

Overview

What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to philosophise? And how closely connected are these two questions? The truth of the matter is that we all do philosophy and, therefore, have some loosely formed conception of what human nature is. However, we rarely consider the logical consequences and reflect critically upon these assumptions. In this vein, throughout the semester we will explore what fundamentally sets our particular kind of existence apart from the non-human. We will turn to some of the foundational texts from the Western philosophical tradition and explore the thought of Jacques Rancière, Plato, Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Rene Descartes, Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Emmanuel Levinas and et al.

Goals

- Introduce ourselves to some of the major Western philosophical conceptions of human nature. Philosophy is an activity performed best in dialogue with others so let's keep an eye on what some of the major figures have had to say to one another.
- Sharpen our natural abilities for doing philosophy, that is:
 - Learning to read *philosophically*
 - Practicing critical self-reflection
 - Constructing and defending personal philosophical views
- Lastly, clear thought and clear writing are intimately connected. Use this class as an opportunity to improve upon a skill whose value will extend far beyond the classroom and your years of undergraduate study.

Requirements (In Brief)

- Weekly Reflections
- Final Essay
- Midterm & Final Examination

Suggestions for Studying Philosophy

☞ **Try to learn something from every new text** rather than seeking find straightaway how easily it can be dismissed. In a sense, treat every new text as a person you've met for the very first time. This is the key to balancing charity with critical rigor.

☞ **Read each assignment more than once.** Read a passage through quickly once in order to get the "lay of the land." Then review the passage a second time with a focus on the details: consider outlining it, isolating its argumentative structure and taking notes on it. A third, quick review to make sure you have not missed anything would not hurt, nor would a re-reading after our class discussion.

☞ **If you encounter difficulties** come and see me during my office hours or email me with questions!

Course Policies

PHILOSOPHY OF HUMAN NATURE (PHIL1000)

Fall 2018, Lincoln Center Campus

Thursdays, 6:00-8:45 PM

Location: TBD

Instructor: David Grunner

Email: grunner@fordham.edu

Skype: dwgrunner

Office: TBD

Office Hours: Thursdays, 4:00-6:00 PM

by appointment/via Skype

Required Texts

Plato, [*A Plato Reader: Eight Essential Dialogues*](#) (Hackett, ISBN 978-1603848114)

Descartes, [*Meditations on First Philosophy*](#) (Cambridge, ISBN 978-0521558181)

Merleau-Ponty, [*The World of Perception*](#) (Routledge, ISBN 978-0415773812)

Important Dates

October 11

Midterm Examination

December 20

Final Essay Due

December 20

Final Examination (6:00pm)

(1) Attendance. Students are expected to be present and on time for *all* classes. In accordance with University policy, only 3 absences (excused and unexcused) will be tolerated over the course of the semester. *A fourth absence will result in a failing grade.* Given the nature of our course (that it meets only once a week and it is structured such that we will cover one to two thinkers per week), it is extremely important that you attend class regularly—catching up after having missed more than a class or two will be very difficult if not impossible.

(2) Participation. It is my hope that our class will be run mostly as a discussion rather than a lecture-style course. As such, your participation is essential in making this happen! There is no grade for participation—I only hope that the silence brought about by the absence of participation will result in crippling guilt...

(3) Laptops, et al. In order to foster an atmosphere free from distraction and conducive to class participation, cell phones, laptops, iPads, e-Readers and other such devices are not to be used during class.

(4) Plagiarism or any other type of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Plagiarism includes both copying verbatim from a source, paraphrasing from a source, and using ideas from a source not original to you. I am required by Fordham University to report all instances of plagiarism to the Dean, including suspected plagiarism. A student caught plagiarizing will receive, at minimum, a zero for the paper, and, at maximum, fail the course. (For further information, see: *Fordham University Undergraduate Handbook*)

(5) Missed Examinations or Assignments. Late assignments will *not* be accepted. If you fail to turn in your assignment by the beginning of class on the due date, you have failed that assignment. If you think you need an extension on an assigned paper, you must discuss your reasons with me at least one (1) week in advance (and be prepared that I might say no). Missed examinations operate the same way.

(6) Disability Services. As stated in the student handbook, “Fordham University will make reasonable accommodations and provide auxiliary aids and services to assist otherwise qualified persons in achieving access to its programs, services and facilities in accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.” If you believe that you have a disability that may negatively impact your performance in this course, please make an appointment to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services (O’Hare Hall, Lower Level, 718-817-0655). In order to receive accommodations for your disability, you must declare yourself to the Office of Disability Services, and then bring me a letter from that office.

(7) Email. I will regular make use of E-mail in order to send official course announcements, distribute certain texts, etc. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that you regularly check your Fordham email account.

(8) Texts in class. In order to keep your book costs at a minimum (I know firsthand just how expensive some classes can be!), I will make a vast majority of the texts we will be reading available to you electronically in .pdf format. In return, I ask that you please bring to class a printed copy of the text we are discussing on a given day.

Course Requirements

It is expected that you will attend every class, read all the assigned texts and participate actively and respectfully in class discussions.

In order to pass the class, you will be required to:

- Write a final essay.*
- Write weekly reflections on the assigned readings posted to blackboard. **
- Sit for a Midterm & Final examination.***

Your final grade will be calculated in the following manner:

1. Final Essay = 40%
2. Weekly Reflections = 10%
3. Midterm Exam = 25%
4. Final Exam = 25%

*A Note on the Papers:

As the deadline approaches, I will distribute a set of prompts from which you will choose a topic for your paper. I will be happy to meet with you in order to discuss your ideas or help you organize/construct your paper. I will gladly look at outlines but I will not read full drafts.

**A Note on the Weekly Reflections:

Your reflection papers should be at least 500-600 words in length. Treat them as an opportunity to show me that you have done the week’s readings thoroughly and thoughtfully. Rather than summarizing what you have read, address what you found interesting, compelling, confusing or, perhaps, flat out wrong—demonstrate in these short writing assignments that you’re taking the time to wrestle with and think through the questions we’re asking ourselves and the questions these texts are posing to us.

***A Note on the Midterm & Final: These exams will be a mixture of multiple-choice, short answer and essay questions. The Final exam will be *cumulative*.



“Another false start for the Western philosophical tradition.”

Reading Schedule

August 30: Introduction and Rancière

- Blackburn, "Introduction" to *Think**
- Koterski, "The Study of Philosophy"*
- Hadot, "Philosophy as a Way of Life"*
- Pieper, "What Does It Mean To Philosophize?"*
- Ranciere, "The Ignorant Schoolmaster"*

September 6: *The Examined Life*

September 13: Plato

- Herman, *The Cave & the Light*, "Preface-Chpt. 2"*
- Plato, *Apology*
- Plato, *Republic* (Selection)
- Plato, *Phaedrus*

September 20: Aristotle

- Herman, *The Cave & the Light*, "The Doctor's Son"*
- Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Ii-ii*
- Aristotle, *De Anima* Ii, Ii-iii*
- Aristotle, *Politics* Ii-ii, VII i-iii*
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I*

September 27: Aquinas & Kierkegaard

- Aquinas, *Summa Theo.* (selection)*
- Davies, *Aquinas* (selection)*
- Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (selection)*
- Kierkegaard, "At A Graveside"*

October 4: Descartes

- Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*

October 11: Midterm Exam

October 18 Heidegger

- Heidegger, *The Concept of Time**
- Critchley, "Being and Time Part 1-8"*

October 25: Merleau-Ponty

- Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*

November 1: Sartre

- Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism"*
- Camus, "The Guest"*
- Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus"*

November 8: Sex and Gender – Simone de Beauvoir

- Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (selections)*
- Butler, "Sex and Gender in..."*
- Young, "Throwing Like a Girl"*

November 15: Sex and Gender – Judith Butler

- Butler, "Beside Oneself: On the limits of sexual autonomy"*
- Butler, "Precarious Life, Grievable Life"*
- Butler, "Survivability, Vulnerability, Affect"*
- Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution"*

November 29: Humans and Animal Natures

- Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I am"*
- Agamben, "The Open"*
- Russell, "St. Lucy's Home For Girls Raised By Wolves"*

December 6: Biopower

- Foucault, "Right of Death and Power Over Life"*
- Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended"*
- Agamben, "Homo Sacer: Introduction"*

December 13: Psychoanalysis and Final Review

- Readings TBD

December 20: FINAL

Readings marked with an * are to be found in the course Dropbox