

PHI 5681 (HU)MAN(ITY), NATURE AND VALUE

Dr. Nicholas Power

Course Overview: Human beings are probably unique in their ability to reflect on their fate and circumstances. This ability results in the greatest achievements imaginable, from the scientific method to the sonnets of Shakespeare. But what of the ability itself? What questions are raised by the very presence of self-consciousness and reflection? Well, many of the questions we deem “philosophical” arise in this way. What am I? What can I know? What ought I do? And so on. His course will take a close look at a subset of these issues. We will investigate our conception of the self. We will look at Nagel’s famous arguments for “Dual Aspect Theory”, the view that persons have non-physical properties, and we’ll look at the implications that follow this position. The mind-brain nexus is only one of the areas in which (objective) science is threatening our self-conception. The various psychological and even biological sciences hold out the promise of being able to predict when and explain why we sometimes “voluntarily” act contrary to our own best interests, for instance when we sacrifice something of value for others. Our most cherished and protected freedoms, including the freedom to act out of character may be being stripped away by these models. How can a meaningful life be salvaged from sociobiological constraints? This course will familiarize the student with the major philosophical issues surrounding persons (i.e. centers of points of view) and their place in an objective (i.e., “centerless”) world

Required Texts:

Thomas Nagel: *The View From Nowhere*

Thomas Nagel: *Moral Questions*

Additional Reserve Materials/handouts (Including Ludwig Wittgenstein’s “Notes for Lectures on ‘Private Experience’ and ‘Sense Data’”)

Outline of Study:

Metaphysics and the Self

Subjectivity and Objectivity

Reasons to Believe in the Existence of Persons

Reasons to Believe in the Existence of Minds

The Paradoxes of Being Someone in Particular

The Limits of Knowledge & the Possibility of Skepticism

Meta-ethics and the Self

The Incoherence of Autonomy and Residues of Moral Responsibility

Agent –relative (Personal) and Agent-neutral (Maximizing) Reasons

Morality and the Good Life

Questions about the Meaning of Life’s Parts

Homework and Exams: You will be required to write 6 short (1-2 typed pages) bi-weekly response papers on assigned reading materials and one 10 page research paper with full source documentation on a topic approved by the instructor. There will be two essay exams; one mid-term and one final.

Grading Policy: The grade in this course will be determined as follows:

Research Paper	33%
Response Papers (5 of 6 will Count)	33%
Mid-term/Final Exams	33%

Class Participation: Class attendance is never mandatory, but lack thereof can leave me/the group with the impression that you don’t care deeply about that session’s topic, and that has a way of affecting your grade. Late work is unacceptable

All University policies concerning **withdrawal** from the course, **plagiarism** and other forms of cheating, etc. are in full effect. Consult your *Student Handbook* for details.