

St. Francis Xavier University
Department of Philosophy
Course Outline
PHIL230 Philosophy and Human Nature I

Instructor: Doug Al-Maini

Class Room: NH246

Office & Office Hours:

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This class is intended to introduce students to the philosophical analysis of human nature. We shall begin with Plato's analysis of the tri-partite soul, a theory that has had tremendous influence over the Western conception of human nature. To aid us in the study we will give a close reading of Plato's *Phaedrus*. After this we will move on to what is both a reaction to and a development of Plato's work, Aristotle's *On The Soul*. Here we shall concentrate on the map of consciousness that Aristotle lays out. Finally we shall switch our focus and look at a text seminal to the Indian view of human nature, the *Bhagavad Gita*. By the end of the course, students should be able to give a somewhat insightful response to the question, "What does it mean to be human?" from various philosophical perspectives and be able to enunciate why the study of such a question is so important. Topics to be covered include the nature of the soul, the role of the appetites, the mind/body problem, what constitutes a "good" relationship with other people, gender differences, essentialism vs. the plasticity of human nature, and what it might mean to have an aesthetic sense.

PLEASE NO USE OF LAPTOPS, CELL PHONES, OR OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES DURING CLASS TIME.

Schedule:

Week	Topic	Readings	Due Monday
1	Introduction	Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i>	
2	<i>Physis/Nomos</i> debate	Handouts	
3	Tri-partite soul	Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i> (entire dialogue)	
4	Immortality of the Soul	Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i>	
5	Love	Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i>	
6	The Vegetative Soul	Aristotle, <i>De Anima</i> bk. II, 1-4.	1 st Essay Arg. Outline
7	Perception	Aristotle, <i>De Anima</i> bk. II, 5-6, 12.	
8	The Mental Faculties	Aristotle, <i>De Anima</i> bk. III, 2-6	1 st Essay due
9	Knowing, Memory	Aristotle, <i>De Anima</i> bk. III, 7-12	
10	Death	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> 1-6	2 nd Essay Arg. Outline
11	Action and Yoga	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> 7-12	
12	Holism vs. Discreteness	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> 13-18	2 nd Essay due
13	Wrap up		

Assignments: Students will be required to complete two essays and a final exam. The essays will each be worth 25% of the final grade, the final will be worth 40%, and there will be a participation mark worth 10%. A response will consist in an answer to the assigned questions below. In the first class I'll go over some general comments on how to construct a philosophical response, or at least what kinds of things I'm looking for in the assignments; responses will be evaluated according to the attached assessment form.

Essay Questions:**1st Essay: Due Monday, Week 7**

Can a human with no real understanding of the Forms be happy? Students must include an analysis of Plato's conception of human nature in answering this question.

2nd Section: Due Monday, Week 11

At 432a24-432b11, Aristotle offers a criticism of Plato's analysis of the soul. Is Aristotle's criticism sound?

Technical Considerations for Written Assignments:

1) All written assignments must be typed (black ink, please) and double-spaced on pages with at most 1 inch margins. No extra line spaces between paragraphs. Indent the first line of a paragraph. Printing on both sides of a sheet of paper is quite acceptable.

2) Please no title pages. Also no "Works Cited" or "Bibliography" pages referring to one work; do bibliographic references in a footnote if you must. Also no enormously large-fonted titles, names, dates, course numbers, student numbers, phone numbers, or due dates that take up half a page of space. Your title, name, and student number at the top of the first page is quite sufficient. Please visibly number any multiple-page assignments. If for some reason you must hand in the assignment to the office, please include my name at the top of the assignment as well.

3) No duo-tangs, folders, binders, or paperclips. Please staple the pages of your work together. Do not hand in loose sheets of paper.

4) Under no circumstances will emailed assignments be accepted. Please hand in your assignments at the start of class on the day they are due.

5) The final page of this outline is the evaluation form that will be used in the assessment of your writing. This evaluation form provides the clearest explanation of my requirements for an essay. Please, study it carefully before you write your work.

6) Many of the above requirements are arbitrary demands on my part, but they really do facilitate the assessment of your work. These requirements will count towards your organization mark.

7) My late policy is a 3% reduction per day late. You will have known the due dates for your assignments since the start of the semester, thus providing you with ample time to complete your work, so last minute excuses will be met with some skepticism.

8) Plagiarism is completely unacceptable. If you make use of an idea that is not of your own devising, you must cite the source of that idea.

9) Students are obliged to keep a spare copy of their completed assignments for themselves.

Required Texts:

Plato, *Phaedrus*, Penguin Classics Edition

Aristotle, *On the Soul and On Memory and Recollection*, Green Lion Press (September 2001).

Ekknath Easwaran, *The Bhagavad Gita*, Nilgiri Press, 2007.

EVALUATION FORM
(Late assignments will not receive comments)

Style:

Grammar: Are the sentences understandable? Are there any spelling mistakes? Is the diction clear and concise? Can the thought behind each sentence easily be grasped? /10

Organization: Do the ideas logically follow each other, or were they haphazardly strewn together? Is there evidence of the student having constructed an argumentative outline? Is the structure of the argumentation explicitly stated and easily perceived? /10

Content:

Argument Outline: /10

Thesis: Does the assignment give an answer to a question or problem put forward? Is the answer more than a simple “yes” or “no”? Is the answer insightful, being an interpretive idea itself? Is the thesis explicitly stated? /10

Arguments: Are there arguments presented in the paper? Are the arguments interesting or banal? Are the arguments incisive or superficial? Do the arguments explicitly outline broad premises that act as guides to understanding and reveal the unquestioned perspectives adopted in the paper? /20

Originality: Does the student provide input into the conceptual debates the text engages in? Is there evidence of insight on the student’s part into the topic? Are there any new ideas being explored in the assignment? Is the student able to go beyond ideas raised in class discussion? /20

Evaluation: Does the student give a fair summation of the ideas contained in the texts used? Are passages from the text cited? Does the use of these ideas meaningfully contribute to the thesis of the essay, or is the use of material a mere addendum to the main arguments of the paper? /20

/100