:** Across the session we'll constantly be referring to everyday experiences to illustrate points and support arguments, in discussion and in writing. When doing this, it's very easy to fall into stereotypical thinking and expressions that can cause offense to other people. For example, we might assume that marriage is always between a man and a woman, or that people of certain religious or ethnic backgrounds have always have certain tastes or preferences. We often do this without any conscious thought or intention. Having grown up in another country, I know that I’m not always fully aware of racial implications of certain language in the context of the United States.

So I ask that you reflect on your use of language, and endeavor to make it as inclusive as possible, in discussion and in writing. If anything anyone says, myself included (above all myself!), makes you feel uncomfortable, please let me know and I’ll do my best to respond appropriately. There’s no getting around the fact that a philosophy classroom can sometimes be a strange place to be in, but I’d like everyone in the room, without exception, to feel as at home here as possible.

**Mandatory reporting:** As a faculty member of the university, I am a mandatory reporter in matters regarding sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, stalking, and other matters regarding sexual misconduct. This means that if you disclose personal information to me relating to these matters, I must contact the University’s Title IX Coordinator and relay the information to her. If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, you can contact the University Counseling and Psychological Services, the University Health Services, or the Office of Campus Ministry.

**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. The major requires 10 courses, including the 2 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 talk to me, or contact one of the Department’s Associate Chairs: Fr. Christopher Cullen, SJ, Associate Chair LC (ccullen@fordham.edu) and Dr. Daryl Tress, Associate Chair RH (tress@fordham.edu).

**Schedule:**

| Wk 1 | Tues  | June 30 | Introduction and mechanics  
Plato, *Meno* (70a-80e)  
| Wed  | Plato, *Meno* (81a-100b)  
| Thurs | No class, University closed for Independence Day Holiday  
| 2 | Tues  | July 7  
Plato, from *Phaedo* (57a-88c, 115a-118a)  
| Wed  | **Draft 1 due**  
Plato, from *Republic* (504d-519c)  
| Thurs | **Paper 1 due**  
Aristotle, from *On the Soul* (I.1, II.1-3)  
| 3 | Tues  | July 14  
Augustine, from *The Teacher* (94-103, 118-146)  
**Draft 2 due**  
| Wed  | **Paper 2 due**  
René Descartes, *Meditations* Dedicatory letter, Synopsis, 1 & 2  
| Thurs | Descartes, *Meditations* 6  
Selections from the Letters between Descartes and Elizabeth  
| 4 | Tues  | July 21  
**Final day you can withdraw from the course without incurring a WF**  
**Draft 3 due**  
Juana Inés de la Cruz, “Response to the very Illustrious ‘Sor Philotea’”  
| Wed  | **Paper 3 due**  
Paulo Freire, “Education as the Practice of Freedom” (3-18, 29-36)  
Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Chapter 2  
| Thurs | bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, Introduction, Chapters 4, 5, and 12  
| 5 | Tues  | July 28  
Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Chapters 1 and 2  
| Wed  | Walter Omar Kohan, *The Inventive Schoolmaster*, Chapters 1, 2, and 5  
| Thurs | Jeffrey Williams, “The Pedagogy of Debt” and “Student Debt and the Spirit of Indenture”  
| 6 | Tues  | Aug 4  
**Draft 4 due**  
| Paper 4 due on midnight of the evening of August 5