

Introduction to Philosophy:

Human Nature and Conceptions of the Self

Instructor: Dylan Black

Course meeting times / location:

Office:

Office hours:

Course Description: What is your most fundamental nature?—are you a human animal, a soul, or something else? What is the point of being the sort of creature that you are? What, in other words, is the meaning of your life? What does “meaning” mean, and why does meaning matter? How should you understand social categories like sex and gender? Is gender fixed and immutable, or malleable and socially constructed? Where do mental phenomena like thought and consciousness belong in the naturalistic, material world described to us by science? What are the limits of human nature? Is it permissible to use human enhancement technologies to make yourself faster, stronger, and smarter? Do human enhancement technologies change what it means to be human?

In this course you will explore, from a philosophical perspective, what it means to be a human being in the contemporary world—a world in which the human condition and its limitations are in a constant state of flux. Along the way, you will learn to read and interpret philosophical texts, criticize arguments, and write clear analytical papers.

Course Readings: All the readings will be made available online. Around a third of the readings will come from the following three texts (which you are **not** required to purchase):

- What Are We? by Eric T. Olson
- Meaning in Life and Why It Matters by Susan Wolf
- Science Fiction and Philosophy by Susan Schneider

Course Requirements: Regular attendance, in-class participation, daily quizzes, two short expository papers, one argumentative paper, and two exams.

Grade Weighting:

- Total points, 100
- Quizzes, 15 points
- In-class assignments, 15 points

- Two short critical papers, 10 points each
- Argumentative paper, 15 points
- Midterm and final, 15 points each
- Debate, 5 points

Quizzes and In-Class Assignments: You are expected to attend regularly, do the readings carefully, and come prepared participate in discussion. The quizzes and in-class assignments will test your knowledge of the readings. There will be seventeen quizzes and seventeen in-class assignments. Each will be worth 1 point. Two of your lowest quiz scores and two of your lowest in-class assignment scores will be dropped. You will not be told in advance whether or not there will be a quiz or in-class assignment, so you should always come prepared.

Two Critical Papers: The critical papers will require you to write two pages of exposition and one page of criticism. Topics will be given in advance. You will be graded for completeness, clarity of reasoning, and originality. Each critical paper will be worth 10 points.

Argumentative Paper: The argumentative paper will require you to write five pages critically discussing a philosophical problem raised in the course. Topics will be given in advance. You will be asked to turn in a complete draft, attend a mandatory peer review session, and revise your draft in light of the comments you receive. You must bring three physical copies of your draft to the peer review session, one for each of your reviewers and one for me. The argumentative paper will be graded for clarity of reasoning, organization, and originality. It will be worth 20 points of your final grade.

Midterm and Final: The midterm and final will test your understanding of the vocabulary, basic ideas, and main arguments introduced in lecture and the readings. They will be organized into four sections: fill in the blank, true/false, and short answers. Each is worth 15 points.

Plagiarism Policy: If you are confused about what plagiarism is, read the university's official statement on plagiarism at: xxx. If I discover that a writing assignment is plagiarized you will fail that assignment and, at my discretion, the course. I will also report you for academic misconduct. So please don't do it.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS, AND EXAMS

Part 1: Personal Ontology

xxxx No readings (syllabus, introduction, philosophical definitions)

xxxx No readings (opinions, doubts, & closed belief traps)

- xxxx No readings (arguments)
- xxxx "Where Am I?" by Daniel Dennett
- xxxx "Animals" (Sections 2.1, 2.2, & 2.3) by Eric Olson
- xxxx "Brains" (Sections 4.1 & 4.2) by Eric Olson
- xxxx "Bundles" (Sections 6.1 & 6.2) by Eric Olson
- xxxx "Souls" (Sections 7.1 & 7.2) by Eric Olson
- xxxx No readings, Debate

Critical Paper 1 Assigned

Part 2: The Meaning of Life

- xxxx "On the Vanity of Existence" by Arthur Schopenhauer
- xxxx "The Absurdity of Life without God" (pp. 1-7) by William L. Craig
- xxxx "The Absurdity of Life without God" (pp. 7-14) by William L. Craig

Critical Paper 1 Due

- xxxx "Nothing Matters" by Richard Hare
- xxxx "Meaning in Life and Why It Matters" (pp. 77-84) by Susan Wolf
- xxxx "Meaning in Life and Why It Matters" (pp. 85-95) by Susan Wolf

Part 3: Sex & Gender

- xxxx "X: A Fabulous Child's Story" by Lois Gould
- xxxx "Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender" (Sections 1.1, 1.2, 3.2, & 3.3) by Mari Mikkola
- xxxx The Transsexual Empire (Ch. 4, pp. 99-106) by Janice Raymond
- xxxx The Transsexual Empire (Ch. 4, pp. 113-119) by Janice Raymond
- xxxx "A Cyborg Manifesto" by Donna Haraway
- xxxx "Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers" (pp. 43-52) by Talia Mae Bettcher

Critical Paper 2 Assigned

- xxxx "Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers" (pp. 52-60) by Talia Mae Bettcher
- xxxx No reading
- xxxx No reading
- xxxx To be decided

Critical Paper 2 Due

- xxxx To be decided

xxxx **Midterm**

Part 4: Mind, Intelligence, & Consciousness

- xxxx "The Difference" by Sam Hughes
- xxxx "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" (Sections 1, 2, & 3) by Alan Turing
- xxxx Kantian Deontology
- xxxx "Moral Machines" by Colin Allen and Wendell Wallach
- xxxx "Ethical Issues in Advanced Artificial Intelligence" by Nick Bostrom
- xxxx "Functionalism" from the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- xxxx "The Country of the Blind" by H.G. Wells
- xxxx "Epiphenomenal Qualia" by Frank Jackson
- xxxx "Quining Qualia" (pp. 1-9) by Daniel Dennett
- xxxx "Quining Qualia" (pp. 1-9) by Daniel Dennett
- xxxx "The Puzzle of Conscious Experience" by David Chalmers

Argumentative Paper Assigned

Part 5: The Ethics of Human Enhancement

- xxxx Brave New World (Chs. 1, 2, & 3) by Aldous Huxley
- xxxx "Transhumanist Declaration"

"Transhumanism" by Francis Fukuyama

"Transhumanism: The World's Most Dangerous Idea?" by Nick Bostrom

xxxx "The Man on the Moon" (Parts I and II) by George J. Annas

xxxx "The Man on the Moon" (Parts III and IV) by George J. Annas

xxxx "Procreative Beneficence: Why We Should Select the Best Children" (pp. 413-419)
by Julian Savulescu

xxxx "Who Wants to Live Forever?" by Martien A M Pijenburg and Carlo Leget.

xxxx Peer Review

xxxx **Final**

xxxx No class

Argumentative Paper Due