



PHIL1031

The Philosophy of Human Nature

Session 1, Online-scheduled-weekday 2023

Department of Philosophy

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Macquarie University has taken all reasonable measures to ensure the information in this publication is accurate and up-to-date. However, the information may change or become out-dated as a result of change in University policies, procedures or rules. The University reserves the right to make changes to any information in this publication without notice. Users of this publication are advised to check the website version of this publication [or the relevant faculty or department] before acting on any information in this publication.

General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff

Convenor; Lecturer (Section 1)

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By arrangement

Lecturer (Section 2)

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Lecturer (Section 3)

Thomas Corbin

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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.

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
Online Quizzes	25%	No	11:55pm Sundays, Weekly from Wk3

Name	Weighting	Hurdle	Due
Tutorial Participation/Online Participation	15%	No	Weeks 1-6, 8-12
Reflective tasks	20%	No	Pt1 - 5/3; Pt2 - 5/3 OR 12/3 OR 19/3; Pt3- 30/4
Essay preparation task	5%	No	11:55pm, Sunday 14/5 (Wk10)
Essay	35%	No	11:55pm, Sunday 4/6 (Wk 13)

Online Quizzes

Assessment Type ¹: Quiz/Test

Indicative Time on Task ²: 15 hours

Due: **11:55pm Sundays, Weekly from Wk3**

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.

Tutorial Participation/Online Participation

Assessment Type ¹: Participatory task

Indicative Time on Task ²: 15 hours

Due: **Weeks 1-6, 8-12**

Weighting: **15%**

Students should be well prepared for tutorials/online discussions, having done the required reading and attended or watched the lecture. Students should engage constructively with 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

Reflective tasks

Assessment Type ¹: Reflective Writing

Indicative Time on Task ²: 15 hours

Due: **Pt1 - 5/3; Pt2 - 5/3 OR 12/3 OR 19/3; Pt3- 30/4**

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 preparation task

Assessment Type ¹: Plan

Indicative Time on Task ²: 5 hours

Due: **11:55pm, Sunday 14/5 (Wk10)**

Weighting: **5%**

A short essay preparation 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

Essay

Assessment Type ¹: Essay

Indicative Time on Task ²: 25 hours

Due: **11:55pm, Sunday 4/6 (Wk 13)**

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

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 delivered live on campus from 1-3 on Wednesday of each week in the Macquarie Theatre. 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 1-6; 8-11) 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 1-6; 8-11) 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. 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

<p>Week 1 (week beginning 20th February)</p>	<p>Introduction</p> <p>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.</p>
<p>Week 2</p> <p>(w/b 27th February)</p>	<p>The Mind/Body Problem</p> <p>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>
<p>Week 3</p> <p>(w/b 6th 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 13th 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 20th March)</p>	<p>The Problem of Existence; Absurdity and Authenticity</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>Week 6</p> <p>(w/b 27th March)</p>	<p>Human Freedom and Consciousness</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>Week 7</p> <p>(w/b 3rd April)</p> <p>No tutorials this week</p>	<p>Being-in-the-world and Mortality</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>(Mid-Semester break 8/4-24/4)</p>	
<p>Week 8</p> <p>(w/b 24th 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>SECTION 3 - ARE HUMANS UNIQUE?</p> <p>Lecturer: Dr Thomas Corbin</p>	

<p>Week 9</p> <p>(w/b 1st 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, at least not as previously held. 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 8th May)</p>	<p>Are humans all that different from other animals?</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? 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. In this lecture 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 15th May)</p>	<p>Our Search for Meaning: Religion, Art, and Beauty?</p> <p>Whether that is through our ethical principles, our religious beliefs, our appreciation of art or natural beauty, the search for meaning is where we carve out a space for ourselves that we feel is uniquely ours. It is how we create our identities. But as well as this, our search for meaning is also typically the area of life which we most identify with our own 'humanity'. Finding the music which speaks to us, the art that gives us new eyes, or the book that reveals our deepest truths to ourselves, it seems that our search for meaning is where we find out what it truly means to be human. In this lecture we will look to some of the ways humans have oriented their search for meaning through religion, art and beauty, and we will ask if what they found really does make humans unique.</p>
<p>Week 12</p> <p>(w/b 22nd May)</p> <p>No tutorials this week</p>	<p>Tools for Thought: Technology, Culture and Human Labour</p> <p>Humans are cultural and technical animals, and we are also working animals. Some of us work in corporate offices and others work in care roles in the home, but almost all of us work. We labour, we make, we learn, we inherit artefacts, stories, rules, morals and traditions. Through this we produce the world we inhabit. This final lecture explores the idea that Humans are both continuous in Darwin's sense, but also unique, in that we are the pre-eminently cultural and technological species expressed most clearly through human labour.</p>
<p>Week 13 (w/b 29th May)</p>	<p>There are no lectures or tutorials this week: Use the time to finalise your essay.</p> <p>We hope you have enjoyed PHIL/PHIX1031.</p> <p>(Essay due Sunday 4/6)</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](#)
- [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>) 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

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/.

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.