

Fordham College Lincoln Center

PHIL 1000: Philosophy of Human Nature

LL 1114

Fall 2025

TF 8:30 – 9:45 AM

“The first duty of philosophy is making you understand what deep shit you are in.”

– Slavoj Žižek, quoted in *The Guardian*

Instructor

Dr. Rory Varrato, psychoanalyst-in-training

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Office hours: Friday 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Course Description

In this course, we will interrogate what it means to be human. To accomplish this goal, we will survey some of the major works in Western philosophy as they relate to our inquiry. (Necessarily, many voices will be left out—a fact which we will make it a point to address.)

On our journey, we will be guided by innumerable questions. For example, is a human being a political animal? A member of a race, sex, or class? A creator of values? A meaning maker? None of these, all of these, and/or something else entirely?

Along the way, we will strive to keep in mind that we are all just walking each other home.

Course Readings

The required book for this course is listed below. *Please purchase only this specific edition.* It is on order at the Fordham College bookstore. **All other texts will be provided to you in advance as PDFs.**

** Plato. *Republic*. Translated by G. M. A. Grube. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1992.
<https://hackettpublishing.com/republic-second-edition>.

** Varrato, Rory, editor. 2025. *Philosophy of Human Nature: An Introductory Reader*. Cognella Academic Publishing. <https://store.cognella.com/84029-1a-ni-002>.

Course Expectations

Précis

You will be required to submit three academic summaries, or *précis*, of selected texts from our readings. Each *précis* will include two parts: one section describing a key concept or theme from the reading, and a second section detailing a vignette from your personal life that demonstrates or otherwise connects with the concept described. More instructions will be provided when the first *précis* is assigned.

Final exam

There will be an in-person final exam administered by blue book (i.e., handwritten). This exam will test the skills you develop in completing your *précis* and participation assignments. More instructions will be provided later in the semester.

Attendance and Participation

Attendance is mandatory. Valid excuses will be accepted only in accordance with university policy. Unexcused absences will lower your participation grade.

Participation will be self-assessed three times throughout the semester. Each self-assessment grade will range from nine (highest) to zero (lowest). I warmly encourage you to participate regularly. Asking questions, raising objections, taking notes, expressing puzzlement, etc. are all good forms of participation.

Technology

Please limit use of electronic devices in class as much as possible, except for approved accommodations.

Grading

Précis = 60%

Participation = 27%

Final exam = 13%

Note: All of your grades for the semester will be posted online as the course progresses.

This course will follow the specifications method of grading. This approach emphasizes the completion of assignments in accordance with detailed instructions and the ability to choose your own level of achievement. Put simply, if you do the work, you will get credit for the work—but you do not have to do all of the work if you do not wish to do so. More details will be provided with the *précis* instructions.

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Readings marked with an asterisk and with [O] will be posted online; all others are from the Varrato book.

DATE	READINGS
August	
8/29	Plato, * <i>Allegory of the Cave</i> [in-class], and Kohlberg, * <i>Heinz dilemma</i> [in-class]
September	
9/2	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i>
9/5	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , 471c-480a and 484a-494b
9/9	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , 500c-511e
9/12	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , 514a-521d * Participation #1 due 9/14
9/16	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , 580d-592b
9/19	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , 605c-621d * Précis #1 due 9/21
9/23	Plato, <i>Symposium</i> , 189a-193e & 201d-212c
9/26	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book I, Ch. 1-7 and Book II, Ch. 1-4
9/30	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book II, Ch. 5-9 and Book VIII, Ch. 1-8
October	
10/3	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> , Book I, Ch. 1-7 and Book III, Ch. 1, 5-9
10/7	Seneca, <i>Letters from a Stoic</i> and Marcus Aurelius, <i>Meditations</i>
10/10	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , Book II, Ch. 1-10 * Participation #2 due 10/12
10/14	Descartes, <i>Meditations</i>
10/17	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> and Rousseau, <i>Discourse on Inequality</i> * Précis #2 due 10/19
10/21	Rousseau, <i>Emile</i> and Smith, <i>The Theory of Moral Sentiments</i>
10/24	Kierkegaard, <i>Either/Or</i> and <i>Fear and Trembling</i>
10/28	Marx, <i>Preface to Critique of Political Economy</i> and <i>The Communist Manifesto</i>
10/31	Emerson, * <i>Experience</i> [O] and <i>The Over-Soul</i>
November	
11/4	Nietzsche, <i>On Truth and Lie</i> and <i>The Gay Science</i>
11/7	Nietzsche, <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i>
11/11	Du Bois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>
11/14	Freud, * <i>Civilization and Its Discontents</i> [O] * Participation #3 due 11/16
11/18	Sartre, <i>Existentialism is a Humanism</i> and Camus, <i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i>
11/21	Beauvoir, <i>The Second Sex</i> * Précis #3 due 11/23
11/25	Frankl, <i>Man's Search for Meaning</i>
11/28	No class (Thanksgiving)
December	
12/2	Rogers, * <i>On Becoming a Person</i> [O]
12/5	Zapffe, <i>The Last Messiah</i>
12/9	Albrecht, * <i>Negating Solastalgia: An Emotional Revolution from the Anthropocene to the Symbiocene</i> [O]
	Final exam – specific due date TBD

University Statements

Academic Integrity

Please familiarize yourself with the Undergraduate Policy on Academic Integrity at Fordham. The policy notes that: “Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an honest, truthful, and responsible manner. Violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, plagiarism, cheating on exams, falsification, unapproved collaboration, and destruction of library materials.”

You may discuss homework problems with other students, but the work that you submit should be your own, in your own words. Collaboration with others (including online resources) during quizzes and exams is prohibited. If you violate the policy, you will receive a grade of 0% on the assignment, quiz, or exam.

Attendance

It is expected that undergraduate students attend all synchronous or in-person class meetings. If this will be a burden for you (due to time zone or wifi issues), please talk with your instructor at the beginning of the semester about options that will allow you to participate in the course and continue your learning. Documentation supporting excused absence(s) for emergencies or long-term illness (defined as missing more than a week's worth of classes) should be sent to their class dean. During this time, it is also recognized that unforeseen circumstances may well lead to an occasional absence or a class cancellation. Instructors and students are encouraged to engage in a dialogue at the start of the semester about the importance of *cura personalis* and how to inform each other in the event of situations like this.

Office of Disability Services

If you are a student with a documented disability and require academic accommodations, please register with the Office of Disability Services for Students (ODS) in order to request academic accommodations for your courses. Please contact the main ODS number at 718-817-0655 to arrange services. Accommodations are not retroactive, so you need to register with ODS prior to receiving your accommodations. Please see me after class or during office hours if you have questions or would like to submit your academic accommodation letter to me if you have previously registered for accommodations.

Chosen Name and Pronoun Policy

Some members of the Fordham community are known by a name that is different from their legal name. Students who wish to be identified by a chosen name can contact their professor via email and request their chosen name and pronoun be used by the professor during class and other interactions.

Mandatory Reporting

As a course instructor, I am a mandatory reporter and am required to contact and provide information to Public Safety, to the Dean of Students, and/or to the Title IX Coordinator if I learn you have been sexually harassed (verbally or physically), sexually assaulted /raped, stalked, had domestic violence or dating violence occur in a relationship, or been a victim/ survivor of any behavior prohibited by the University's Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures. Once reported, the University will promptly seek to properly support any student and make efforts to stop the prohibited behavior, prevent it from recurring, and remedy its effects. There are two confidential places on campus where you can seek support where it will not be

“reported:” counselors in Psychological & Counseling Services and Campus Ministry. The Student CARE Brochure can provide you with on and off-campus resources for support and more information.

Mental Health Resources

Counseling and Psychological Services provides a range of services to help students address and cope more effectively with their stress and psychological concerns. You are encouraged to stop by or call the office to make an appointment.

Hours

Monday – Thursday 9 a.m. – 7 p.m.
Friday 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Location:

Rose Hill: O’Hare Hall Basement
Lincoln Center: 140 W 62nd St. Room G02

Phone

Rose Hill: (718) 817 – 3725
Lincoln Center: (718) 817 – 6225

At Rose Hill, the Fordham University Emergency Medical Service (FUEMS) is available 24 hours a day and can be contacted by calling the Department of Public Safety at 718-817-2222.

If you need help, you should not hesitate to contact your instructor if you have any questions, especially about homework problems. Please start homework early so that you will have time to ask questions in class, in office hours, or by email. You should also stop by your instructor’s office (make an appointment if office hours do not fit your schedule) if you have any questions or want to go over some of the material. We are here to help you learn and understand!

Please let us know if there is anything we can do to help make our classroom as inclusive as possible for learning and participating.

Writing Resources for Students

Fordham University Writing Center

Hours

Monday – Thursday 9 a.m. – 8 p.m.
Friday 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Location

Rose Hill: Walsh Library, Reference Area (Rm 121)
Lincoln Center: Quinn Library, Rm 233

Phone

Rose Hill: (718) 817 – 0077
Lincoln Center: (646) 868 – 4009

Tutoring Services

At Lincoln Center, for students needing assistance with particular subjects, free tutoring help is available. Specific departments offer faculty tutoring. Tutoring is available for: Mathematics, Language Learning Center, Economics, Computer Science, and Writing.

At Rose Hill, tutoring services for most academic departments are offered free of charge. Please consult with the associate chair for undergraduates of the department.

General Class Etiquette

Please be mindful of your instructor and your fellow students. This means:

- Our classroom is meant to be a safe place. You are encouraged to express your ideas candidly while also keeping in mind that you are expected to show respect for one another and for the diversity of people and ideas in the world around you. Thoughtful critiques and feedback are welcome and encouraged, but negative criticism is not. If there are concerns that any student is not conducting themselves appropriately, this will be discussed with the student on an individual basis. Similarly, if any student feels unsafe as a result of viewpoints expressed by the instructor or fellow students, they are encouraged to speak with the instructor in private;
- Discrimination, harassment, or global generalizations against others on the basis of race, creed, national or ethnic origin, age, religion, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression will not be tolerated;
- This syllabus may be revised as needed to ensure the educational quality and fairness of the course. If changes are made, a revised syllabus will be provided.

Online Etiquette

- Please try to keep your video on for the duration of online class meetings. Think about video this way: if we were in a classroom together, we would be able to see each other for the whole time;
- Keep your audio muted, except when you want to speak, to minimize background noise when others are speaking;
- You can use a virtual background if you want, as long as it doesn't use too much of your bandwidth and interfere with your audio/video quality;
- Close all applications on your computer/tablet that aren't necessary for the course;
- Temporarily disable notifications so they don't distract you. Turn off your phone (or put it on Do Not Disturb).
- Try to find a place where you won't be interrupted or distracted by pets, curious family members, etc;
- Food? Eat if you need to eat and can't have a meal before or after class. Try to minimize any distraction from eating during class. (Use the same judgment you would for an in-person class meeting.);
- Please use the "raise hand" function to contribute to discussion, or raise your hand physically if you are having trouble with the "raise hand" function.

References

- Cooper, John M. and D. S. Hutchinson, eds. 1997. *Plato: Complete Works*. Hackett.
- Kohlberg, Lawrence. 1981. *Essay on Moral Development, Volume One: The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice*. Harper & Row.
- Plato. (c. 375 BCE) 1992. *Republic*, 2nd ed. Translated by G. M. A. Grube and C. D. C. Reeve. Hackett.
- Varrato, Rory. 2025. *Philosophy of Human Nature: An Introductory Reader*. Cognella Academic Publishing.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2010. “Slavoj Zizek: The World’s Hippest Philosopher.” *The Guardian*, July 5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/authorinterviews/7871302/Slavoj-Zizek-the-worlds-hippest-philosopher.html>.