

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN NATURE – PHIL 120
Fall 2018 – Dr. Grant J. Rozeboom

Office: Cofrin 338
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St. Norbert College
Classroom: Cofrin 201
Class Schedule: MWF 8:30-9:30 am
Class site: classroom.google.com

GOALS: The main goal of this course is to learn how to take responsibility for some of our core, organizing beliefs – our beliefs about what it means to be human. Doing this involves clearly stating these beliefs (which often go unstated), examining our rationales for them, and seeing if our rationales hold up in light of our other core beliefs (about God, freedom, or morality) and conflicting views of human nature. This is a distinctively philosophical project, which requires developing and analyzing arguments, clearly stating key ideas, and examining the sources of our ideas. We will organize our efforts around central texts in the Western philosophical tradition, learning how to analyze what these texts say and using them to compare and evaluate our own beliefs.

OUTCOMES: We will pursue these goals with an eye to the following four outcomes:

- Articulation of core beliefs: You will be able to clearly and succinctly articulate your core beliefs about human nature, in both writing and verbal discussion, and using the philosophical readings we study.
- Developing and examining arguments: You will be able to clearly explain plausible rationales for your core beliefs about human nature, distinguishing your supporting reasons (or “premises”) from your core beliefs (or “conclusions”), and you will be able to evaluate the strength of your rationales, considering whether your premises are correct and to what extent they support your core beliefs.
- Reconstructing philosophical views: You will be able to reconstruct the main views about human nature presented in our readings, identifying and restating the main conclusions, identifying and restating the supporting arguments, and raising questions about the meaning and/or plausibility of these views.
- Comparing and evaluating core beliefs: You will compare your core beliefs to the views presented in our readings, considering whether and how they differ, explaining whether and how they present challenges to your own beliefs, and when they do, deciding how to respond to those challenges.

REQUIREMENTS: To achieve the main goals of the course, you will need to complete regular short written work (both in and outside of class), some of which will culminate in a paper, reading guides, and mid-term and final exams. More details ...

- Analytical Reflections: You will complete a short (~400 words), focused analysis of one of your and/or an author’s view about a specific question about human

nature every one or two weeks (depending on when other large assignments or exams are due). I will provide evaluation criteria and instructions.

- Paper: Based on your work in some of your analytical reflections, you will compose a 1200-word paper explaining your response to a challenge to one of your core beliefs about human nature. The criteria for this paper will be drawn from the evaluation criteria applied to your analytical reflections.
- Reading Guides: For many of our readings, you will complete short reading guides that raise 3-5 questions about the reading, which will prepare you for class discussion and other assignments and, more generally, help you to efficiently study the readings and use them to refine your own thinking.
- Class Contributions: Taking responsibility for our beliefs about human nature is a collective effort – we need to hear from others about what they think and, perhaps more importantly, hear others restate what we think. In each class, we will work together to answer important philosophical questions, both as a large group and in small groups. This will often involve written work turned in for credit.
- Exams: To cement the skills of disciplined thought that are paramount in this course, you will take a mid-term and final exam that will require you to revisit and tie together the concepts and arguments that are most important for helping us to refine and revise our core beliefs about human nature.

GRADING: Your grade will be determined by how well you satisfy the requirements, with 20% of your grade coming from the Analytical Reflections, 30% from the Paper, 10% from the Reading Guides, 10% from Class Contributions, and 30% from the exams. Some further details and policies:

- Grading Scale: A = 93%-100%, AB = 88%-92%, B = 83%-87%, BC = 79%-82%, C = 74%-78%, CD = 70%-73%, D = 65%-69%, F = 0%-64% (Note: I will round to the nearest whole percentage point.)
- Late/Rewrite Policy: You are expected to turn in all of your assignments on time, and they cannot be revised once they are turned in. That being said, life is hard, and so for one (and only one) of your Analytical Reflections, you can turn it in late (within one week of the original deadline) or rewrite it with no penalty (within one week of when you receive the initial grade). All other late work will receive a lowered grade, and some assignments will receive no credit if they are late.

If you encounter a personal emergency/illness or feel that your St. Norbert-sanctioned activity (concerts, sporting events, etc.) requires you to turn in an assignment late, you must let me know in person or by email at least 24 hours in advance (in the case of participating in St. Norbert activities) or within 24 hours following the deadline (in the case of a personal emergency or illness) in order to avoid late penalties. I will let you know if and to what extent your circumstances warrant avoiding the late penalty.

- Attendance, Punctuality, & Technology: You are expected to actively contribute to each class meeting. That being said, life is hard, and so you can miss one (and only one) class without a grading penalty. *All other absences will lower your total Class Contributions grade by 20%*. Keep in mind that being on time matters, because it's a part of respecting one another. Showing up for class late will negatively impact your Class Contributions grade.

Staying engaged matters, because it's a part of respecting yourself and one another. So, *using your computer in class for things other than notes, in-class activities, and course readings will be counted as an absence*. Any use of cell phones or similar technology will be counted as an absence. Some portions of class will require you to close/put away your computers.

If you encounter a personal emergency/illness or feel that your St. Norbert-sanctioned activity (concerts, sporting events, etc.) requires you to miss or be late to a class, you must let me know in person or by email at least 24 hours in advance (in the case of St. Norbert activities) or within 24 hours following the missed class (in the case of a personal emergency or illness) in order to avoid lowering your Class Contributions grade. I will let you know if and to what extent your circumstances warrant avoiding a lowered grade.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS: In keeping with the St. Norbert College mission to help students develop their full potential, and in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, the College provides supportive services to students with disabilities. For inquiries and further details, please visit the Academic Support Services office located in Todd Wehr Hall Room 211 or contact the Director of Academic Support Services (403-1326), or visit: <http://www.snc.edu/academicsupport/accommodation>

ACADEMIC HONESTY: You are expected to adhere to the College's academic policies regarding academic integrity. Please refer to the "St. Norbert College Academic Honor Code" in *The Citizen* or see the Honor Code website for the text of the Honor Code process, procedures and penalties. For more information, see the link for *The Citizen* on the judicial affairs website (www.snc.edu/judicialaffairs) or contact the Honor Code Facilitator (403-3047) or the Assoc. Academic Dean's Office (403-4044).

REQUIRED MATERIALS: You must obtain the following materials:

- Pinker, *The Language Instinct* (ISBN 978-0061336461)
- Augustine, *Confessions* (ISBN 978-0199537822)
- Plato, *The Republic* (ISBN 978-0872207363)
- Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (ISBN 978-0061300677)

Other materials will be made available on our Google classroom site.

SCHEDULE: Note that all materials and assignments are listed with the class *by/before* which they need to be completed. “GC” readings are on Google Classroom.

Week 1 – Are We Different? Humans and Animals

Class 1.1 (8/27): Taking responsibility for your core beliefs

- Readings: syllabus
- Assignments: none

Class 1.2 (8/29): Animals and us

- Readings: Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (GC); Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* (GC)
- Assignments: Reading Guide #1

Class 1.3 (8/31): Animals such as us

- Readings: Korsgaard, “Facing the Animal You See in the Mirror” (GC)
- Assignments: Analytical Reflection #1

Week 2 – Are We Different? Humans and Computers

No class on Labor Day (9/3) – enjoy the day off, and [read about Labor Day](#).

Class 2.1 (9/5): The Turing Test

- Readings: Turing, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” (GC)
- Assignments: Reading Guide #2

Class 2.2 (9/7): Testing the Turing Test

- Readings: Christian, [“Mind vs. Machine”](#) (GC)
- Assignments: Analytical Reflection #2 (with office hours visit)

Week 3 – Are We Good or Bad? Born Bad

Class 3.1 (9/10): Our sinful condition – Augustine

- Readings: Augustine, *Confessions*, Books I-III
- Assignments: Reading Guide #3

Class 3.2 (9/12): Our propensity to evil – Kant

- Readings: Kant, *Religion*, Book I (pp. 15-39)
- Assignments: Reading Guide #4

Class 3.3 (9/14): Our propensity to evil – Kant

- Readings: no new readings
- Assignments: none

Week 4 – Are We Good or Bad? The State of Nature

Class 4.1 (9/17): Selfish, self-interested, or power-hungry?

- Readings: Hobbes, [Leviathan, Ch. 11](#) (GC)
- Assignments: none

Class 4.2 (9/19): Hobbesian state of nature and war

- Readings: Hobbes, [Leviathan, Ch. 13](#) (GC)
- Assignments: Reading Guide #5

Class 4.3 (9/21): Hobbesian state of nature and war

- Readings: none
- Assignments: none (in-class group report)

Week 5 – Are We Good or Bad? The State of Nature

Class 5.1 (9/24): Rousseauian state of nature and peace

- Readings: Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, Part I (GC)
- Assignments: Reading Guide #6

Class 5.2 (9/26): Rousseauian state of nature and peace

- Readings: Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, Part II (GC)
- Assignments: none

Class 5.3 (9/28): Do we desire money for security or status?

- Readings: none
- Assignments: Analytical Reflection #3

Week 6 – Are We Rational?

Class 6.1 (10/1): Cities and souls

- Readings: Plato, *The Republic*, Book IV (pp. 114-133)
- Assignments: Reading Guide #7

Class 6.2 (10/3): Cities and souls

- Readings: none
- Assignments: Analytical Reflection #4

Week 7 – Are We Rational?

Class 7.1 (10/8): What if we're not rational?

- Readings: Thaler & Sunstein, "Libertarian Paternalism" (GC)
- Assignments: Reading Guide #8

Class 7.2 (10/10): Mid-term review

- Readings: none
- Assignments: mid-term study guide

Class 7.3 (10/12): Mid-term exam

Week 8 – Are We Free and Responsible?

Class 8.1 (10/15): Must our futures be open?

- Readings: Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" (GC)
- Assignments: none

Class 8.2 (10/17): Must our futures be open?

- Readings: none
- Assignments: Analytical Reflection #5

Class 8.3 (10/19): Must our futures be open?

- Readings: Hillary Bok, “Freedom and Practical Reason”
- Assignments: none

Week 9 – Are We Free and Responsible?

Class 9.1 (10/22): Are we free anyways?

- Readings: Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person” (GC)
- Assignments: Reading Guide #9

Class 9.2 (10/24): Are we free anyways?

- Readings: Review – Frankfurt and Bok
- Assignments: none

Class 9.3 (10/26): Paper workshop

- Readings: no new reading
- Assignments: in-class: partial paper draft

Week 10 – Are We Blank Slates?

Class 10.1 (10/29): Born without ideas

- Readings: Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* selection (GC)
- Assignments: Reading Guide #10

Class 10.3 (11/2): The “language instinct”

- Readings: Pinker, *The Language Instinct*, Ch. 1-2
- Assignments: Reading Guide #11

Week 11 – Are We Blank Slates?

Class 11.1 (11/5): The “language instinct”

- Readings: Pinker, *The Language Instinct*, Ch. 9
- Assignments: paper due

Class 11.2 (11/7): The “language instinct”

- Readings: Pinker, *The Language Instinct*, Ch. 13
- Assignments: Reading Guide #12

Class 11.2 (11/9): Blank, or instincts?

- Readings: none
- Assignments: Analytical Reflection #6

Weeks 12-13 – Cultivating Human Nature: Transformation

Class 12.1 (11/12): Augustine’s conversion

- Readings: Augustine, *Confessions*, Book VII-VIII
- Assignments: Reading Guide #13

Class 12.2 (11/14): Kantian moral transformation

- Readings: Kant, *Religion*, Book II (pp. 40-46, 54-72)
- Assignments: none

Class 12.3 (11/16): Why we need community

- Readings: Kant, *Religion*, Book III (pp. 88-93)
- Assignments: Reading Guide #14

Class 13.1 (11/19): Something we do, or something that just happens?

- Readings: none
- Assignments: Analytical Reflection #7

Week 14 – Cultivating Human Nature: Moral Education

Class 14.1 (11/26): Educating “guardians”

- Readings: Plato, *The Republic*, Books II-III (margin #'s 374-397)
- Assignments: none

Class 14.2 (11/28): Educating in light of *amour-propre*

- Readings: Rousseau, *Emile*, pp. 235-7, 244-7 (GC)
- Assignments: Reading Guide #15

No class on 11/30

Week 15 – Cultivating Human Nature: Democratic Education

Class 15.1 (12/3): Democratic education

- Readings: Mill, *On Liberty* selection (GC)
- Assignments: none

Class 15.2 (12/5): Democratic education

- Readings: Dewey, *Experience and Education* selection (GC)
- Assignments: Analytical Reflection #8

Class 15.3 (12/7): Final exam review

- Readings: none
- Assignments: none

Final exam on 12/13, 2:15-4:15 pm (Cofrin 201)