



PHIL1031

The Philosophy of Human Nature

Session 1, Weekday attendance, North Ryde 2020

Department of Philosophy

Contents

<u>General Information</u>	2
<u>Learning Outcomes</u>	3
<u>General Assessment Information</u>	3
<u>Assessment Tasks</u>	3
<u>Delivery and Resources</u>	3
<u>Unit Schedule</u>	4
<u>Policies and Procedures</u>	5

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General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff

Convenor

Alexander Gillett

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Lecturer

Robert Sinnerbrink

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Lecturer

Jennifer Duke-Yonge

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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

Assessment Tasks

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update

Assessment details are no longer provided here as a result of changes due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Students should consult [iLearn](#) for revised unit information.

[Find out more about the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and potential impacts on staff and students](#)

General Assessment Information

Unless a Disruption to Studies request has been submitted and approved, (a) a penalty for lateness will apply – two (2) marks out of 100 will be deducted per day for assignments submitted after the due date – and (b) no assignment will be accepted seven (7) days (incl. weekends) after the original submission deadline. No late submissions will be accepted for timed assessments – e.g. quizzes, online tests.

Delivery and Resources

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update

Any references to on-campus delivery below may no longer be relevant due to COVID-19.

Please check here for updated delivery information: https://ask.mq.edu.au/account/pub/display/unit_status

Required Reading: There will be a core texts to read for each week of the course. It is mandatory that these be read as tutorial discussions and lectures are based on these. Quiz questions will focus on the weekly readings as well. The weekly readings will be available via the Leganto service, which is accessible through the ilearn. Additional optional readings will be made

available electronically on the iLearn in each week.

Technology Used and Required: We use an iLearn website, and the Echo360 lecture recordings. Any other material you need will be available through the iLearn website. We recommend you have access to a reliable internet connection throughout the semester.

Assignment Submission: Assignments in this course will be submitted electronically, as word documents. There is no need for a coversheet - the iLearn assignment submission (Turnitin) involves declaring your details and honesty in submitting your work. Please note, we do not accept submission by email attachment.

Unit Schedule

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update

The unit schedule/topics and any references to on-campus delivery below may no longer be relevant due to COVID-19. Please consult [iLearn](#) for latest details, and check here for updated delivery information: https://ask.mq.edu.au/account/pub/display/unit_status

Week and lecture topic	Description
Part one	CLASSICAL DEBATES <i>Lecturer: Dr Jennifer Duke-Yonge</i>
1. Introduction	A general introduction: What is Philosophy? What is an argument? What is a thought experiment? And an introduction into the general themes and concerns surrounding the notion of human nature that we will explore throughout the rest of the course.
2. The Mind-Body Problem	This week we discuss the mind-body problem: is the self or mind only material? Or is there an immaterial aspect of human nature, a soul? If so, how does this dualistic composition of mind and matter interact?
3. Personal Identity	Does the self persist over time? We will examine John Locke's and Derek Parfit's thought experiments exploring the questions of whether and how a self persists over time.
4. Free Will and Determinism	Is human nature determined? Or do we have free will? This week we will discuss this debate that has enraptured Western Philosophy since its inception.
Part Two	EXISTENTIAL TOPICS <i>Lecturer: Associate Professor Robert Sinnerbrink</i>
5. Human Freedom and Consciousness	What is human freedom? How does it relate to consciousness? Are human relationships inevitably conflictual? This week introduces existentialism and focuses on Jean Paul Sartre's existentialist account of freedom, consciousness, and our relations with others.

6. Being-in-the-world and Mortality	An introduction to phenomenology focusing on practical everyday existence. Martin Heidegger's anti-dualistic account of human existence as 'being-in-the-world'. How we deal with our environment but also with our mortality.
7. Essay Writing workshop	There are no tutorials this week . Instead, the lecture discusses the first essay assignment and provides students with preparation and skills for how to go about researching and writing philosophical essays. (<i>Lecture to be delivered by Dr Alexander James Gillett</i>)
Mid Semester Break (<i>Take a well-earned break</i>)	
8. Literature and Art as Philosophical Tools	The importance of art and literature as alternative ways of exploring philosophical questions. Sartre on literature and why it helps us understand human freedom. Merleau-Ponty on visual art as a way of exploring the 'phenomenology of perception'.
Part Three	BIOLOGY AND TECHNOLOGY <i>Lecturer: Dr Alexander James Gillett</i>
9. Human Nature after Darwin	Having considered a range of classical and existential questions, we now turn to how questions about human nature have been radically altered by scientific findings related to evolution. Is human nature innately determined and fixed by our genetics? Or is human nature malleable and shaped by our cultural environment?
10. Essay Plan Week	Students are to submit an essay plan this week. As such, there are no lectures or tutorials scheduled.
11. Humans and Animals	A perennial feature of the debates about human nature involve contrasting ourselves to the other parts of the animal kingdom. This week we discuss whether other animals have minds and "higher" mental faculties. Relatedly, one can ask whether humans are a unique species different from all other animals? Or whether we are just another kind of animal? What are the implications of these questions and how we answer them?
12. Human Nature and Technology	This week we examine the question of human nature in the light of technology. Is human nature being radically altered by modern technology? Or are we pre-adapted in some sense to be intimately interconnected with an artificial environment filled with tools, what Andy Clark calls "Natural Born Cyborgs"? What is the future of human nature?
13. Tying it All Together	In the final session of the course we bring together all the various debates and topics surrounding human nature to examine the differences and similarities between positions. And to prepare for the final assessment. There are no tutorials scheduled in this week.

Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from [Policy Central \(https://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policy-central\)](https://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policy-central). 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](#)

- [Grade Appeal Policy](#)
- [Complaint Management Procedure for Students and Members of the Public](#)
- [Special Consideration Policy](#) (**Note:** *The Special Consideration Policy is effective from 4 December 2017 and replaces the Disruption to Studies Policy.*)

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

If you would like to see all the policies relevant to Learning and Teaching visit [Policy Central](http://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policy-central) (<http://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policy-central>).

Student Code of Conduct

Macquarie University students have a responsibility to be familiar with the Student Code of Conduct: <https://students.mq.edu.au/study/getting-started/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 or if you are a Global MBA student contact globalmba.support@mq.edu.au

Student Support

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

Learning Skills

Learning Skills (mq.edu.au/learningskills) provides academic writing resources and study strategies to help you improve your marks and take control of your study.

- [Getting help with your assignment](#)
- [Workshops](#)
- [StudyWise](#)
- [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

Students with a disability are encouraged to contact the [Disability Service](#) who can provide

appropriate help with any issues that arise during their studies.

Student Enquiries

For all student enquiries, visit Student Connect at ask.mq.edu.au

If you are a Global MBA student contact globalmba.support@mq.edu.au

IT Help

For help with University computer systems and technology, visit 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.