

Human Nature

PHL 244, Fall 2018
Tues & Thurs 1:30-3pm, SF 1105

- Professor:** Brendan de Kenessey
Department of Philosophy
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- Office:** Jackman Humanities Building (170 St. George St), Room 508
- Office hours:** Tuesdays 3-5pm or by appointment
If you cannot make my Tuesday office hours, don't hesitate to email me to schedule another time to meet!
- TAs:** Megan Burden (megan.burden@mail.utoronto.ca)
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- Website:** <https://q.utoronto.ca/courses/57539>
- Readings:** All readings for the course can be downloaded from the course website.
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

“Know thyself.” If philosophy has a slogan, this might be it. In this course, we will attempt to better our understanding of ourselves by asking three questions:

(1) What are we? Are we immaterial souls who can outlive our bodies? Are we made up of our memories and other psychological states, so that we could in principle be uploaded into a computer? Or are we physical bodies, just like any other animals?

(2) Are we good or evil? Are human beings innately selfish, or are we capable of genuine altruism? What motivates us to be moral? Why do some people do evil things? And what does it take to be a good person? Should we aspire to complete selflessness, or is that too high a standard?

(3) Do we have free will? Can we be held responsible for our actions if they are the inevitable result of the laws of nature? What would it mean for us to have free will? Does modern neuroscience show that there is no such thing?

In the process of investigating these questions, you will learn how to think and write philosophically. By the end of this course, you should be able to read a philosophical text, clearly explain its main argument, and assess whether the argument is convincing by raising objections to it.

GRADING AND EXPECTATIONS

Grade breakdown

Class participation: 10%

Paper 1: 20%

Paper 2: 30%

Paper 3: 40%

There will be no final exam.

Class participation and group work

To learn the skills involved in doing philosophy, you need to *practice* them yourself. (Try learning how to play the guitar without ever picking one up!) So, I will expect you to take an active part in class. In almost every lecture there will be time where I ask you to reflect on some questions yourself, either by brainstorming on your own or by discussing with your classmates.

One of the main ways you will participate in class is by working together in groups. Your group will be assigned in the first class and will stay together throughout the term.

At the end of all in-class exercises you will turn in some brief writing summarizing the results of your reflection or discussion. Sometimes you will each turn in writing individually; often your group will submit one piece of writing collectively. **All in-class writings will be graded pass/fail:** if your writing shows that you are thinking about the questions, you will pass.

Your participation grade will be determined primarily by the individual and group in-class writings you turn in throughout the term. At the end of term, I will ask you to fill out evaluations of how your groupmates contributed to your group's work. Though these peer evaluations will not directly determine your participation grade, they will be considered. If your peers unanimously agree that you contributed especially well, or refused to participate, that will likely influence your participation grade positively or negatively.

Papers

The other way you will practice thinking philosophically is by writing papers. You will write three papers for this course. The first paper will be broken into two parts, so you will turn in a total of four writing assignments:

Paper 1 Argument Reconstruction (500-600 words): due **September 27th at 1:30pm**

Paper 1 (1000-1200 words): due **October 18th at 1:30pm**

Paper 2 (1000-1200 words): due **November 13th at 1:30pm**

Paper 3 (1600-1800 words): due **December 4th at 1:30pm**

You will submit your papers online via the course website. All papers must be submitted ***before the start of class*** on the day they are due.

Prompts for each paper will be distributed in class well before the paper is due; they will also be available on the course website.

COURSE POLICIES

Late papers

Late papers will lose one-third of a letter grade per day they are late. So, an A paper turned in one day late will receive an A-, turned in two days late will receive a B+, and so on.

Papers turned in after the start of class on the due date are considered one day late. A paper turned in more than 24 hours after the time it was due (i.e. after 1:30pm the day after the due date) is two days late; and so on.

Extensions

I am happy to grant extensions for papers for almost any reason *so long as they are requested significantly before the due date*. The earlier you request an extension, the more likely you are to get it. So, plan ahead: if a paper is due on the day of a big exam in another class you're taking, email me *now* to ask for an extension, and you'll probably get it.

I will not consider requests for extensions the day before the assignment is due unless you have a verifiable medical or family emergency.

Email communication

If you have a practical question about the course schedule, assignments, or requirements, check the course website and syllabus first before emailing me or your TA. If you email us a question that could be answered by consulting the syllabus or website, we will not answer your email.

If you have a substantive question about the course material, ask it in person, either by coming to office hours or by scheduling a meeting with me or your TA.

All emails to me or your TA must be sent from your utoronto.ca address. We cannot answer emails sent from personal addresses.

Academic honesty and plagiarism

It should go without saying that your papers must be your own work. There is an easy way to avoid academic dishonesty: **cite everything you don't think of and write yourself**. Better to cite too much than too little. Acknowledge anything that has helped you write your paper with a citation or footnote:

- If you quote something verbatim, make sure it appears between quotation marks and that you identify the source and the page numbers you are quoting from.
- If you paraphrase something you read, add a footnote citing the source and page numbers of the passage you are paraphrasing.
- If you read something helpful, add a footnote citing the source and acknowledging that it helped you with the paper – even if you aren't paraphrasing it directly. An example: “My thinking about the issues in this paper has been helped by the article ‘Free Will’ in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/freewill/>.”
- If you get an idea from a conversation with a friend or anyone else, then acknowledge their help in a footnote. Example: “Thanks to my roommate Justin Beiber for suggesting this response to my objection to Descartes’ argument.” (Professional philosophers do this all the time!)

The University of Toronto treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The University's policies and procedures regarding academic honesty can be found in its *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*, available at:

<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppjun011995.pdf>

More information is available at <https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/>

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you are in any doubt about whether something you are doing constitutes academic dishonesty, ask me or your TA.

Turnitin.com

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site.

Your papers will be reviewed by Turnitin.com by default when you submit them on the Quercus course website. Use of Turnitin.com is **voluntary**: if you wish to opt out of having your papers reviewed by Turnitin.com, email me and we will set up an alternative arrangement.

Accessibility and accommodation

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility, and students with disabilities and other diverse learning needs are welcome in this course. If you require accommodation for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about this course, please contact either me or Accessibility Services as soon as possible (accessibility.services@utoronto.ca; 416-978-8060). For more information on accessibility at U of T, go to <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>

If you anticipate being absent from class due to a religious observance, please let me know so I can provide you with notes from the class and ensure that your participation grade is unaffected.

RESOURCES

Want help? Here are some people you can ask:

- (1) **Me and your TAs.** We are here to help you learn, and want to see you succeed. So please don't hesitate to ask me and/or your TAs for help! We are always happy to meet with you to talk about anything you are struggling with (or excited about!) in the course.
- (2) **The Philosophy Essay Clinic.** You can get one-on-one help on your philosophy papers at the Philosophy Essay Clinic: <http://philosophy.utoronto.ca/st-george/undergraduate-at-st-george/philosophy-essay-clinic/>. Though your TAs and I unfortunately cannot read drafts of your papers, the essay clinic will be more than happy to review your rough drafts.
- (3) **Your college's Writing Centre.** Each college has a writing centre where students from that college can go for help with their writing assignments. To find your college's writing centre, go here: <http://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/arts-and-science/>
- (4) **Writing Plus workshops.** U of T's writing center holds a series of workshops throughout the term on every aspect of academic writing: see <http://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-plus/fall-workshops/>. You can also find lots of writing advice on the center's website: <http://writing.utoronto.ca/>
- (5) **ELL (English Language Learning).** If English is not your first language, or if you want to improve your English language skills for any reason, there are helpful resources available at <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/advising/ell>

University of Toronto also offers support services for a wide range of challenges you might encounter, including (but not limited to) mental health, financial distress, housing crises, and sexual violence. **If you need help, please ask for it.** There are people whose job it is to give you help. For a guide to these resources, visit <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/feeling-distressed>

For a fun and helpful guide to reading and writing philosophy, I highly recommend "The Pink Guide to Taking Philosophy Classes" by Professor Helena de Bres: <https://sites.google.com/a/wellesley.edu/pinkguidetophilosophy/>

COURSE OUTLINE

If no page numbers are given, that means you should read the whole article.

Part I: What are we?

Thursday 9/6: Introduction

No readings

Tuesday 9/11: Are we immortal souls?

Plato, *Phaedo*: p. 50-51 (margin numbers 57-59c), p. 60-73 (69e-84c)

Thursday 9/13: Are we immortal souls? Continued

Plato, *Phaedo*: p.73-83 (margin numbers 84c-96), p. 86-92 (100b-107d), p. 97-100 (115-118a)

Tuesday 9/18: Is the mind distinct from the body?

René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*: p. 16-18, p. 54

Elizabeth of Bohemia, correspondence with Descartes: p. 9-17

Thursday 9/20: Is the mind distinct from the body? The modern debate

David Chalmers, “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness”: sections 1-3

Patricia Churchland, “The Hornswoggle Problem”

Tuesday 9/25: What makes me the same person now as I was 10 years ago? The psychological theory of personal identity over time

Amy Kind, *Persons and Personal Identity*: Chapter 2

Thursday 9/27: Personal identity continued: the bodily theory

[PAPER 1 ARGUMENT RECONSTRUCTION DUE]

Bernard Williams, “The Self and the Future”

Tuesday 10/2: Personal identity continued: teleportation and fission

Amy Kind, *Persons and Personal Identity*: Chapter 3

Part II: Are we good or evil?

Thursday 10/4: Do we only seek our own pleasure?

Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*: p. 39-54 (Book I, Chapter 4)

Tuesday 10/9: Are we ever genuinely altruistic?

C. Daniel Batson and Laura Shaw, “Evidence for Altruism: Toward a Pluralism of Prosocial Motives”: p. 107-110 (stop at “Potential Egoistic and Altruistic Motives for Helping”), p. 114-120 (start at “Testing the Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis”)

Thursday 10/11: What motivates us to be moral?

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*: p. 7-10 (margin numbers 393-399)

C. Daniel Batson, "Moral masquerades: Experimental exploration of the nature of moral motivation"

Tuesday 10/16: How altruistic should we be?
Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"

Thursday 10/18: Is it possible to be *too* good?
[PAPER 1 DUE]

Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints": p. 419-427 (stop at "Moral Saints and Moral Theories"), p. 435-439 (start at "Moral Saints and Moral Philosophy")

Tuesday 10/23: Where does evil come from?
Roy Baumeister, *Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty*: p. 33-47, p. 60-62, p. 72-75

Thursday 10/25: How can we make moral progress?
Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen*: p. 3-51

Tuesday 10/30: Are good people just lucky?
Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck"

Part III: Do we have free will?

Thursday 11/1: Can there be free will in a deterministic world?
Peter van Inwagen, "The Powers of Rational Beings: Freedom of the Will," p. 400-405

Tuesday 11/13: Free will and determinism continued
[PAPER 2 DUE]
Continued discussion of Peter van Inwagen, "The Powers of Rational Beings"

Thursday 11/15: Free will and determinism continued
Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility"

Tuesday 11/20: Free will and determinism continued
Gary Watson, "Free Agency": p. 205-216, p. 220

Thursday 11/22: Does neuroscience show that there is no free will?
Benjamin Libet, "Do we have free will?"

Tuesday 11/27: Is anger ever justifiable?
Martha Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*: p. 14-35

Thursday 11/29: Is anger ever justifiable? Continued
Amia Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger"

Tuesday 12/4: Conclusions
[PAPER 3 DUE]
No reading