

PHIL 050: PHILOSOPHY OF HUMAN NATURE

Course Description:

Investigation into the meaning of rational life. The course deals with the following four problem areas: human choice, human cognition, the affective, social, and spiritual dimensions of the human person, and the unity of the human being. A substantive treatment of classical and Christian philosophical approaches will be included.

PLACE OF THE COURSE WITHIN THE CURRICULUM

The focal areas and perspectives of PHIL 050 constitute an integral part of the liberal arts themselves, and have always occupied a central place within the Christian humanist vision of God, man, and nature. They also complement the scientific and artistic approaches to understanding the nature of human life.

PHIL 050 is intended to introduce the beginning student to both the traditional problems which philosophers have found in their study of human nature, and to the classical and Christian perspectives which have evolved in response to these problems. The course is prerequisite to other courses offered by the department for two reasons. First, it provides the student with a reflective insight into working philosophical method. Secondly, it provides a background from which other philosophical problems and courses may be approached.

METHOD AND STRUCTURE

A systematic approach to the fundamental problems of human nature should provide the beginning student with a deeper understanding of man. This should enable the student to make educated judgments about vital human issues. These include scientific, social, and political approaches to the human situation, as well as a deeper understanding of our cultural heritage. Such a systematic approach need not be ahistorical. Its emphasis on classical and Christian sources may include the historical development of these approaches. While a variety of texts may be used to isolate problems, the emphasis throughout is upon the attainment of a systematic and integrated perspective.

In selecting illustrative materials, instructors will naturally choose those which, being more familiar to them, will enable them to provide students with a clear example of philosophy at work. A mere listing of positions, historical or systematic, is not sufficient to enable the student to appreciate the importance of personal involvement with, and reflection upon, the central issues and problems.

MORE DETAILED EXPLANATION OF THE ITEMS
IN THE COURSE DESCRIPTION FOR PHILOSOPHY 050
PHILOSOPHY OF HUMAN NATURE.

The word "classical" refers to the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. The word "Christian" refers to the philosophy of Augustine and/or Aquinas. That some background be provided in these men who are dominant influences in the formation of Christian philosophical perspectives is essential.

It is emphasized with respect to the four areas that they do not represent a serial or jointly exhaustive listing, nor are they mutually exclusive. It would be expected that these four topics would be dealt with in the course. Some might be presented together; their order might be arranged differently, and other problem areas might be added in individual sections. The point of the listing is that these four must be adequately covered in the course.

In the first problem area in the description human choice refers to the problem of freedom of choice and determinism. The problem area is not political freedom but the notion of the human person as the subject of freedom and responsibility.

The second problem area will naturally include certain elements of epistemology, but these are to be integrated into a wider perspective of human life.

The third problem area emphasizes dimensions of human life wider than purely cognitive, including also the affective and communal elements. Mention of a communal dimension is not meant to include philosophy of the state. The mention of the spiritual dimension is intended to place the conception of human nature in a Christian context.

The general nature of the fourth problem is that while the human is a complex being, there is a unity within the complexity. This last problem could provide a unifying focus for the other three areas, and indeed for the whole course if desired. The Christian tradition usually deals with the unity question in terms of the ontological unity that underlies the various dimensions of human life, e.g. the mind/body, substance/accident unity.

(Note: Effective Fall 2002, all sections of Phil 050 are to meet the Human Nature "knowledge and skills objectives" for the Human Nature and Ethics knowledge area of the Common Core Curriculum of Marquette University.)