PHI 197: HUMAN NATURE
Mo/We 3:45 – 5:05
Falk 101
Instructor: Sean Nalty
Email: smnalty@syr.edu
Office hours: TBA – or by appointment

***** NOTE: SYLLABUS SUBJECT TO CHANGE. ANY CHANGES WILL BE ANNOUNCED IN CLASS. SEE BLACKBOARD FOR UPDATES. *****

Course Description: This course presents a philosophical exploration of subjects relating to our shared human nature. The course is divided into three units. Unit 1 will focus on questions of *wellbeing*, or *what is good for us* — e.g., *What makes a life worth living? Are things like love and knowledge valuable in themselves, or only insofar as they bring us pleasure? Is death necessarily to be feared?* Unit 2 will focus on questions of *character and motivation* — e.g., *What kinds of considerations drive our decision making? Are we capable of knowingly doing wrong? How should we explain our apparent tendency to act against reason?* Finally, in Unit 3, we will take up consideration of questions pertaining to the concept of free will — e.g., *Is free will possible for creatures like us? Does free will require the ability to do otherwise? What, if anything, can science tell us about freedom?* In the course of attempting to answer these questions, we will be consulting a range of classic and contemporary texts, including works by *Plato*, *Aristotle*, *Epicurus*, *Hume*, *Schopenhauer*, and more.

Learning Objectives: Beyond the obvious goal of introducing you to the philosophical study of human nature, this course will also serve to introduce you to more general philosophical methodology, as well as strengthen your reasoning and argumentative writing skills.

Readings: There is no textbook. All readings will be made available via Blackboard.

Course Schedule:

1/17 — Meeting 1: Introductions + Syllabus (no reading)

1/22 — Meeting 2: General Introduction to Human Nature (no reading)

UNIT 1: VALUE AND WELLBEING

1/24 — Meeting 3: HEDONISM (reading: Tilley)

1/29 — Meeting 4: DESIRE-SATISFACTION (reading: Heathwood)

1/31 — Meeting 5: VIRTUES (reading: Aristotle)

2/05— Meeting 6: VIRTUES II: IS THERE MORE TO LIFE THAN BEING GOOD? (reading: Wolf I)

2/07 — Meeting 7: OBJECTIVE-LIST THEORIES (reading: Fletcher)

2/12 — Meeting 8: PESSIMISM (reading: Schopenhauer)

2/14— Meeting 9: DEATH… *HOW BAD CAN IT BE?* (reading: Epicurus + Larkin)

2/19 — **QUIZ DAY** (no reading)

2/21 — TBD

UNIT 2: CHARACTER AND MOTIVATION

2/26 — Meeting 10: SOCRATIC INTELECTUALISM (reading: Plato)

2/28 — Meeting 11: REASON AND THE PASSIONS (reading: Hume): **FIRST PAPER DUE**

3/04 — Meeting 12 INTENTIONAL ACTION (reading: Davidson)

3/06 — Meeting 13: ACTION AND RATIONALITY (reading: Gendler)

3/11 — **SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS**

3/13 — **SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS**

3/18 — Meeting 14: MORALITY AND EVOLUTION (reading: Street)

3/20 — Meeting 15: EMPIRICAL CHALLENGES TO OUR CONCEPTION OF CHARACTER (reading: Harman)

3/25 — Meeting 16: CHARACTER AND MORAL LUCK (reading: Nagel)

3/27 — **QUIZ DAY** (no reading)

4/01 — TBD

UNIT 3: FREE WILL

4/03 — Meeting 17: INTRO TO FREE WILL (reading: van Inwagen)

4/08 — Meeting 18: LIBERTARIANISM (reading: Kane): **SECOND PAPER DUE**

4/10 — Meeting 19: COMPATIBILISM I (reading: Frankfurt)

4/15— Meeting 20: COMPATIBILISM II (reading: Wolf II)

4/17 — Meeting 21: IMPOSSIBILISM (reading: Vihvelin)

4/22 — Meeting 22: MEANING WITHOUT FREEDOM (reading: Pereboom)

4/24— Meeting 23: FREEDOM AND SCIENCE (no reading)

4/29 — **QUIZ DAY** (no reading)

5/07 — **FINAL PAPER DUE**

A Note About the Readings: Some of the readings for this course were first published in academic journals aimed at a specialist audience. As such, you are likely to encounter technical terminology with which you are not familiar. Several of these readings also presuppose a background knowledge of the subject matter which students in a 100-level philosophy course cannot be reasonably expected to possess. **Don't let this discourage you!** It's okay if

some, or even *most*, of the assigned material goes over your head on a first pass. Just do your best on your own, and I'll do my best to provide any missing context in the subsequent lecture.

Grading Policy: Overall grades for the course will be determined as follows:

10% - Question Submissions: Students will be prompted to submit well thought-out questions via Blackboard in advance of class review days.

30% - In-Class Quizzes: Three in-class quizzes – one at the end of each unit – worth 10% of total course grade, each.

60% - Argumentative Papers: Students will have three opportunities to submit an argumentative paper (~6-8 pages in length), at the end of each course unit. The **two highest-scored papers** will determine 60% of the overall course grade (30% of total course grade, each). *Submission instructions will be included in the prompts for each paper*.

Letter grade conversions as follows:

Letter Grade	Numeric Score
A	93 - 100
A-	90 – 92.9
B+	87 – 89.9
B	83 – 86.9
B-	80 – 82.9
C+	77 – 79.9
C	73 - 76.9
C-	70 – 72.9
D	60 – 69.9
F	0 – 59.9

Rubric for Papers: Paper will be graded according to their *clarity*, *accuracy*, and *relevance*. Papers will not be judged according to *rhetorical style* or *grammar*, unless the rhetorical style or grammatical mistakes compromise the paper's intelligibility.

Lateness Policy: If you suspect you will be unable to complete a written assignment within the allotted time, I strongly encourage you to reach out to request an extension. No excuse/medical documentation is required in order to receive an extension, but ***you must request your extension at least 24-hours before the deadline***.

Assignments submitted more than 24-hours late without an extension will be penalized one full letter grade.

Late assignments will be penalized an *additional* letter grade for every *additional* 24 hours past-due.

Academic Integrity:

Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit and for upholding course-specific, as well as university-wide, academic integrity expectations. The policy governs citations and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and truthfulness in all academic matters, including course attendance and participation. The policy also prohibits students from: 1) submitting the same work in more than one class without receiving advance written authorization from both instructors and, 2) using websites that charge fees or require uploading of course materials to obtain exam solutions or assignments completed by others and present the work as their own. Under the policy, instructors who seek to penalize a student for a suspected violation must first report the violation to the Center for Learning and Student Success

(CLASS). Students may not drop or withdraw from courses in which they face a suspected violation. Instructors must wait to assign a final course grade until a suspected violation is reviewed and upheld or overturned. Upholding academic integrity includes abiding by instructors' individual course expectations, which may include the protection of their intellectual property. Students should not upload, distribute, or otherwise share instructors' course materials without permission. Students found in violation of the policy are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered, as described in the Violations and Sanctions Classification Rubric. Students are required to read an online summary of the University's academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on Myslice.

Please Note: ***Using artificial intelligence to complete any assignments and exams is prohibited because developing your own understanding of the material is a key goal of this course. AI detection tools including Turnitin's built-in AI writing indicator, may be used as one factor in evaluating potential inappropriate use of AI in this course.***

Tutoring and Student Resources: Syracuse University offers resources designed to help you succeed. I encourage you to take advantage of these services:

Tutoring Center: https://class.syr.edu/

Writing Center: https://thecollege.syr.edu/writing-center/

Disability Accommodations:

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to meet with me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process.
If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with CDR, please visit their website at http://disabilityresources.syr.edu. Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information.

CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to begin this process.

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If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with CDR, please visit Center for Disability Resources. Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information.

Religious Observances:

Syracuse University's religious observances policy recognizes the diversity of faiths represented in the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their traditions. Under the policy, students are given an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work

requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance, provided they notify their instructors no later than the academic drop deadline. For observances occurring before the drop deadline, notification is required at least two academic days in advance. Students may enter their observances in Myslice under Student Services/Enrollment/my Religious Observances/Add a Notification.

Classroom Behavior:

Mutual respect is key to constructive dialogue.
Keep an open mind.
Keep discussion civil.
Don't distract your classmates.
Silent use of electronic devices is permitted.

Some Helpful Philosophy Resources:

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: https://plato.stanford.edu/

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: https://iep.utm.edu/

1,000-Word Philosophy: https://1000wordphilosophy.com/