PHIX1031

The Philosophy of Human Nature

Session 1, Online-flexible 2025

School of Humanities

Contents

General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff
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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. All enrolment queries should be directed to Open Universities Australia (OUA): see www.open.edu.au

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/Chapt GPT in Philosophy:

In this Unit, and unless notified otherwise *in writing* by the Unit Convenor, substantive assessment content that has been generated by AI will be regarded as not the student's own work and potentially in breach of Academic Integrity standards. This applies to all assessments, including online forums. In submitting assessments all students will be required to confirm their agreement with the following:

In submitting this assessment, I certify that this submission is my own work and demonstrates my own understanding, analysis, research, reflection, critical thinking, and writing. I am not submitting anything that I cannot myself fully explain and defend, if called upon to do so. I understand that if my teachers have concerns about whether this submission is my own work or an AI-generated output, I may be required to attend an interview with the Unit Convenor/Integrity Officer/academic staff to verify my research methods, my understanding of the content, and my close familiarity with all sources I have cited. If I am found to have submitted work that is not my own, my work will be further investigated, and I may be found to be in breach of the MQ Academic Integrity Policy.

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
Media presentation	25%	No	30/03/2025
Reflective Task	45%	No	25/05/2025
Reflective Portfolio	30%	No	08/06/2025

Media presentation

Assessment Type [1]: Media presentation
Indicative Time on Task [2]: 20 hours
Due: **30/03/2025**
Weighting: **25%**

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

Reflective Task

Assessment Type [1]: Reflective Writing
Indicative Time on Task [2]: 35 hours
Due: **25/05/2025**
Weighting: **45%**

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

Reflective Portfolio

Assessment Type [1]: Portfolio
Indicative Time on Task [2]: 20 hours
Due: **08/06/2025**
Weighting: **30%**

A set of reflections on learning in the unit

On successful completion you will be able to:

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

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[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 12noon-2pm on Monday 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 2-11) on campus. Check the timetable for details (http://timetables.mq.edu.au). Your participation in tutorial is a crucial element of learning in this unit and is based on pre-tutorial preparation activities as well as discussion. Tutorial participation is required in order to complete the Reflective Portfolio assessment task.
- Students enrolled in the '**online scheduled**' offering will attend one tutorial each week (Weeks 2-11) on Zoom. Zoom links will be available in iLearn. Check the timetable for details (http://timetables.mq.edu.au). our participation in tutorial is a crucial element of learning in this unit and is based on pre-tutorial preparation activities as well as discussion. Tutorial participation is required in order to complete the Reflective Portfolio assessment task.
- Students enrolled in the '**online flexible**' offering (either in PHIL1031 or via OUA in PHIX1031) will engage in discussion activities flexibly, through the aynchronous discussion forums in iLearn (Weeks 2-11). Tutorial participation is required in order to

complete the Reflective Portfolio assessment task. 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 24th 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 3rd 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?
Week 3 (w/b 10th 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 17th 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

Week 5 (w/b 24th March)	**The Problem of Existence; Absurdity and Authenticity** 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? *Media Presentation due Sunday 30/03*
Week 6 (w/b 31st March)	**Human Freedom and Consciousness** 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.
Week 7 (w/b 7th April)	**Being-in-the-world and Mortality** 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 time and our mortality. **(Mid-Semester break 14/04-25/04)**

Week 8 (w/b 28th April)	**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 and social relations. Maurice 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.

SECTION 3 – FROM THE NARRATIVE SELF TO SELF-NARRATIVE PRACTICES

Lecturer: Dr Regina Fabry

Week 9 (w/b 5th May)	**Narrative and Selfhood**
	How are we able to conceive of ourselves as selves that continue to exist across time? This week, we explore and discuss one influential answer to this question that emphasises the importance of narratives for the psychological continuity of selfhood: Marya Schechtman's (1996, 2007) *narrative self-constitution view*.
Week 10 (w/b 12th May)	**Embodied Narratives**
	Many philosophers claim that human agents are both embodied and narrative creatures. But what is the relationship between our lived embodied experiences and our self-narratives? This week, we will explore Richard Menary's (2008) *embodied narrative account* and more recent philosophical accounts that can provide answers to this question.
Week 11 (w/b 19th May)	**Cognitivist Approaches to Self-Narrative**
	Proponents of 4E (embodied, embedded, extended, enactive) accounts of cognition and affectivity argue that self-narration is not only embodied, but causally dependent on our interactions with our socio-culturally shaped niche. To what extent, then, does the niche influence how we make sense of our experiences through self-narration? This week, we look at Richard Heersmink's (2020) account of distributed self-narratives and recent critical engagements with this work. *Reflective Task due Sunday 25/05*
Week 12 (w/b 26th May) No tutorials or assessed discussion this week	**Self Narratives and Cultural Niches**
	Previous research on 4E cognition and affectivity has tacitly assumed that the socio-culturally shaped niche has a beneficial impact on self-narrative practices. More recently, however, philosophers have started to paint a more nuanced, complicated picture of the relationship between self-narrators and their niche. This week, we will explore the potentially harmful constraints that the niche imposes on processes of self-narration by discussing Lucy Osler's (2024) account of *narrative railroading* and cognate philosophical considerations.
Week 13 (w/b 2nd June)	There are no lectures or tutorials this week: Use the time to finalise your Reflective Portfolio We hope you have enjoyed PHIL/PHIX1031! *Reflective Portfolio due Sunday 08/06*

Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from Policy Central (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). 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) 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 connect.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/

Academic Success

Academic Success 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 the Service Connect Portal, 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.

Unit information based on version 2025.03 of the Handbook