



PHIL1031

The Philosophy of Human Nature

Session 1, Special circumstances 2021

Department of Philosophy

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Notice

As part of [Phase 3 of our return to campus plan](#), most units will now run tutorials, seminars and other small group activities on campus, and most will keep an online version available to those students unable to return or those who choose to continue their studies online.

To check the availability of face-to-face activities for your unit, please go to [timetable viewer](#). To check detailed information on unit assessments visit your unit's iLearn space or consult your unit convenor.

General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff

Convenor; Lecturer (Section 1)

Jennifer Duke-Yonge

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By arrangement

Lecturer (Section 2)

Robert Sinnerbrink

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Lecturer (Section 3)

Richard Menary

richard.menary@mq.edu.au

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

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 the Special Consideration policy in the list of policies at the end of this document for further details.

Read the policy 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.

Late Submission Penalty

Unless a Special Consideration 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 more than seven (7) days (incl. weekends) after the original submission deadline. No late submissions will be accepted for timed assessments – e.g. quizzes, online tests.

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.

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.

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

Assessment Tasks

Name	Weighting	Hurdle	Due
Online Quizzes	25%	No	Open Mon (from Wk2); close 11.59pm Sun of following week
Reflective tasks	20%	No	Part 1 (intro quiz), Sun 7/3; Part 2 (reflection), Sun11/4.
Essay	35%	No	11.59pm, Sunday 6/6
Tutorial Participation/ Online Participation	20%	No	Weeks 1-7; 9-11

Online Quizzes

Assessment Type ¹: Quiz/Test

Indicative Time on Task ²: 15 hours

Due: **Open Mon (from Wk2); close 11.59pm Sun of following week**

Weighting: **25%**

Multiple choice questions will cover material discussed in the weekly content.

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.

Reflective tasks

Assessment Type ¹: Reflective Writing

Indicative Time on Task ²: 15 hours

Due: **Part 1 (intro quiz), Sun 7/3; Part 2 (reflection), Sun11/4.**

Weighting: **20%**

Short reflective tasks

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

Essay

Assessment Type ¹: Essay

Indicative Time on Task ²: 30 hours

Due: **11.59pm, Sunday 6/6**

Weighting: **35%**

An argumentative Essay about themes from the unit.

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

Tutorial Participation/Online Participation

Assessment Type ¹: Participatory task

Indicative Time on Task ²: 15 hours

Due: **Weeks 1-7; 9-11**

Weighting: **20%**

Students should be well prepared for tutorials, having done the required reading and devised questions and discussion points. Students should make a constructive contribution to classroom/online 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

¹ 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.

² 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 available online from Monday of each week. You should make sure you watch the lectures before attending tutorials or engaging in tutorial discussions.

Tutorials

Internal Students will attend one tutorial each week (Weeks 1-7; 9-11), either on-campus or on Zoom. Check the timetable for details (<http://timetables.mq.edu.au>)

External/Online students will engage in tutorial discussions through the discussion forums 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 22 nd February)	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 1 st March)	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?

<p>Week 3</p> <p>(w/b 8th March)</p>	<p>Personal Identity</p> <p>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 <i>you</i>.</p>
<p>Week 4</p> <p>(w/b 15th March)</p>	<p>Free will and Determinism</p> <p>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?</p>
<p>SECTION 2 – EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS</p> <p>Lecturer: Associate Professor Robert Sinnerbrink</p>	
<p>Week 5</p> <p>(w/b 22nd March)</p>	<p>Human Freedom and Consciousness</p> <p>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.</p>
<p>Week 6</p> <p>(w/b 29th March)</p>	<p>Being-in-the-world and Mortality</p> <p>An introduction to phenomenology 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><i>Midsemester break 2nd-18th April (Reflection due 11th April)</i></p>	
<p>Week 7</p> <p>(w/b 19th April)</p>	<p>Literature and Art as Philosophical Tools</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>Week 8</p> <p>(w/b 26th April)</p> <p>No tutorials this week</p>	<p>Essay Writing (Jenny Duke-Yonge)</p> <p>This week's lecture will focus on essay writing, to help you develop skills for researching and writing philosophical essays, in preparation for your essay due at the end of semester.</p>
<p>SECTION 3 - ARE HUMANS UNIQUE?</p> <p>Lecturer: Professor Richard Menary</p>	

<p>Week 9</p> <p>(w/b 3rd May)</p>	<p>What's so Special about Humans?</p> <p>There is a long tradition of thinking about humans which proposes that we are a unique species. Prior to Darwin the prevalent view (in the West) was that humans were unique because they were created with special properties that no other creature possessed: an immortal soul; freedom of the will; reason; language; etc. In other words, Humans are discontinuous with the rest of the natural world, including other species. Darwin and the incredible success of evolutionary Biology 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. How then to explain some of the features of human nature that have been proposed as markers of uniqueness?</p>
<p>Week 10</p> <p>(w/b 10th May)</p>	<p>Animals Like Us: Why Animals Have Minds</p> <p>Philosophers such as Aristotle and Descartes have argued that animals don't really have minds like us. Descartes went so far as to propose that animals are essentially mechanisms, whereas Aristotle proposed a hierarchy of souls with humans at the top and animals being incapable of rational thought. Were they right? This lecture will propose an answer to the question: They were wrong. The balance of argument is between some of the markers of uniqueness of human nature with the Darwinian account of the continuity of humans with the natural world. We will look at some of the fascinating accounts of animal mindedness and arguments for both the continuity and discontinuity of human nature.</p>
<p>Week 11</p> <p>(w/b 17th May)</p>	<p>Emotions, what are they good for?</p> <p>We've all got them, but why do we have them? Why do we spend so much time thinking about our own emotions and those of others? Why do we have so many ways that we express them, or evaluate them? Why do we want to be moved by Art and fiction? One possibility is that emotions in humans evolved for social bonding and engagement. This lecture will expand on the idea that Human Nature is strongly pro-social and human emotions should be considered in the light of human sociality.</p>
<p>Week 12</p> <p>(w/b 24th May)</p> <p>No tutorials this week</p>	<p>Tools for Thought: Technology, Culture and Mind</p> <p>We make, we learn, we inherit artefacts, stories, religions, rules, morals and traditions. Humans are cultural and technical animals. We make cultures and we inherit them. We learn about them from our parents, teachers and peers. The way that we do this appears to be the result both of the way that our minds have evolved, but also, that the slow, incremental process of the evolution of culture has gradually transformed our minds as well. This lecture argues that Humans are both continuous in Darwin's sense, but also unique, in that we are the pre-eminently cultural and technological species.</p>
<p>Week 13</p> <p>(w/b 31st May)</p>	<p>There are no lectures or tutorials this week: Use the time to finalise your essay, which is due on Sunday 6/6/21.</p> <p>We hope you have enjoyed PHIL1031.</p>

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](#)

- [Grade Appeal Policy](#)
- [Complaint Management 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>) 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 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.

Changes from Previous Offering

Some changes to topics, readings and assessment.