



# PHIL1031

## The Philosophy of Human Nature

Session 1, In person-scheduled-weekday, North Ryde 2024

*Department of Philosophy*

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## General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff

Convenor; Lecturer (Wks1-4)

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By arrangement

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Tutor details will be available in iLearn

Credit points

10

Prerequisites

Corequisites

Co-badged status

### Unit description

The unit introduces the big philosophical questions about human nature, personal identity and the meaning of life. Are human beings somehow unique in nature? Do we have distinct selves that endure through time? Do we have free will? What is the relation between our identity and the things that matter to us? The main theme is whether there is such a thing as human nature at all. We begin by asking whether mind is entirely physical or could in principle survive bodily death. We also explore the links between the self, time, and memory. The remainder of the unit introduces some key thinkers of the twentieth century; and we explore their views on freedom, lived experience, and our relations to others. The unit as a whole offers a detailed introduction to controversial questions about the nature of the mind, showing how historical understanding animates current debates, and demonstrating the relevance of philosophy to live modern issues about science, human nature, and culture.

## Important Academic Dates

Information about important academic dates including deadlines for withdrawing from units are available at <https://www.mq.edu.au/study/calendar-of-dates>

## Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this unit, you will be able to:

**ULO1:** identify key philosophical problems about human nature at an introductory level

**ULO2:** explain important philosophical responses to problems about human nature at an introductory level

**ULO3:** critically and reflectively respond to the problems and theories introduced in the unit.

**ULO4:** express and defend your own views with increased clarity

**ULO5:** contribute to the learning of the group by engaging constructively in philosophical discussion and activities

## General Assessment Information

### Detailed assessment information and rubrics

Detailed information about each of the assessments, including rubrics, will be available in iLearn. Please make sure you read the assessment information carefully, and contact the convenor if you have any questions.

### Submission and return of assessments

Written assessments in this unit are to be submitted through the appropriate 'Turnitin' links in the unit website. They will be marked through 'Grademark', which will allow you to access your marked assignments directly through the website. For information about Turnitin and Grademark, see:

<https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/tools-and-resources/ilearn/ilearn-quick-guides-for-students/assignments-and-grades>

### Special Consideration

Requests for extensions should be submitted via a Special Consideration request, which is available in the <http://ask.mq.edu.au> portal. Your request should be submitted no later than five days after the due date and should be accompanied by appropriate documentation. Please see <https://students.mq.edu.au/study/assessment-exams/special-consideration> for further details and instructions. Read this information closely as your request may be turned down if you have not followed procedure, or if you have not submitted a request in a timely manner. The Macquarie University Special Consideration Policy can be found at the end of this document.

### Late Submission Penalty

Unless a Special Consideration request has been submitted and approved, a 5% penalty (of the total possible mark) will be applied each day a written assessment is not submitted, up until the 7th day (including weekends). After the 7th day, a mark of, 0 (zero) will be awarded even if the assessment is submitted. Submission time for all written assessments is set at 11.55pm. A 1-hour grace period is provided to students who experience a technical issue.

This late penalty will apply to non-timed sensitive assessment (incl essays, reports, posters, portfolios, journals, recordings etc). Late submission of time sensitive tasks (such as tests/exams, performance assessments/presentations, scheduled practical assessments/labs etc) will only be addressed by the unit convenor in a Special consideration application. Special Consideration outcome may result in a new question or topic.

### Academic Integrity

In Philosophy, academic honesty is taken very seriously, and a range of methods, including but not restricted to the use of Turnitin, are used to detect plagiarism. Misrepresenting someone else's work as your own may be grounds for referral to the Faculty Disciplinary Committee. If you have questions about how to properly cite work or how to credit sources, please ask the convenor for help and see also the Academic Integrity Policy <https://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policies/academic-integrity>

Please note that the policy also prohibits resubmitting work you have already submitted in another unit or unit offering. This counts as **self-plagiarism**. To avoid self-plagiarism, if you have done this unit previously, you should write on another topic this time. If this presents you with any problems, please contact the unit convenor as soon as possible.

All assessment tasks in this unit are individual tasks. Using other students' work or making your work available to other students counts as **collusion**, which also puts you in breach of the Academic Integrity policy.

A helpful resource if you would like to know more about referencing and avoiding plagiarism is Macquarie's Academic Integrity Module, available here: <https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/skills-development>. You will need to complete this Module before accessing the unit content, if you have not already done so. More information is available in iLearn.

## Policy on the use of Generative AI

You have undoubtedly heard about ChatGPT and other Generative AI tools that can be used to generate content in relation to prompts. You may find it useful and interesting to see what these tools can tell you about some of the topics we're looking at. We will also be thinking about some interesting philosophical questions arising out of artificial intelligence. A few warnings are in order, though, about content generated by ChatGPT or similar tools:

1. It's not your work, so you can't submit it, or adapt it a bit and then submit it. This will count as a breach of the Academic Integrity Policy. This applies to any assessments.
2. It's not reliable. It gets a lot of things right, but it also gets things wrong, makes up references etc, and its outputs tend to be shallow and generic.
3. It doesn't count as research. We'll talk more later about what count as good sources for academic work, but using ChatGPT means you don't always have a way to trace and check the sources of the content you're using.

A useful analogy, I think, is to think of ChatGPT as being like a knowledgeable but slightly unpredictable acquaintance. Talking to them might be a good way to get some ideas to inspire your own thinking and research, but you can't take what they say for granted, and you can't pretend their work is your own.

This unit covers a lot of really interesting topics. We want you to engage, and we want you to learn. You won't do that if you try to outsource your thinking.

## Academic Writing and Study Support

Macquarie University offers a number of services to help with academic writing, referencing and study skills. For details, see: <https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/skills/assignments>

For information about policies related to Assessment, see *Policies and Procedures* section below.

## Assessment Tasks

Name	Weighting	Hurdle	Due
<a href="#">Introductory quiz</a>	5%	No	11.55pm, Sun 3/3/24
<a href="#">Reflective task 1</a>	25%	No	11.55pm, Sun 24/3/24
<a href="#">Reflective task 2</a>	40%	No	11.55pm, Sun 5/5/24
<a href="#">Media presentation</a>	15%	No	11.55pm, Sun 2/6/24
<a href="#">Participation</a>	15%	No	Wks 2-11

### Introductory quiz

Assessment Type <sup>1</sup>: Quiz/Test

Indicative Time on Task <sup>2</sup>: 2 hours

Due: **11.55pm, Sun 3/3/24**

Weighting: **5%**

Short answer quiz

On successful completion you will be able to:

- identify key philosophical problems about human nature at an introductory level

## Reflective task 1

Assessment Type <sup>1</sup>: Reflective Writing

Indicative Time on Task <sup>2</sup>: 15 hours

Due: **11.55pm, Sun 24/3/24**

Weighting: **25%**

Discussion reflection

On successful completion you will be able to:

- identify key philosophical problems about human nature at an introductory level
- explain important philosophical responses to problems about human nature at an introductory level
- critically and reflectively respond to the problems and theories introduced in the unit.
- express and defend your own views with increased clarity

## Reflective task 2

Assessment Type <sup>1</sup>: Reflective Writing

Indicative Time on Task <sup>2</sup>: 30 hours

Due: **11.55pm, Sun 5/5/24**

Weighting: **40%**

Reflection and research task

On successful completion you will be able to:

- identify key philosophical problems about human nature at an introductory level

- explain important philosophical responses to problems about human nature at an introductory level
- critically and reflectively respond to the problems and theories introduced in the unit.
- express and defend your own views with increased clarity

## Media presentation

Assessment Type <sup>1</sup>: Media presentation

Indicative Time on Task <sup>2</sup>: 13 hours

Due: **11.55pm, Sun 2/6/24**

Weighting: **15%**

Short recorded reflection

On successful completion you will be able to:

- critically and reflectively respond to the problems and theories introduced in the unit.
- express and defend your own views with increased clarity

## Participation

Assessment Type <sup>1</sup>: Participatory task

Indicative Time on Task <sup>2</sup>: 15 hours

Due: **Wks 2-11**

Weighting: **15%**

Active engagement in discussion and associated activities.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- identify key philosophical problems about human nature at an introductory level
- explain important philosophical responses to problems about human nature at an introductory level
- critically and reflectively respond to the problems and theories introduced in the unit.
- express and defend your own views with increased clarity
- contribute to the learning of the group by engaging constructively in philosophical discussion and activities

<sup>1</sup> If you need help with your assignment, please contact:

- the academic teaching staff in your unit for guidance in understanding or completing this type of assessment
- the [Writing Centre](#) for academic skills support.

<sup>2</sup> Indicative time-on-task is an estimate of the time required for completion of the assessment task and is subject to individual variation

## Delivery and Resources

### Lectures

Lectures will be delivered live on campus from 12-2 on Wednesday of each week in 29WW T1. Internal students are strongly encouraged to attend, but the lectures will also be streamed and recorded for online students, and those unable to attend. **All students need to have attended or watched the lectures before attending tutorials or engaging in weekly discussions, since each week's tutorials and discussions will focus on content from the same week's lecture.** Internal and zoom students should take this into consideration when choosing a tutorial time.

### Tutorials

All students will engage in the discussion and related activities with their classmates and member of teaching staff, but the mode of participation will depend on how you've enrolled:

- Students enrolled in the '**in person scheduled**' offering will attend one tutorial each week (Weeks 2-5; 7-11) on campus. Check the timetable for details (<http://timetables.mq.edu.au>). Note that your participation mark is based on pre-tutorial preparation activities as well as discussion. See the rubric in iLearn for details.
- Students enrolled in the '**online scheduled**' offering will attend one tutorial each week (Weeks 2-5; 7-11) on Zoom. Zoom links will be available in iLearn. Check the timetable for details (<http://timetables.mq.edu.au>). Note that your participation mark is based on pre-tutorial preparation activities as well as discussion. See the rubric in iLearn for details.
- Students enrolled in the '**online flexible**' offering (either in PHIL1031 or via OUA in PHIX1031) will engage in discussion activities flexibly, through the asynchronous discussion forums in iLearn (Weeks 2-5; 7-11). More information will be available in iLearn.

### Reading

All the essential readings and some supplementary readings for the course will be available electronically through the library, with links from iLearn. A list of weekly readings will be available through iLearn in week 1. You should do the essential weekly reading before your tutorial/ discussion.



## Website

The unit website is available through iLearn (<http://ilearn.mq.edu.au>). It contains essential resources for the unit, and you are expected to log in on a regular basis.

## Student Email

Communications about the unit may be sent to your MQ student email address. Please make sure you check it regularly. For more information about accessing your MQ email, and how to redirect it to a personal email account if you wish to do so, can be found here: <https://students.mq.edu.au/support/technology/service-desk/student-email>

# Unit Schedule

## SECTION 1 - HUMAN NATURE: TRADITIONAL DEBATES

Lecturer: Dr Jenny Duke-Yonge

**Week 1** (week beginning 19th February)  
*No tutorials or assessed discussion this week*

### Introduction

A general introduction: What is Philosophy? What is Human Nature? This week we will have a general introduction to the methods of Philosophy, and to the concerns about human nature that we will be examining over the unit.

**Week 2**  
(w/b 26th February)

### The Mind/Body Problem

This week we discuss the mind-body problem: Are we purely physical beings, or do we have a mind that cannot be explained in physical terms? If we have an immaterial mind, how does it fit into the material world? But if we don't, how can we make sense of our experience?

*Introductory Quiz due Sunday 3/3*

**Week 3**  
(w/b 4th March)

### Personal Identity

What makes you a person? And what makes you the same person over time? This week we'll look at some classic and contemporary arguments and thought experiments to help us understand what it is for you to be *you*.

**Week 4**  
(w/b 11th March)

### Free will and Determinism

Do we have free will? Or are our actions determined by causes outside our control? What implications does this question have for our sense of agency and responsibility?

## SECTION 2 – EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS

Lecturer: Professor Robert Sinnerbrink

<p><b>Week 5</b></p> <p>(w/b 18th March)</p>	<p><b>The Problem of Existence; Absurdity and Authenticity</b></p> <p>Albert Camus claimed that 'the only serious philosophical problem' is that of the meaning and value of existence. This week introduces existentialism by exploring the problem of existence and the experience of existential 'absurdity'. How might we live an authentic existence in an absurd world?</p> <p><i>Reflective Task 1 due Sunday 24/5</i></p>
<p><b>Week 6</b></p> <p>(w/b 25th March)</p> <p><i>No tutorials or assessed discussion this week</i></p>	<p><b>Human Freedom an Consciousness</b></p> <p>What is human freedom and how does it relate to consciousness? Are human relationships inevitably conflictual? Do we accept our freedom, or do we exist in 'bad faith' (self-deception)? This week we examine Jean Paul Sartre's existentialist account of freedom, consciousness, and our difficult relations with others.</p>
<p><b>Week 7</b></p> <p>(w/b 1st April)</p>	<p><b>Being-in-the-world and Mortality</b></p> <p>An introduction to phenomenology as a philosophical method focusing on practical everyday existence. Martin Heidegger's anti-dualistic account of human existence as 'being-in-the-world'. Why we are 'skilled copers' rather than disengaged knowers. How we deal with our environment but also with our mortality.</p>
<p><b>Week 8</b></p> <p>(w/b 8th April)</p>	<p><b>Literature and Art as Philosophical Tools</b></p> <p>The importance of art and literature as alternative ways of exploring philosophical questions. Sartre on literature and why it helps us understand human freedom and social relations. Merleau-Ponty on visual art as a way of exploring the 'phenomenology of perception' What painting can show us about embodied perception and experiencing nature.</p>
<p><b>(Mid-Semester break 13/4-28/4 )</b></p>	
<p><b>SECTION 3 - ARE HUMANS UNIQUE?</b></p> <p><b>Lecturers: Dr Oisín Deery (Weeks 9 and 10); Prof Jean-Philippe Deranty (Weeks 11 and 12)</b></p>	
<p><b>Week 9</b></p> <p>(w/b 29th April)</p>	<p><b>What's so Special about Humans?</b></p> <p>There is a long tradition of thinking about humans which says that we are a unique species. Prior to Darwin the prevalent view (in the West) was that humans are unique because they were created with special features that no other creature has: an immortal soul, freedom of the will, reason, language, the ability to love, and so on. In other words, humans are discontinuous with the rest of the natural world, including other species. Darwin and the incredible success of evolutionary theory in the twentieth century gave a very different account of human nature: humans are continuous with the rest of the natural world. Our capacities for thinking, communicating, emotions, and technology have evolved from earlier precursors, and there are hallmarks of all these traits in other species. We are not discontinuous with the rest of the natural world, at least not in the way we previously thought. Are humans unique? This week, we will try to make headway on this question.</p> <p><i>Reflective Task 2 due Sunday 5/5</i></p>

<b>Week 10</b>  (w/b 6 <sup>th</sup> May)	<b>Are humans all that different from other animals?</b>  Many philosophers have argued that animals don't really have minds like ours. Descartes, for example, went so far as to suggest that animals are essentially mechanisms, like clocks, and Aristotle proposed a hierarchy of souls with humans at the top and animals being incapable of rational thought. Were they right? The argument here is between those who think humans are unique in a special way and those who agree with the Darwinian account of the continuity of humans with the rest of the natural world. This week, we will look at some fascinating recent accounts of animal mindedness and arguments for both the continuity and the discontinuity of humans with the rest of nature.
<b>Week 11</b>  (w/b 13 <sup>th</sup> May)	<b>The Working Species</b>  Traditionally, work has been viewed as one of the characteristic traits of humanity, making it distinct from other animal species. Yet many aspects of human work seem to be shared with other animals, like the learning of skills, the use of tools and instruments, cooperation, the division of work processes into different tasks and specialisation. Is human work unique, then, and if so, in what ways? We look at an influential account of human evolution which explains how human work is different from animal work and shows why these characteristics of human work reveal a lot about the unique evolutionary trajectory of our species.
<b>Week 12</b>  (w/b 20 <sup>th</sup> May)  <i>No tutorials or assessed discussion this week</i>	<b>The good, the true and the beautiful</b>  We wrap up the unit by considering the higher values, beyond the basic needs of material existence, which for many define what makes a life truly human: our capacity to care and search for truth, moral excellence, justice, and beauty. Are these objects also pursued by other animals? Are religion, science, art, or philosophy, specifically human searches? What are their links to human powers and human needs? We answer these questions by reading a famous account of meaning in life.
<b>Week 13</b> (w/b 27 <sup>th</sup> May)	There are no lectures or tutorials this week: Use the time to finalise your Media Presentation  We hope you have enjoyed PHIL/PHIX1031.  <u><a href="#">(Media Presentation due Sunday 2/6)</a></u>

## Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from [Policy Central \(https://policies.mq.edu.au\)](https://policies.mq.edu.au). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to Learning and Teaching:

- [Academic Appeals Policy](#)
- [Academic Integrity Policy](#)
- [Academic Progression Policy](#)
- [Assessment Policy](#)
- [Fitness to Practice Procedure](#)
- [Assessment Procedure](#)
- [Complaints Resolution Procedure for Students and Members of the Public](#)
- [Special Consideration Policy](#)

Students seeking more policy resources can visit [Student Policies \(https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/policies\)](https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/policies). It is your one-stop-shop for the key policies you need to know about throughout your undergraduate student journey.

To find other policies relating to Teaching and Learning, visit [Policy Central \(https://policies.mq.edu.au\)](https://policies.mq.edu.au)

[du.au](#)) and use the [search tool](#).

## Student Code of Conduct

Macquarie University students have a responsibility to be familiar with the Student Code of Conduct: <https://students.mq.edu.au/admin/other-resources/student-conduct>

## Results

Results published on platform other than [eStudent](#), (eg. iLearn, Coursera etc.) or released directly by your Unit Convenor, are not confirmed as they are subject to final approval by the University. Once approved, final results will be sent to your student email address and will be made available in [eStudent](#). For more information visit [ask.mq.edu.au](http://ask.mq.edu.au) or if you are a Global MBA student contact [globalmba.support@mq.edu.au](mailto:globalmba.support@mq.edu.au)

## Academic Integrity

At Macquarie, we believe [academic integrity](#) – honesty, respect, trust, responsibility, fairness and courage – is at the core of learning, teaching and research. We recognise that meeting the expectations required to complete your assessments can be challenging. So, we offer you a range of resources and services to help you reach your potential, including free [online writing and maths support](#), [academic skills development](#) and [wellbeing consultations](#).

## Student Support

Macquarie University provides a range of support services for students. For details, visit <http://students.mq.edu.au/support/>

## The Writing Centre

[The Writing Centre](#) provides resources to develop your English language proficiency, academic writing, and communication skills.

- [Workshops](#)
- [Chat with a WriteWISE peer writing leader](#)
- [Access StudyWISE](#)
- [Upload an assignment to Studiosity](#)
- [Complete the Academic Integrity Module](#)

The Library provides online and face to face support to help you find and use relevant information resources.

- [Subject and Research Guides](#)
- [Ask a Librarian](#)

## Student Services and Support

Macquarie University offers a range of [Student Support Services](#) including:

- [IT Support](#)

- [Accessibility and disability support](#) with study
- Mental health [support](#)
- [Safety support](#) to respond to bullying, harassment, sexual harassment and sexual assault
- [Social support including information about finances, tenancy and legal issues](#)
- [Student Advocacy](#) provides independent advice on MQ policies, procedures, and processes

## Student Enquiries

Got a question? Ask us via [AskMQ](#), or contact [Service Connect](#).

## IT Help

For help with University computer systems and technology, visit [http://www.mq.edu.au/about\\_us/offices\\_and\\_units/information\\_technology/help/](http://www.mq.edu.au/about_us/offices_and_units/information_technology/help/).

When using the University's IT, you must adhere to the [Acceptable Use of IT Resources Policy](#). The policy applies to all who connect to the MQ network including students.

## Changes from Previous Offering

Minor changes to assessment and readings.

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Unit information based on version 2024.02 of the [Handbook](#)