

PHI 197: Human Nature

Fall 2021

Lectures: TuTh 2:00-2:55 in Hall of Languages 207

Professor: Christopher Noble
535 Hall of Languages

e-mail: cinoble@syr.edu

Office hours: Mondays 2:00-3:00 or by appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

What role do reason and emotion play in determining human behavior? What can we learn about happiness by thinking about human nature? In what ways does communal life promote or frustrate the pursuit of happiness? What implications do facts about human nature have for our moral obligations, and how could such facts have these implications? How might the theory that human beings have evolved through natural selection be relevant to these questions? In this course we will explore these and other questions with the help of classic texts drawn from the Western philosophical tradition (including works by Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, Hobbes, Kant, J. S. Mill, and Sartre) together with works by contemporary philosophers (such as Susan Wolf, Peter Singer, and Sharon Street).

GOALS

You will learn to how to read texts drawn from a variety of historical periods, and how to identify, evaluate, and construct philosophical arguments. You will also become better acquainted with a variety of historical approaches to thinking about human nature.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The following course texts are required:

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (ed. S. Dunn), *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses* (Yale, 2002), ISBN-10: 0300091419

Sartre, Jean-Paul (trans. C. Macomber), *Existentialism is a Humanism* (Yale, 2007), ISBN-10: 2007002684

All other course readings will be made available as PDFs on Blackboard.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

Section Participation	20%	
Paper #1 (4-6 pages)	20%	Due October 4th
Paper #2 (4-6 pages)	20%	By November 1st
Paper #3 (4-6 pages)	20%	By December 6th
Midterm and Final Exam	20%	October 19th and December 9th

Participation: It is important to attend and to participate regularly in your discussion section. If everyone tries to contribute by asking questions, responding to them, and making observations, then your discussion section will be more interesting and productive for you and your peers.

Papers: This is your chance to engage critically with a topic discussed in course lectures. Papers should be 4-6 pages in length, double-spaced, with standard margins, at a font size roughly corresponding to Times New Roman 12 point.

Papers are to be submitted via the plagiarism-detection program Turnitin (a link will be provided under “Assignments” on the course’s Blackboard page). You will have the opportunity to review the results of Turnitin’s analysis, and, if necessary, resubmit your paper up (if you wish to resubmit your paper after seeing Turnitin’s analysis, please contact your TA to let him or her know).

Midterm and Final Exams: The midterm and final exam will each consist of several short answer questions and two essay questions. The final exam will only cover course material presented after the midterm.

Class Preparation: Reading assignments should be completed prior to class. Reading study questions will be provided on Blackboard to help you prepare for class. Many of the readings for this course are dense and challenging. Give yourself plenty of time.

Attendance policy: Regular attendance at discussion sections is required, and regular participation is expected. Your attendance at discussion sections will be recorded by your TA.

Late submissions and extensions: Writing assignments submitted after the deadline will be subject to a deduction of 1/3 letter grade on the first day (e.g. from B+ to B), and an additional 1/3 letter grade on each subsequent day. Requests for extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis by your TA, but should be made well in advance of the deadline.

Grades: The following grading scale will be used for the course: A = 94.0 or higher, A- = 93.9-90.0, B+ = 89.9-87.0, B = 86.9-84.0, B- = 83.9-80.0, C+ = 79.9-77.0, C = 76.9-74.0, C- = 73.9-70.0; D+ = 69.9-67.0, D = 66.9-60.0,

F = 59.9 or lower. Grades will be rounded up or down to the nearest tenth of a percent. You can check the Blackboard “Grade Center” to track your course grade. All grades on assignments as well as the course grade are final and not subject to revision, except in cases of computational errors.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

COVID-19 Safety: Please be aware of Syracuse University’s COVID and Masking Alert Framework (<https://news.syr.edu/blog/2021/08/13/covid-19-campus-update-dynamic-covid-alert-and-masking-framework/>), and follow its guidance about mask wearing on campus and in the classroom. The current COVID alert level may be found here: <https://www.syracuse.edu/staysafe/>

Academic Integrity: The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy will be strictly enforced. The Syracuse policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work submitted in exams and assignments. Please be sure that everything you submit is your own work, and that you conscientiously cite any sources that you use. ***Serious sanctions including course failure and academic probation can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.*** For more information and the complete University policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>

Special Accommodations: If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located at 804 University Avenue, Room 309, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue “Accommodation Authorization Letters” to students as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: This following schedule is tentative and is subject to revision. Please consult this course’s Blackboard page for the most up-to-date version.

Week 1

Aug. 31: Introduction

I. **Motivation** (5 sessions)

Sept. 2 Socrates – Socratic Intellectualism

Reading: Plato, *Protagoras* (4th cent. B.C.), 349a-362a

Week 2

Sept. 7 Plato – The Divided Soul

Reading: Plato, *Republic* IV (4th cent. B.C.), 434d-end

Sept. 9 Hume – Reason as Slave to the Passions

Reading: David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), Book II.3 and III.2

Week 3

Sept. 14 Freud – Unconscious Drives

Reading: Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (1923), ch. 2, and ‘Psychoanalysis’ (1926)

Sept. 16 Gendler –Beliefs, Aliefs, and Action

Reading: Tamar Gendler, ‘Alief and Belief’ (2008)

II. **Happiness** (4

sessions) Week 4

Sept. 21 Aristotle – The Human Good and Human Excellence

Reading: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (4th cent. B.C.), I.7 and II.1-7

Sept. 23 Epicurus – A Refined Hedonism

Reading: Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus* (4th/3rd cent. B.C.)
 Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* (1st cent. B.C.), III.830-862, 972-975

Week 5

Sept. 28 Stoicism – The Invulnerability of Happiness

Reading: Seneca, *On the Happy Life* and *Letter 76 and 124* (1st cent. A.D.)

Sept. 30: Nozick – Is Happiness Everything?

Reading: Robert Nozick, *The Examined Life* (1989), ‘Happiness’

III. **Society** (6 sessions)

Week 6

**** Paper #1 due by 5:00 p.m. on Monday, October 4th. ****

Oct. 5 Aristotle – Political Animals

Reading: Aristotle, *Politics* (4th cent. B.C.), I.1-2
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (4th cent. B.C.), VIII-IX (excerpts)

Oct. 7 Hobbes – The State of Nature and the Social Contract

Reading: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), chs. xiii-xiv

Week 7

Oct. 12 Rousseau – Happiness in the State of Nature

Reading: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Second Discourse* (1755), Preface, Part I, and Note O

Oct. 14 Rousseau – Corruption by Civilized Society

Reading: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Second Discourse* (1755), Part II

Week 8

Oct. 19 **** Midterm Exam ****

Oct. 21 Marx – Work and Alienation

Reading: Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 'Estranged Labor' and 'Notes on James Mill' (1844)

Week 9

Oct. 26 Freud – Tensions between Instincts and Culture

Reading: Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), chs. 3-5

IV. **Ethics** (6 sessions)

Oct. 28 Kant – Duty and Autonomy

Reading: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), sec. I (excerpt)

Week 10

**** Paper #2 due by 5:00 p.m. on Monday, November 1st. ****

Nov. 2 Kant – Duty and Autonomy (cont.)

Reading: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), sec. II (excerpt)

Nov. 4 J. S. Mill – Utilitarianism

Reading: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (1861), chs. 1-2, 4

Week 11

Nov. 9 Sartre – Existentialist Ethics

Reading: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946)

Nov. 11 Wolf – The Limits of Morality

Reading: Susan Wolf, 'Moral Saints' (1982)

Week 12

Nov. 16 Rachels – Cultural Relativism

Reading: James Rachels, 'The Challenge of Cultural Relativism' (1986)

Nov. 18 Singer – The Moral Community and Animal Rights

Reading: Peter Singer, 'All animals are equal' (1989)

V. **Evolution** (3

sessions) Week 13

Nov. 30 Darwin – The Evolution of the Moral Sense

Reading: Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (1871), Vol. I.158-167

Dec. 2 Axelrod and Lorenz – Evolution, Cooperation, and Conflict

Reading: Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression* (1963) (excerpts)
Robert Axelrod and William Hamilton, 'The Evolution of Cooperation' (1981)

Week 14

**** Paper #3 due by 5:00 p.m. on Monday, December 6th. ****

Dec. 7 Street – Evolution and Moral Values

Reading: Sharon Street, 'Does Anything Really Matter or Did We Just Evolve to Think So?' (2015)

Dec. 9 **** Final Exam ****