

Philosophy of Human Nature

Course Packet

Instructor: John Davenport
Fordham University
Fall 2011

PHIL 1000 Section L10

TF 11:30 - 12:45 PM

Contents of Course Packet

Syllabus

The Discipline of Philosophy and its Subdivisions

The Relevance of Personhood as a Theme

Philosophy Department and the Major

Writing and Researching Philosophy Papers

1. Reading a Philosophical Text
2. Philosophy Essay Tips
3. Examples One and Two: Footnotes and Endnotes
4. The Writing Center
5. Reading a Philosophical Text
6. Library Databases Page

Handouts on Sentential Logic

1. Elements of a Good Argument
2. Criteria for Good Arguments
3. Some Common Informal Fallacies
4. Strategies for Criticizing Arguments
5. Methods for Making Your Own Arguments
6. Formal Arguments and Formal Fallacies
7. Parity-of-Reason Arguments Gone Bad
8. Truth-Tables Defining the Main Logical Connectives.
9. Rules of Inference for '&,' 'v,' and '~' (page from logic textbook)
10. Examples of Validity Confirmed at Each Step by applying the rules of valid inference.
11. More Logic! Further examples.
12. Hermione's Potions Riddle (for fun only).
13. Relations Between Soundness, Validity, & Truth of Premises and Conclusions in Arguments

Handouts on Philosophical Anthropology

1. Plato's Theory of Forms and its Background
Menon and Socrates on Virtue
2. *Republic* IV: How Individual and Social Justice Fit Together
3. Plato's Answer to Thrasymachus
4. Background: Influences on Augustine
5. Neo-Platonic Hierarchies in Augustine
6. Outline of the Argument in *Free Choice of the Will* Books I-II
7. Augustine: Judgments in Accordance with Trans-Personal Standards
8. Augustine's Platonic Argument for God's Existence
9. Descartes's Arguments Concerning 'Ideas'
10. Moral Personhood

Supplemental Course Readings (outside of the assigned books)

1. The Tax Burden of the Very Rich (sample argument)
2. William Irwin, “Computers, Caves, and Oracles: Neo and Socrates,” from *The Matrix and Philosophy*, ed. Irwin.
3. “The Republic of Bullshit: On the Dumbing Up of Democracy,” in *Bullshit and Philosophy*, ed. Hardcastle and Reisch.
4. Kevin Decker, “By Any Means Necessary: Tyranny, Democracy, Republic, and Empire,” from *Star Wars and Philosophy* ed. Decker and Eberl.
5. Theodore Schick, “Choice, Purpose, and Understanding: Neo, the Merovingian, and the Oracle” from *More Matrix and Philosophy*, ed. Irwin..
6. Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” from Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).
7. Harry Frankfurt, “On Bullshit,” from Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*.
8. Harry Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” section I on prereflective self-awareness, from Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*.
9. Daniel C. Dennett, “Where am I?” from *The Mind’s I*, ed. Dennett and Hofstader.
10. Raymond Smullyan, “An Epistemological Nightmare,” from *The Mind’s I*.
11. Jason Holt, “The Machine-Made Ghost: Or, The Philosophy of Mind, Matrix Style,” in *The Matrix and Philosophy*, ed. Irwin.
12. Jennifer McMahon, “Popping a Bitter Pill: Existential Authenticity in *The Matrix* and *Nausea*” from *The Matrix and Philosophy*, ed. Irwin.

Philosophy of Human Nature (PHIL 1000 - L10)

Fall 2011
Fordham University

Instructor: John Davenport
Office Phone: 212-636-7928
Email: Davenport@fordham.edu
Office: Rm.921f; Mailbox: Rm 916

Office Hours: TF: 3 - 5:30 PM and by appointment; most Wednesdays I'm at Rose Hill for meetings, and most Mon-Thurs. I'm home (reach me by email). I teach another class TF 1 - 2:15pm.

Course Goals: The aim of this course is to explore what it is to be a "person" (in some of important senses of that polyvalent term) From its beginnings, western philosophy has sought to comprehend the nature of human life by focusing on several different features of human beings that distinguish us from other animals, such as our rational abilities, our apparent freedom to choose our actions, and our self-consciousness. Our class will focus on these features, along with the closely related question of our volitional capacities that we use in forming our character. Although our focus is not on ethics, we will explore the classical idea that some conceptions of human nature imply that certain kinds of goals and forms of social life are *naturally better* for us or more likely to make us fulfilled – and we will debate possible implications of these theories for politics and education.

The course is historical in structure but topical in focus: you will be introduced to famous treatments of human nature in some of the most famous works in western thought, but we will use these classics as a starting point for our own investigation of personhood. Thus our aim is not only to understand what Plato, Augustine, Descartes and contemporary authors say, but to discuss them critically, and decide if they are convincing or correct. This requires asking whether their descriptions fit with our own experiences: we must reflect on *ourselves*. This is why the course begins with an introduction to logic: with this tool, you will learn to recognize and evaluate argument-structures. To help with our reflection, in each unit, the main reading is supplemented by contemporary philosophical articles or chapters that build on the themes in our primary texts and/or critique them.

Five Units. The famous works we'll read this semester approach human nature in radically different ways, and so our course will be divided up into five major units or sections as we move forward in historical order.

1. We begin with a very brief overview of some main points in logic, which will form the basis for evaluating arguments throughout the semester. This discussion of logic will also illustrate the feature of human nature that Socrates and his followers took to be definitive of personhood: namely, *rationality*, and in particular our capacity to grasp universal concepts that extend beyond their instances in the physical world.
2. Then we turn to the culture of ancient Greece and Plato's efforts to establish a new vision of our moral nature, as presented in the most famous work in all of philosophy: the *Republic*. In contrast to the Sophists, who represent the earlier "archaic" culture with its amoral conceptions

of excellence as power, Plato argues that human flourishing and happiness require justice and friendship, which in turn require the ability to care about goods other than our own material interests and pleasure, such as the goods that are the defining ends of various practices or professions. Plato conceives persons as beings who are not *simple egoists*: we can only live well (and avoid self-destruction) when guided by universal principles that all can endorse. We'll consider some of the political implications of Plato's proposals.

3. The third topic is will and freedom of choice. Although Augustine agrees with Plato's rational conception of human nature, we'll see that his account also places more emphasis on individual choice and our responsibility for our own character. Unlike Plato, he does not regard evil only as a sort of mental illness. We will ask whether he is right that moral responsibility requires the ability to do or choose otherwise, and whether he succeeds in proving that our capacity for practical judgment depends on an innate access to standards that we did not create, and consider a recent effort to defend Augustine's view that will is the distinguishing feature of human nature.
4. The fourth topic is consciousness. Descartes, although heavily indebted to Plato and Augustine, became the father of modern philosophy by emphasizing the subjectivity of our consciousness and the certainty of its self-awareness as a basis for knowledge. His conception of human nature is far more individualistic than that of his predecessors, and it is the origin of the still-unresolved problem about *how matter can be conscious*. We will explore some truly mind-bending puzzles that arise from Descartes's thought-experiments, which laid the basis for all modern philosophy.
5. Our fifth and final topic is the contemporary idea that persons have a "practical identity" related to their character and what they care about – a sense of "self" that can be more or less "authentic." We'll consider Charles Guignon's accessible introductions to these themes, including the notion that the identity of a person has a narrative form like that of a protagonist in a novel.

We will cover quite a bit of ground in this course, but the amount of reading in any given week will not be overwhelming, since class discussion and debate are also crucial. Each class will include both some lecture time to familiarize us with the readings and some directed discussion so that you can explore your interests and reactions to the readings, exchange views with classmates, and develop ideas for your papers. Learning to write clearly argued expositions of theoretical material, followed by criticisms of alternative views and direct defense of your own views, is potentially one of the greatest benefits of studying philosophy.

Texts

Great Dialogues of Plato, Warmington and Rouse, eds. (Signet/Penguin Books, 1984)

Free Choice of the Will, by St. Augustine, tr. Thomas Williams (Hackett Publishing).

Meditations on First Philosophy, 3rd ed or later, by René Descartes, tr. Donald Cress (Hackett Pub.)

On Being Authentic, by Charles Guignon, (Routledge, 2004) paperback.

Course packet with all the other required readings (you pay for this with a \$20 money order to dept.)

You need these editions to follow along with the class discussions. Please buy these ones! It is much better to have these hardcopies for note taking and ease of reference than to have an e-text. These are not novels; you need to be able to underline passages, put in tabs, follow along easily in class etc.

Why you must buy the books for this course! I have a strict policy that students must purchase all books for the class. There is no point in spending \$20,000 for college tuition and then trying to save \$200 by not buying books for your courses, which makes it almost impossible to get the education for which you paid so much. That would be like buying a new BMW and then refusing to pay to put tires on it. I do order the cheapest copies I can to make the costs easier. Expect and plan on spending a \$200 for course materials each semester *as part of the normal cost of college, not an optional extra!* Moreover, you should *keep most* of your college books so you have a library for the rest of your life (i.e. don't sell them back to the bookstore for mere pennies on the dollar!).

Assignments and Grade Components:

1. *Short Argument Analysis.* This assignment will test your ability to use the skills in logic developed in the first unit of the course.
2. *Plato Text Analysis.* This will be a short paper (roughly 3 pages) designed both to develop your ability to pull an argument out of narrative text, analyze it, and make proper use of quotations and citations in the process.
3. *Midterm test:* your knowledge of the readings will be evaluated in a midterm test in March. The test will consist of multiple choice questions along with some short-answer questions. It is open book. The focus will be on what we have discussed in class, so regular attendance and keeping up with the readings is key.
4. *Paper:* There will also be a 7-8 page paper due in Nov. in which you compare and contrast the ideas of two thinkers and argue for your own position on a question they address. You will have some choice among assigned questions here. I deduct 1% for every grammar error beyond two.
 - As an alternative, you may be able to present an *oral report* in the second half of the semester (with a 3-4 page written version to hand in). If interested, ask me; there will only be a few slots.
5. *Final:* the final exam in Dec. will have a similar format to the midterm. It is cumulative, but the emphasis in the questions will be on the material discussed since the midterm.
6. *Class Participation:* Discussion and debate are essential in a philosophy course. This requires being prepared, attending, and being willing to contribute. Ask questions without worry! If you are puzzled by something in the text, probably most other students are too. Also, it is fine to challenge something that the book says, that I say, or that other students say. There is no shame at all in taking a position and being refuted or facing counterarguments: that is Socrates's main lesson. Two key factors for this component of your grade:
 - The quality of your questions and contributions in class, including being prepared and able to answer assigned study questions for the day and do class exercises. Be an *active* contributor, not just a passive listener, and you'll get more out of this material! Philosophy should be fun.
 - Your attendance. More than one unexcused absence will lose you points for participation. Four absences is likely to lower you a whole grade. See attendance policy below.

Grading System

Class participation: 12%

Short Argument Analysis :	11%	
Plato Text Analysis:	15%	This breakdown of course components is a basic guide for you, but there is also be a certain amount of leeway and credit for improvement in assigning the final grade.
Essay:	22%	
Midterm test:	20%	
Final exam:	20%	

Other Policies

Attendance and typical excuses. Attendance is very important since discussion is key!

- No absence is excused for medical reasons without a real doctor's note.
 - No absence is excused for work reasons (tell your employers when you have classes).
 - Absence is excused for weddings and funerals only with some kind of proof after the fact.
 - No absence is excused because of family vacations or airline tickets booked at bad times.
- If you have a real life crisis, talk to me in private to work something out. *Please don't just vanish!*

Computers: Back up your work on *more than one* computer and/or flashdrive. You may use computers in class for note taking, but please no web browsing our email checking (which is rude).

Email: Please read your Fordham email or forward it to the account that you do read, so that you can receive course notes and notices pertaining to the course when necessary.

Honesty and Citation: I take this very seriously; cheating is the one unforgivable sin. All your work for this class must be original, must be your own, and you must cite your sources, both when you quote text, and when you paraphrase. Examples of cheating:

- (1) Handing in work you did for another class without clearing it with me.
- (2) Copying another student's work on a test or paper, with or without their permission.
- (3) Handing in an essay downloaded from the internet, copied from an uncited website, or copied from an encyclopedia, book, or article without citation is plagiarism. This holds true *even if* the wording has been significantly changed.

If I judge that a student has cheated in any of these ways, or in any comparably serious fashion, that student will fail the entire course and it will go on his/her permanent record here. If there are any prior offenses on record, suspension is possible. A very minor infraction results in an F for the entire assignment, usually dropping your final grade by a whole letter. Every semester I fail some student for cheating. Don't risk it; be fair to others and give your own writing a chance to develop!

– See the policies on academic integrity: <http://www.fordham.edu/undergraduateacademicintegrity>

Secondary Sources: You do not really need secondary sources for this course. Just do the primary readings. However, if you want more information, go to the new *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* first (see the library webpages, go to Databases, then Phil. & Religion) or to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* online. Never depend on Encarta or Wikipedia, which are not reliable. If you bring in ideas and quotes from secondary sources, but you must cite them either by footnotes or parenthetical references referring to a bibliography at the end of the paper. See the handouts on how to do this in the course packet. Even if you acknowledge an internet site, for example, you can't just lift large sections of its text wholesale: only take short quotations, clearly indicated as such in

- your paper. Every quote should be explained and have a clear purpose in your argument.
- This includes *paraphrases*: even if you reword what the author said, cite the page number.
 - It also includes websites: give the full URL of the page you cite (including “last visited” date).

Tentative Schedule

9/2: Introduction to Philosophy

- (1) Elements of the course.
- (2) What Philosophy is About (see handout in course packet).
- (3) Contemporary Theories and Problems in Philosophical Anthropology (see handout).

9/6-9/9: Introduction to Logic

- (1) The elements of sentential logic (course packet Logic handouts).
- (2) The elements of good argument (course packet Logic handouts).
- (3) Informal fallacies and Simple Proofs (course packet Logic handouts).
- (4) Sample argument: “The Tax Burden of the Very Rich” (handout in Readings section of packet).
- (5) Harry Frankfurt on the nature of “bullshit” – powerpoint and class discussion.

9/13-9/16: Plato’s *Apology* as a Lesson in Basic Sentential Logic

- (1) Begin Plato’s *Apology* (The Trial of Socrates).
- (2) Class exercise: practice reconstructing the logical structure of arguments in text.
- (3) Short Argument Analysis exercise due 9/16 in class.
- (4) Plato’s *Apology* (continued).

9/20-9/23: Plato’s Conception of Knowledge

- (1) What Plato was up to: the Archaic vs the Classical Worldview (handout in course packet).
- (2) Plato’s *Meno* (The Theory of Forms). See handout on Plato’s Forms in course packet.
- (3) Plato’s *Republic* Book VII, pp.312-20 (Allegory of the Cave).

9/27-9/30: Plato and Enlightenment

Happy Rosh Hashanah

- (1) William Irwin, “Computers, Caves, and Oracles: Neo and Socrates,” from *The Matrix and Philosophy* (course packet).
- (2) Start *Republic* Book I.
- (3) Plato Text Analysis (with proper use of quotations and citations) due 9/30.

10/4-10/7: Plato on Justice and the Tripartite Soul: A Social Conception of Personhood

- (1) *Republic* Books I and IV.
- (2) Also look at the first few pages of *Republic* Book II up to the Ring of Gyges story
- (3) “The Republic of Bullshit: On the Dumbing Up of Democracy,” in *Bullshit and Philosophy* (course packet).

10/11-10/14: Democratic Republics? A Debate with Plato.

- (1) Plato, *Republic* IV continued.
- (2) Kevin Decker, “By Any Means Necessary: Tyranny, Democracy, Republic, and Empire,” from *Star Wars and Philosophy* (course packet)
- (3) Midterm exam in class 10/14

10/18-10/21: Augustine on Free Will and our place in the Cosmic Hierarchy.

- (1) Augustine's *Free Choice of the Will*, Books I-II.

10/25-10/28: Augustine, Fate, and the Person as Will.

- (1) Augustine continued.
- (2) Theodore Schick, "Choice, Purpose, and Understanding: Neo, the Merovingian, and the Oracle" from *More Matrix and Philosophy* (course packet).
- (3) Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" (in course packet).

11/1: From Augustine to Descartes on self-consciousness

- (1) Augustine and Frankfurt continued.
- (2) Begin Descartes, *Meditations* I and II.

11/4 Professor away in the UK for conference. Class may meet for short film in library or schedule a makeup day at a time convenient for as many as possible.

11/8-11/11: Descartes's first argument for the existence of God

Happy Veterans Day

- (1) Descartes, *Meditation* II continued.
- (2) Descartes's *Meditation* III: from the concept of perfection to a Perfect Being?

11/15: We are Minds (but what is a mind??)

- (1) Daniel C. Dennett, "Where am I?" (course packet)
- (2) Brief selection by Frankfurt on Pre-Reflective Self-Awareness: Harry Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," §I (course packet).

11/18 Professor away in San Francisco for American Academy of Religion conference. No class.

11/22: Could Machines Think and Become Conscious?

- (1) Jason Holt, "The Machine-Made Ghost: Or, The Philosophy of Mind, Matrix Style," in *The Matrix and Philosophy* (course packet)
- (2) Essay due 11/22.

11/25 Happy Thanksgiving

11/29-12/2: Existential Conceptions of Personhood & the Ideal of "Authenticity"

- (1) Thumbnail History of Practical Conceptions of Personhood (class discussion)
- (1) Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, chs. 1-4.

12/6-12/9: Authenticity and Narrative Identity

- (1) Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, chs. 7-8.
- (2) Discussion: Is a meaningful life like a significant story?
- (3) Compare Jennifer McMahon, "Popping a Bitter Pill: Existential Authenticity in *The Matrix* and *Nausea*" from *The Matrix and Philosophy*, ed. Irwin (course packet).

12/13: Makeup class / Review day

12/16: Final Exam: 1:30 pm [date to be confirmed]