PHIL 1000-L21: Philosophy of Human Nature

Summer Session II 2017, TWR: 6:00-9:00 pm Location: TBA @ Lincoln Center Campus

Instructor: Michael Begun (mbegun@fordham.edu)

Office Hours: W 3:00pm-5:00pm, and by appointment at other dates/times.

Required Texts

1. Plato, Symposium (Penguin, 9780140449273)

2. Aristotle, On the Soul (Penguin, 9780140444711)

3. Augustine, On Free Choice of the Will (Hackett, 9780140444711)

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

5. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science (Random House, 9780394719856)

6. Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents (Penguin, 9780393304510)

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 may also purchase them on your own; the editions listed are recommended. Readings from these required texts will be supplemented by readings uploaded to Blackboard.

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 theories 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 class discussions.
5. Write carefully and concisely, in order to express yourself clearly and precisely in the papers that you write, and on your exams.

Course Requirements:

Reading & Writing Assignments

This course is reading and writing intensive both by its own nature and by the brevity of this summer semester. Through the reading assignments, we will be covering a work of philosophy at an average pace of one work per every two class days during this abbreviated semester, with some overlap due to the course scheduling. In terms of writing expectations, you will be required to write five (5) roughly page length and two (2) roughly three-page length papers, in addition to completing a written take-home final exam requiring you to write up to four pages for a total of at least fifteen (15) pages of required written work. Further details will be provided during the course concerning how to complete successfully these various written assignments.

Attendance & Participation

Barring excused absences, you are expected to attend all class meetings and participate actively in the class. You can participate actively in the class by, e.g. asking or answering questions in class, making relevant comments in class, emailing questions and comments to the instructor, visiting during office hours, scheduling appointments with me to talk about class subjects, etc.

Midterm Exam

There will be a midterm exam on July 20 that covers the material on philosophical concepts and logic. The midterm exam will consist of short answer questions in various formats, such as true/false, multiple choice, and argument description. The exam will be graded out of 100 points.
Final Exam

There will be a cumulative, take-home final exam due August 8. The final exam will require four pages of typed writing and will be graded on Fordham’s letter scale of A-F.

Grade Breakdown:

“Solution Response” Papers: 20% (2 total @ 10% each)

“Problem Interpretation” Papers: 30% (15% each)

“Philosophical Assessment" Papers: 20% (2 total @ 10% each)

Midterm Exam: 10%

Final Exam: 20%

Course Communication

Your Fordham email address will be the default and primary means that the instructor will use to reach you both collectively and individually. Please check your Fordham email frequently for course updates and other important correspondence.

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 assessment will result in an F for that assessment; a second incident will result in an F for the course.

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. Contact ODS at 718-817-0655 if this applies to you. Staff at ODS can walk you through the registration process. Please see me after class or during office hours if you have questions about academic accommodations, or if you have a letter from ODS to submit to me.
Tentative Schedule of Meetings with Assignments

Week One

July 5: course introduction & introduction to philosophy
Read: no assignment

July 6: overview of logical concepts and arguments
Read: no assignment

Week Two

July 11: overview of logical arguments, cont. and Plato on Love & Wisdom
Read: Theages (available online)

July 12: Plato on Love and Wisdom
Read: Symposium pp. 3-63

July 13: Aristotle on Life and Nature
Read: On the Soul Book One & Selections from Book Two (page assignment TBA)

Week Three

July 18: Aristotle on Life and Nature
Read: selections from On the Soul Book Three (page assignment TBA)

July 19: Augustine on Evil and Free Will
Read: On Free Choice of the Will, pp. 1-28
Write: first paper on Plato or Aristotle due today

July 20: Augustine on Evil and Free Will
Read: selections from Book II and Book III in FCW (page assignment TBA)
Midterm Exam @ 7:30pm

Week Four

July 25: Descartes on Body & Mind
Read: selections from Meditations I- III in Discourse and Meditations (page assignment TBA)
July 26: Descartes on Body & Mind

Read: selections from Meditations V & VI (page assignment TBA)

July 27: Nietzsche on Knowledge and Science, Freud on Self and Society

Read: The Gay Science, Selections from Books I-III (page assignment TBA)

or

Read: Civilization and its Discontents, Selections from Parts I-IV (page assignment TBA)

and

Write: second paper on Augustine or Descartes due today

Week 5

August 1: Nietzsche on Knowledge and Science, Freud on Self and Society

Read: The Gay Science, Selections from Books IV-V (page assignment TBA)

or

Read: Civilization and its Discontents, Selections from Parts V-VIII (page assignment TBA)

and

Write: third paper on Nietzsche or Freud due today by 10am

August 2: Fanon on Race and Recognition, Butler on Sex and Gender

Read: Black Skin, White Masks Introduction and Chapter I (page assignment TBA)

or

Read: Gender Trouble, 1990 Preface & Selections from Chapter 1 (page assignment TBA)

August 3: Fanon on Race and Recognition, Butler on Sex and Gender

Read: Black Skin, White Masks Selections from Chapter 5 and Ch. 8 (page assignment TBA)

or

Read: Gender Trouble, Selections from Ch. 2 & 3 (page assignment TBA)

and

Write: fourth paper on Fanon or Butler due today by 10am