

# Philosophy and Human Nature

## I Instructor Information

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**Name:** Dr. Bradley Rettler

**Office:** Lowenstein 921B

**Office Hours:** Monday 11:15-12:30, Tuesday 1-3, and by appointment

**E-mail:** rettlerb@gmail.com

**Course Website:** <http://philosophy.bradleyrettler.com>

## II Course Description

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Philosophy is distinguished both by its subject matter and by the methods with which it investigates its subject matter. Among its subject matter are those most basic and most important questions we can ask:

1. What do we know?
2. What are we?
3. Are we free?
4. Is there a God?

Many other disciplines are also interested in answering these questions: theology, physics, biology, and literature, to name a few. But philosophy distinguishes itself from them by its method — logically valid arguments proceeding from things we already believe. In this class we will aim to answer the above questions by proceeding from things we believe via truth-preserving inferences. We will defend our premises with further valid arguments.

## III Required Readings

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You are not required to purchase any books. All readings will be available on the course website.

## IV Evaluation

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**Participation:** 20% of your grade. This includes coming to class, having (i) carefully done the reading, (ii) prepared an outline of the argument, (iii) prepared questions about anything you didn't understand, and (iv) prepared objections to or arguments for the premises of the author's argument. It also includes being involved in class discussion by sharing your thoughts, and by listening to your colleagues' thoughts.

**Critical Papers:** 40% of your grade (10% each). Four times during the semester you will write a one to two page paper and email it to me by 11:59pm the night before the class for which the reading is assigned. You must write one paper for each section – one on

knowledge, one on the nature of human persons, one on free will, and one on philosophy of religion. The papers will contain a brief summary of the argument of the reading for the day (half a page to a page), and then an objection to a premise of that argument (half a page to a page). Late papers will be 10% off per day late.

**Midterm Exam:** 20% of your grade. You will have a midterm exam comprised of multiple choice and short essay questions on the class discussions and readings. It will take place on Monday, March 19.

**Final Exam:** 20% of your grade. You will have a final exam comprised of 4-6 short essay questions on the readings. It will take place on the regularly scheduled exam day and time. If you cannot make it or have a conflict with the scheduled exam time, you must alert me two weeks in advance so that we can make alternate arrangements.

**Extra Credit:** You may write one extra critical paper, and I will substitute the grade you receive for the lowest of your critical paper grades (assuming it is higher). The extra critical paper must be emailed by 11:59pm the night before we discuss the reading to which it is a response. Late extra credit critical papers will not be accepted.

## V Honor Code

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All students are expected to abide by the Academic Honor Code. Students are not allowed to write papers together, although verbal discussion of one's paper (with anyone) is not only permitted but encouraged. Any use of outside sources for specific ideas or arguments must be properly cited. Plagiarism is easily detectable and will absolutely not be tolerated. The University provides guidelines on what constitutes plagiarism here: [https://www.fordham.edu/info/25380/undergraduate\\_academic\\_integrity\\_policy](https://www.fordham.edu/info/25380/undergraduate_academic_integrity_policy). You are **strongly encouraged** to read that document. If you have any doubt about the appropriateness of any action, please check with me.

## VI Students with Disabilities

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I am happy to accommodate students with disabilities. Students desiring accommodations on the basis of physical, learning, or psychological disability for this class should contact the Office of Disability Services. They are located in the Lower Level of O'Hare Hall, and can be reached by email at [disabilityservices@fordham.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@fordham.edu) or by phone at 718.817.0655.

## VII Title IX Office

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If you or someone you know would like help related to an experience of sexual violence including sexual assault, harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking or other type of non-consensual sexual conduct, please contact Anastasia Coleman, the Title IX Coordinator at Fordham, by email at [TitleIX@Fordham.edu](mailto:TitleIX@Fordham.edu) or phone at 718.817.3112.

I am (along with all faculty and staff members) a mandatory reporter; if I learn of any incident of sexual violence or misconduct, I am legally required to report it.

## **VIII Expected Schedule**

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The readings are to be done **by the day** for which they are scheduled.

Jan 18: Introduction: What is Philosophy?

### **What do we know?**

Jan 22: Meno

Jan 25: Meno, continued

Jan 29: Logic – Argument Forms

Feb 1: Gettier, Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?

Feb 5: Descartes, Meditation I

Feb 8: Meditation I, continued

### **What kinds of things are we?**

Feb 12: Descartes, Meditation II

Feb 15: Meditation II, continued

Feb 20 (TUESDAY): Plato - Phaedo

Feb 22: Phaedo, Continued

Feb 26: Aristotle, Physics

March 1: Aristotle, On the Soul

March 5: Aquinas – Summa Theologiae

March 8: Summa Theologiae, continued

### **Are we free?**

March 12: Augustine – On Free Choice of the Will, pp.1-28

March 15: Exam Review

March 19: Midterm Exam

March 22: NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

March 26: NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

March 29: NO CLASS – EASTER

April 2: NO CLASS – EASTER

April 5: van Inwagen – The Consequence Argument

April 9: van Inwagen – The Mind Argument

April 12: Frankfurt – Alternative Possibilities

## **Is there a God?**

April 16: Descartes – Meditation 5

April 19: Guanilo's and Kant's Responses

April 23: Zagzebski – Does Ethics Need God?

April 26: Collins – Fine-Tuning

April 30: Adams – Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God

May 3: Review