

# Philosophy of the Human Person

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## I. Course Summary

Briefly reflect for a moment: fundamentally, what are you? You might have answered: “I am a human with traits  $x$ ,  $y$  and  $z$ .” But are those traits really *fundamental* features of yourself? More importantly, what does it even mean to be human? Does being human make us special compared to other animals or living beings? In addition to being human, we all have a strong sense of “self”. But what exactly is the nature of the self? Should the self be thought of as a *soul* that is independent from the body? To what extent do our circumstances and biology determine who we are? To what extent are social features (like gender and race) of ourselves real parts of ourselves? Are we truly free? How should we live? By engaging in this kind of inquiry we are participating in the distinctively human activity known as *philosophy*.

Philosophy is different from other subjects in that it does not constitute a collection of facts organized in a particular way. Translating from the Greek, “philosophy” literally means *love of wisdom*. This course provides an introduction to philosophical inquiry, not only as an area of study, but as a way of life defined by a commitment to inquiry and self-knowledge. In short, we will treat philosophy as something to be lived out in our everyday interactions.

In this course, we attempt to answer questions like those posed above, that is, questions concerning the nature of the self, human existence, and the ideal life. To help us navigate these questions, we will engage with a number of important texts from Western and non-Western philosophical authors, and consider various conceptions of the self and the good life. By engaging in a dialogue with these texts, with one another, and with ourselves, this course aims to develop in each of us a greater sense of who we are, what we value, and why wisdom ought to be loved.

## II. Course Goals and Objectives

1. Students will read influential texts that reflect on the nature of the human person, the self, and the good life.
2. Students will be able to define a variety of prominent theories of the self and identify their strengths and weaknesses.
3. Students will learn to articulate their fundamental beliefs and discuss their beliefs with each other in a constructive way.
4. Students will deepen their relationships with their beliefs, their sense of self, and their sense of purpose.

5. This class will be discussion and writing centered. Students will write papers and work on a final creative project. As a result, students will develop their argumentative and critical thinking skills, as well as their written and verbal communication skills. The final creative project allows students to develop creative thinking in addition to analytical thinking.

### III. Course Materials

You will need to obtain the following texts:

1. Mark Siderit, *Buddhism as Philosophy: an Introduction* (2007, Hackett).
2. Plato, *Five Dialogues* 2nd Edition (2002, Hackett).
3. I will supply all other readings.

### IV. Evaluation

1. Philosophy Journal. *Each week I will post a journal prompt. Students will respond to these prompts and submit a copy of their journals by Friday of each week. Responses must be at least 500 words.*
2. Three papers. *Three times during the term students will submit a 3-5 page paper responding to a prompt (see calendar below for dates). Grading is based on a detailed rubric (available on Sakai). 60% of total grade = each paper is 20% of total grade.*
3. Creative project. *Students will submit a creative project on a topic of their choice. This may take the form of a traditional research paper, a piece of creative writing (e.g., poetry or prose), a podcast, graphic novel, or short film. This project will proceed in two stages. First, students will submit proposals detailing and outlining their projects (see calendar for due dates). Second, students will complete their projects according to their proposals. Due by 5pm on the Friday of finals week. 20% of total grade.*

**Grade scale:** A+  $\geq$  97 > A  $\geq$  93 > A-  $\geq$  90 > B+  $\geq$  87 > B  $\geq$  83 > B-  $\geq$  80 >; etc.

### V. Calendar

- WEEK 1: What is Philosophy?  
**Tuesday:** Introduction, Logistics  
**Thursday:** Overview of pre-socratic philosophy.

- WEEK 2: Plato and Socrates on Wisdom  
**Tuesday:** Plato, *Apology* 17a-32c.  
**Thursday:** Plato, *Apology* 32c-42.
  
- WEEK 3: Plato on the Soul  
**Tuesday:** Plato, *Phaedo*, 59c-84b.  
**Thursday:** Plato, *Phaedo*, 84c-118a.
  
- WEEK 4: Aristotle on the Soul, **Paper 1 due Thursday**  
**Tuesday:** Aristotle, *De Anima*, Book 1, Chapter 1-2.  
**Thursday:** Aristotle: *De Anima*, Book 2, Chapters 1-3.
  
- WEEK 5: Aristotle on Human Happiness and Virtue  
**Tuesday:** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1.  
**Thursday:** Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2.
  
- WEEK 6: Epicureanism and Stoicism  
**Tuesday:** Various excerpts on Epicureanism.  
**Thursday:** Various excerpts on Stoicism.
  
- WEEK 7: Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas  
**Tuesday:** St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae I*, Prologue.  
**Thursday:** St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae I*, Q.2.
  
- WEEK 8: St Thomas on the Soul, **Paper 2 due Thursday**  
**Tuesday:** St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae I*, Q. 75.  
**Thursday:** St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae I*, Q. 76
  
- WEEK 9: Mid-semester break
  
- WEEK 10: Descartes' Mind-Body Dualism  
**Tuesday:** Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 1 and selected objections.  
**Thursday:** Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 2 and selected objections.
  
- WEEK 11: Buddhism and the non-self  
**Tuesday:** Siderits, "Buddhism as Philosophy?"  
**Thursday:** Siderits, "Early Buddhism: Basic Teachings".

- WEEK 12: Non-self and its Ethical Implications  
**Tuesday:** Siderits, “Non-self: Empty Persons”.  
Maha-nidana Sutta (‘The Great Discourse on Causal Links’)  
**Thursday:** Siderits, “Buddhist Ethics”.
- WEEK 13: Evolution, Computers, and Human Nature  
**Tuesday:** Hull, “On Human Nature”.  
**Thursday:** Turing, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence”.
- WEEK 14: Existentialism, **Paper 3 due Thursday**  
**Tuesday:** Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Excerpt.  
**Thursday:** Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Excerpt.
- WEEK 15: The Nature of Gender, **Paper 3 due Thursday, Creative Project Proposal Due T**  
**Tuesday:** Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Excerpts.  
**Thursday:** Barnes, “The Metaphysics of Gender”.
- WEEK 16: The Nature of Race.  
**Tuesday:** Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race”.  
**Thursday:** Spencer, “Are Folk Races like Dingoes, Dimes, or Dodos?”
- FINALS WEEK: **Creative Projects Due Friday at 5pm**

## VI. Student Wellbeing

Maintaining and promoting students’ social, emotion, and mental wellbeing is a priority. If you or someone you know needs help, there are a variety of counseling and wellness related resources available at the student health center. Please contact me if you would like more information regarding such services. It is important to me that students take sleep and rest seriously; they should aim for about 8 hours of sleep each night. If a student needs an extension for any assignment, please talk to me before or after class or send me an email.