

PHIL 201 Philosophy of Human Nature

Spring 2016

TTh 2:40-3:55 P.M. (sec 2)

David H. Calhoun

Campus extension: 6743 Email: calhoun@gonzaga.edu

Office: Campion 211

Office Hours: W 10:00 A.M.-12:00 noon, 1:30-3:30 P.M., by appointment

Course Description

Among biological organisms on Earth, human beings uniquely ask questions about themselves: What are we? What does it mean to be human? Is there some readily identifiable nature shared by all human beings?

Humans desire to know what kind of beings they are and in what relationship they stand to the rest of the world. Study of human beings and reflection on what it means to be human are features of human civilizations since the beginning of recorded history. The topics and themes have varied from time to time and place to place, but some questions remain central. Is having a soul what it means to be human? If so, what is a soul? What do intellectual, linguistic and emotional abilities indicate about the make-up of human beings? Is human action free? Do human beings survive death? How is the mind related to the body, and in particular, to the brain? Are humans merely highly developed animals?

Throughout much of Western intellectual history, answers to fundamental questions about human existence have been tied to views about the human soul. This course seeks to tell a story—a story we might call "The Eclipse of the Soul." The course provides an overview both of some of the historically prominent authors who have discussed human nature and the soul, and attempts to show the general movement of this discussion from the time of the ancient Greeks to our own times. The story is about the "eclipse" of the soul because focus on the soul gradually has diminished over the past 500 years, primarily as a result of the success and power of natural science. We will try to trace out the loss of the soul in two senses—first, in terms of its disappearance from our cultural conversation and, second, in terms of the implications of its disappearance. We will also explore how we might proceed forward in thinking about human nature in the light of the modern situation, and consider whether revival of the concept of the soul might help illuminate the human condition.

Course Student Learning Outcomes

This course will support the Course Learning Outcomes specified for sections of PHIL 201:

- Outcome 1: Students will be able to explain competing models of conceiving of human beings involving philosophical concepts of soul, mind, and body, and the historical and conceptual relations among these models in a way responsive to contemporary problems and concerns, such as the power of scientific accounts of human nature.
- Outcome 2: Students will be able to describe the implications of competing accounts of human nature for a set of related topics, such as human intellect, human emotions, human freedom, human sociality, the relationship between humans and animals, and human dignity.
- Outcome 3: Students will recognize the relevance for human nature of key concepts from the Catholic intellectual tradition, such as God, creation, the soul, human freedom, and human dignity.

Detailed Course Goals

Philosophical Knowledge. This course is intended to help students cultivate a sophisticated knowledge of some key theories on human nature that have been advanced throughout the history of philosophy and of the vocabulary used to discuss those theories. Students will also be able to critically compare different theories of human nature. As a result of the course readings

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and class discussions, students will be able to compare and evaluate answers to questions in a set of fundamental philosophical topic areas:

Reality. How is the universe structured? What sorts of things are real? How do human beings fit into the totality of what is real? (This set of topics is the domain of the part of philosophy called *metaphysics*.)

Mind and Body. Is there a human soul? What is it, and what characteristics does it have? Is the soul identical to the mind? How should we understand the human body and its relationship to the mind or soul?

Knowledge. What sorts of knowledge are human beings capable of attaining? Where does knowledge come from, and how is it possible? What sort of knowledge is most important for human beings, and why? (This set of topics is the domain of the part of philosophy called *epistemology*.)

Humans and Animals. Are human beings significantly different from animals? If so, what features distinguish the two?

Death. What is death? What attitude should we have toward death? What are some of the most important views about what happens to a person after death?

Freedom. Are human beings free? If so, in what sense? If not, why not?

Humans and God. Why do people believe in God? Can we know if God exists? How is human understanding of God related to human self-understanding?

Human Good, Meaning, and Happiness. Does human life have a purpose? If so, what is it? How do we find meaning for our lives? What sort of life will best promote human happiness, and why? (These questions are the central focus of the part of philosophy called *ethics*. Students at Gonzaga will take a course in Ethics after Philosophy of Human Nature, but we will try to show in this class how our understanding of *what* human beings are shapes what we think about *how* we should live.)

Philosophical Development. This course begins with the presumption that all students—and all human beings—are philosophers, insofar as they are concerned about basic questions of reality, knowledge, and truth. For this reason, an important objective of the course is to promote philosophical inquiry on the part of students by active interaction with significant philosophical texts and ideas.

Academic Skills. Like any philosophy course, Human Nature is intended to aid students in the development of academic skills. As a result of the work in this course, students should be able to read texts more closely and carefully, to understand those texts more fully, and to express their own positions more clearly both verbally and in writing.

Grading

The grading scheme for the course is as follows:

1. Course participation	10%
2. Reading Quizzes (about 12 over semester; lowest 2 grades dropped)	20%
3. Short paper (Plato paper required; additional paper optional)	20%
4. Midterm exam	25%
5. Final essay	25%
6. Extra credit co-curricular event reports	up to 4 points

All required work must be completed successfully in order to pass the course.

COURSE PARTICIPATION

Course participation will be graded on the basis of evidence of preparation for class by completing the reading, willingness to take part in class discussion, and other broadly conceived contributions to the course.

Attendance. Regular attendance is a basic expectation for this course. According to the standards specified in the Gonzaga University Catalogue for a course that meets twice per week, **no more than four absences will be permitted.**

In-class Discussion. I cannot overemphasize the value of discussion in class not only for my evaluation of your grasp of the material but also for your own processing of the readings and lectures. Philosophy is a written discipline, but it is also in significant ways a verbal discipline. The best way to develop and refine your understanding of the class material and to develop your own views is to discuss the issues in class (and outside of class). For this reason I will encourage and reward discussion. Ideally, discussion is conducted on a voluntary basis, but I value including all students enough to occasionally call on those students who do not volunteer to comment. You may “pass” when I call on you, but repeated passes will adversely impact your participation grade. Reflection questions accompany all reading assignments to help you work through the readings and prepare for class discussion.

Other contributions to the course. The Blackboard course website allows other ways to contribute to the course. If you have a question, problem, or objection concerning one of the readings or a point we have discussed in class, I encourage you to make a post on Blackboard addressing it. We will conduct an online workshop on Blackboard for the Plato paper. Students can also organize study groups on the midterm or final essay.

READING QUIZZES

Because the reading assignments are such an integral part of this course, there will be quizzes on the reading assignments periodically throughout the course. The quizzes will test basic comprehension of factual points about the readings rather than complex points of interpretation or analysis. They will be true-false, multiple-choice, or short-answer format, and will take place at the beginning of the class meeting. Reading quizzes will occur about once a week, so students should expect about 12 over the semester. No make-ups will be allowed for missed reading quizzes. However, the 2 lowest reading quiz grades will be dropped at the end of the semester. If you miss a quiz or two due to absence, or occasionally score poorly because you are not prepared, the dropped grades will protect your overall grade.

SHORT PAPERS

All students in the course will be required to write a short essay on Plato's philosophy of human nature. A specific topic and instruction sheet for this paper is available on the Blackboard course website. Please note that the topic assignment sheet includes detailed evaluation guidelines that will be used in grading the paper. Students who wish to write an additional short paper may do so. Assignment sheets for the optional papers are also available on the Blackboard site so that you can prepare ahead. Optional papers will be scored according to these principles: (1) each student may write only one optional paper; (2) the grade for the optional paper will replace the Plato paper grade for the Short Paper component of the course, unless the optional paper grade is lower, in which case the Plato paper grade will stand.

Essays submitted late may receive a penalty. No essays will be accepted beyond one week later than the deadline. Late papers will receive no evaluative comments.

MIDTERM EXAM

The Midterm Exam will be distributed via Email and will be due on Friday of Midterm Week (see the schedule for details). The primary format for the Exam will be multiple choice. Students will be allowed to consult notes and books and may discuss the exam questions with one another. However, all answers submitted must be the student's own answers, and the Midterm, like all other graded exercises for the course, is governed by the expectations set out in

the Academic Honesty Policy.

FINAL ESSAY

The Final Essay offers students an opportunity to reflect on the theories treated in the course and to defend the view they find most reasonable. A topic and instruction sheet for the final essay is available on Blackboard. The essay will be due to me in hard copy form by the the deadline specified on the course schedule. An optional workshop for the final essay will take place during the time specified for the final exam for the course. Students who choose to attend this workshop will have additional time to complete the final essay.

EXTRA CREDIT EVENT REPORTS

There are a number of events on the Gonzaga campus and in the Spokane area during the semester on philosophical topics related to this course. I will try to draw your attention to such events throughout the semester, but if you are aware of an event that I do not mention, please check with me. Students can receive extra points for the course if they (1) attend the event and (2) post a brief response (2-3 paragraphs) to the Blackboard Discussion Board summarizing and critically evaluating the event. Each event report is worth up to 1 final course grade points, up to a maximum of 4 points over the semester. Co-curricular event reports ideally should be posted as soon as possible after the event.

Classroom Expectations / Decorum

Philosophical inquiry is a dialogic enterprise, and a difficult one at that. If we care about exploring what is true, and critically examining our ideas and arguments, we must cultivate concentration, focus, and rigorous thinking, and must pay careful attention to one another in discussion. To achieve these objectives, I find it important to foster the most suitable possible classroom environment for philosophical inquiry. Given these objectives, electronic devices have only two legitimate functions in class: (1) displaying reading assignments or course materials in digital form, and (2) taking notes on the material for the course. Any other uses of electronic devices obviate the value of class attendance, and often distract other students. The instructor reserves the right to view the screen of any electronic device at any time. Students using electronic devices should also be prepared to contribute to class discussion at any time. Students who use electronic devices for any purposes other than the specified legitimate purposes may be asked to leave the classroom.

Academic Honesty

Honesty is a key virtue in a community of scholars. The University has expressed its commitment to this value by adopting an "Academic Honesty Policy." It is your responsibility to be familiar with and abide by this policy. Students will be required to affirm their commitment to academic honesty by signing a pledge distributed via email at the beginning of the course.

The most troublesome area for students is **plagiarism**. To plagiarize is to take the ideas or words of another and to present them as one's own. To avoid plagiarizing, students must, at the least, acknowledge the sources of ideas or wordings used in written work. Moreover, students should seek to move beyond their sources and to do original work. In the case of Discussion Board posts and papers, students must give credit for ideas or specific wordings that are not their own by citing the source in a footnote or endnote. If you are unsure whether or not you need to give credit in a citation, cite! In the case of take-home exams, you need not cite discussions you have had with other students or references to your texts or notes. However, you should ensure that every answer you submit is your own. It will constitute academic dishonesty to "divide up" exams and share answers with other students.

A grade of "0" (zero) will be the standard penalty for any assignment involving academic dishonesty. In some cases, a more severe penalty (as discussed in the University's "Academic Honesty Policy") may be imposed. The instructor reserves the right to submit copies of student written work to a plagiarism detection site such as TurnItIn.com.

Required Texts

Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. by G. M. A. Grube (Hackett, 1977)

René Descartes, *Discourse on Method/Meditations on First Philosophy*, 4th ed. (Hackett, 1998)

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (Kensington, 1971)

Supplemental readings on Blackboard course website (<http://learn.gonzaga.edu>); I strongly advise that students have the supplemental readings available in class when we discuss them, either in digital or paper form

Blackboard Course Website

The Blackboard course website for PHIL 201 is an important part of this course. Supplemental required readings, assignments, and other information are all found on Blackboard. The Blackboard Email distribution function will also be used to send information out to the class from time to time. Students are responsible for checking the Blackboard site regularly, and for checking their official Gonzaga Email account on a regular basis.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments; Reading Study Questions

Readings should be completed **prior to class** on the day assigned in the schedule; items marked "Blackboard" are readings available on the Course Documents page of the Blackboard course website

T 1/12 Course Introduction: What is philosophy? What is philosophy of human nature?
After class, review Clayton, "Truth" and "Worldviews / God and Philosophical Discussion" (Blackboard)

CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL VIEWS: PLATO AND RESPONSES

Th 1/14 *Phaedo* 57a–70b
What sort of person is Socrates? What attitude does he have toward death? What does Socrates think the philosopher should value, and why?

T 1/19 *Phaedo* 70b–80b
What reasons does Socrates have for thinking the soul is immortal? What specific arguments does he offer? What objections can be raised against those arguments?

Th 1/21 *Phaedo* 80c–95a
How should body and soul be related to one another in this life? Why? What objections can be raised against Socrates' arguments? What attitude should we have to argument?

T 1/26 *Phaedo* 95a–107a
What motivated Socrates' interest in philosophy? (Note all of Socrates' uses of the word "cause" in this passage.) What sort of thing is the soul? What defines its nature? What is Socrates' final argument for immortality?

Th 1/28 *Phaedo* 107a–118a; Jim Holt, "Eternity for Atheists" (Blackboard)
What happens to the soul after death? Why is the point of Socrates' account of the afterlife? What does Socrates' attitude about his own death suggest? Does Plato's idea of a simple indestructible soul fit with a modern view of human beings? Does Plato's idea of immortality require the idea of a God?

F 1/29 **Plato paper workshop begins on Blackboard**

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- T 2/2 Irwin, selections from “Aristotle” (Blackboard); Aristotle, selection from *On the Soul* (Blackboard); Aristotle, selection from *Metaphysics* (Blackboard)
What is Aristotle’s understanding of the soul, the body, and the person? How does Aristotle’s theory of soul reflect his theory of reality? How are different types of soul (plant, animal, and human) distinguished from one another? What differences in experience and reasoning does Aristotle attribute to humans and animals?
- Th 2/4 Epicurus, excerpts from the *Letters* (Blackboard)
What does Epicurus think is real? What does that imply about the human soul, and about death? Compare Epicurus’ view of the good life to Socrates’.
- T 2/9 Clayton, “How to Read Aquinas” (Blackboard)
St. Thomas Aquinas, excerpts from “The Summa Theologica” (Blackboard)
Does Thomas think that God’s existence can be demonstrated rationally? If so, with what sort of approach? How does Thomas’ theory of human nature develop and modify the view offered by Aristotle?
- W 2/10 **Plato paper draft due 5 P.M. (hard copy in my office, Campion 211)**
- THE MODERN TURN: DESCARTES AND RESPONSES
- Th 2/11 Clayton, "Understanding Descartes" (Blackboard); Descartes, *Discourse on Method* I–II (pp. 1–13)
What was the world like in Descartes' time? How had scientists altered the accepted understanding of the universe by Descartes' time? What is Descartes' assessment of his own education? What rules does Descartes adopt for seeking certain truth? What effects did the advances in scientific thought seem to have on Descartes?
- T 2/16 Dedication of *Meditations* (pp. 47–50); *Meditations* I–II (pp. 59–69)
What is Descartes’ objective in the *Meditations*? What are reasons for doubting what seems to be certain? Of what is Descartes certain? Why? What is the point of the “wax experiment”?
- Th 2/18 *Meditations* III, V (pp. 69–81, 87-92)
Can we know that God exists? If so, how? What sort of thing is God? Why does Descartes offer a second proof of God’s existence in Meditation V? How does it differ from the argument in Meditation III? How do Descartes’ proofs relate to proofs offered by earlier thinkers, such as St. Anselm and St. Thomas?
- M 2/22 **Plato paper final revision due 5 P.M. (hard copy in my office, Campion 211)**
- T 2/23 *Meditations* IV (pp. 81–87)
According to Descartes, why do we make mistakes? Is God responsible? What does God’s essence prove about his existence?
- Th 2/25 *Meditations* VI, Synopsis of *Meditations*, *Discourse on Method* Part V (excerpt) (pp. 92–103, 54–56, bottom of page 25–33)
Can we be sure of the body’s existence? How are mind and body related? How do they differ? Is Descartes certain of the immortality of the soul? Explain. In what ways are animals and humans similar and different?
- M 2/29 **Midterm Exam distributed (covers material through class on Th 2/25)**
- T 3/1 Gilbert Ryle, “Descartes’ Myth” (Blackboard)
What specific criticisms of Descartes and the “Official Doctrine” does Ryle offer? What is a “category mistake,” and why does Ryle think that the “Official Doctrine” commits one? What is the “broken-backed argument”?
Optional: critically evaluate the ability of the ghost in the movie “Ghost” to move

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physical objects despite his “spiritual” nature, especially in the scene where he first learns to move objects from the ghost on the subway (video excerpt on Blackboard). How does the film illustrate problems with Cartesian dualism?

Th 3/3 Pascal, excerpt from *Pensees* (Blackboard)
How does Pascal view Descartes' approach to philosophy and to human beings? What sort of things does Pascal think human beings are, and why? How does he approach the question of God's existence? What is the Wager? Is it a proof of God's existence?

F 3/4 **Midterm Exam answers due 12 noon via email (calhoun@gonzaga.edu)**
3/7 – 3/11 **Spring Break**

MODERN SCIENTIFIC NATURALISM

T 3/15 David Hume, *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, excerpts (Blackboard); William Paley, *Natural Theology*, excerpts (Blackboard)

Does Hume find evidence for the agency of a good and powerful God in Nature? Why or why not? How does Hume think the presence of evil in the world relates to the claim that nature is well-ordered and points to God? How, in William Paley's view, does the order and design in nature suggest the work of a powerful and intelligent designer?

Th 3/17 Charles Darwin “Comparison of the Mental Powers of Man and the Lower Animals” (Blackboard); Carl Sagan and Anne Druyan, “What Makes Us Different?” (Blackboard)

Are human beings significantly different from animals, especially higher primates? Is there evidence of animal mental activity, communication, or ethical behavior? How does Darwinism develop Descartes' dualism in a way Descartes did not intend?

T 3/22 Dawkins, “Explaining the Very Improbable” and “Doomed Rivals” (Blackboard)
What are the two possible ways of explaining the phenomenon of biological diversity? Why does Dawkins believe that it is now possible to be an “intellectually fulfilled atheist”? What is Dawkins' conception of Darwinism, and why does he think it has no viable rivals?

Th 3/24 B. F. Skinner, “A Technology of Behavior” (Blackboard)
What is a technology of behavior and how can it be developed? What does Skinner believe explains our failure to understand ourselves? Are human beings truly free? Why does Skinner wish to go “beyond freedom and dignity”?

T 3/29 John Searle, *Minds, Brains, and Science*, Chapters 1 and 6 (Blackboard)
How does Searle characterize the mind-body problem? What are the basic characteristics of mental phenomena? What “two-level” solution to the mind-body problem does Searle offer? What are the implications of this view of mind and body for the claim that human beings are free?

EXISTENTIALISM

Th 3/31 Calhoun, “Reading Notes on Kierkegaard's *Sickness Unto Death*” (Blackboard)
Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death* excerpts (Blackboard)

What is Kierkegaard's basic notion of the self? What does it mean to call the self a “synthesis,” and how does the self's synthetic nature relate to the problem of despair? What are the components of the synthetic self and how are they related?

T 4/5 Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lie,” “The Madman,” and “Of the Three Metamorphoses” (Blackboard)

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What is the moral of the “fable” Nietzsche tells about truth? How does it develop Darwinism in a new way? What is Nietzsche’s madman meant to convey? What is he suggesting about the place of religion in the modern world? What do the “three metamorphoses” suggest about Nietzsche’s perception of the stages of human development?

W 4/6 **optional Scientific Naturalism paper due 5 P.M. (hard copy in my office, Campion 211)**

Th 4/7 Sartre, *Existentialism*, pp. 9–23

What is existentialism? What basic view of humans does it advance? What is the point of the “paper-cutter” analogy? What kinds of existentialism are there? How does Sartre’s atheism appear to build on Nietzsche’s ideas?

T 4/12 *Existentialism*, pp. 23–36

What does Sartre mean to illustrate with his story of the young man seeking advice? On what do human choices ultimately rest? What makes up a person’s self?

Th 4/14 *Existentialism*, pp. 36–51

To what extent does Sartre agree with Descartes? Are existentialists committed to relativism, the view that truth and goodness are defined arbitrarily by each individual? Can existentialists judge others? Are existentialists “humanists”?

T 4/19 **Academic Honors Convocation—no class meeting;** students must read the assigned material and make a one-paragraph post on the assignment to the relevant Blackboard Discussion Board forum by class time; posts may address one of the reading questions, but can concern anything in the reading assignment
Existentialism, pp. 52–59; 63–67; 84–90

How are human beings and world related? What does Sartre mean by “world”? For what is a person responsible, and why? Why does Sartre, an atheist, claim that human beings desire to be God, and what does he mean by this? What are our prospects for achieving what we really want?

CRITICISMS OF MODERNITY AND OF SCIENTIFIC NATURALISM

Th 4/21 Walker Percy, “The Fateful Rift: The San Andreas Fault in the Modern Mind” (Blackboard); Wynne, “Aping Language” (Blackboard)

What flaw lies at the heart of the scientific analysis of human beings? How does Percy’s discussion of Pierce’s distinction between dyadic and triadic relations explain this problem? Is it reasonable to maintain the view that humans are qualitatively different from animals in the face of modern research?

Optional: view video presentation by David Calhoun, “Darwin, Human Distinctiveness, and Human Dignity” (available http://guweb2.gonzaga.edu/faculty/calhoun/Netlectures/Calhoun_DarwinHumanDistinctivenessBGA15April2013.MP4), which argues that while humans are similar to animals, they are also significantly different from animals.

M 4/25 **optional Existentialism paper due 5 P.M. (hard copy in my office, Campion 211)**

T 4/26 C. S. Lewis, “The Abolition of Man” (Blackboard)

What does it really mean to talk about “Man’s power over Nature”? What does Lewis think the final outcome of “Man’s conquest of Nature” is? What limitations does Lewis see in a Skinnerian project to reform and improve human beings?

REVIEW AND TRANSITION TO ETHICS

Th 4/28

Patrick Lee and Robert P. George, "Dualistic Delusions" (Blackboard)

What main alternative views about human nature do Lee and George consider?

What implications do the different views have, especially for ethics? Which view do Lee and George find most reasonable, and why? What are the key elements of *your* theory of human nature? With which thinkers we have studied are you most in agreement? With which do you most disagree? Why?

T 5/3

Final Essay workshop / discussion during scheduled final exam period (3:30-5:30 pm); students who choose to attend have until W 5/4 at 12 midnight to submit the final essay; papers of students who choose not to attend the final essay workshop are due T 5/3 at 5:30 pm