

FREEDOM AND HUMAN NATURE

Prof. Matthews

Email: bmatthew@bhsec.bard.edu

Fall 2007 – 3 credit hours

In this course we address the nature of philosophy through an extensive investigation into the themes of freedom and human nature. Our point of departure is Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*. The thorough analysis of this seminal passage discloses several issues that set the stage for the rest of the course. This allegory also raises the issue of human nature, and how we become who we are. We examine how the contemporary question of the relation between diversity and solidarity is grounded in the more fundamental philosophical issue of identity and difference. We then consider how this question of human nature has been answered by thinkers such as Plato, Hobbes, Mills, Marx, Skinner and Sartre. The answers and models of human nature provided by these thinkers are then discussed as different positions on a continuum that stretches from the idea of an innate and universal human nature at one extreme, to the opposite idea of human nature as socially constructed at the other.

This leads us to the question of freedom. After scrutinizing a spectrum of positions ranging from strict scientific determinism to notions of pure self-determination, we confront the various different layers and dimensions of the presence and absence of freedom in human existence. Are we the 'unfree' products of our environment, or of our genetic composition? Do we have the theoretical possibility, the practical ability, and the ethical necessity of making fundamental decisions about who we are and what we do with our lives? Finally, we explore how much freedom we actually have in balancing out the seemingly contradictory demands of difference and identity, and consider what the impact of this balancing act of diversity and solidarity will be on our society at large.

Course Objectives

1. To familiarize you with some of the central philosophical texts that have shaped the development of Western culture, and with questions and issues they raise.
2. To use our texts as foils for written analyses, both formal and informal, in which you develop your ability to write both critically and creatively, while expressing your thoughts with precision, clarity and confidence.
3. To use our texts as foils for spontaneous responses, discussions and debates that cultivate our ability to think on our feet, express our ideas, to risk articulating our convictions, and to listen attentively and respond thoughtfully to the ideas and perspectives of others.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND SYLLABUS

In college most meaningful learning takes place outside the seminar room. Thus in addition to the three hours we share together, you will need to spend approximately *six to eight hours* of study time outside of class per week. There are three areas of assessment in this course, each of which impacts your final grade as follows:

Response Journals	20%		
Tests	40%	1 st mid-term 2 nd mid-term cumulative final	10% 10% 20%
Essay	15%		
Participation	25%	Protocol Expert Focus	10% 15%

1. Response Journals. 20%

Think of your Response Journal as your portfolio for this course: it contains *all* of the written work you generate over the course of the semester. Your Response Journals will consist of four sections: 1) your journal entries, 2) in class FWs and FFWs, 3) in class notes, and 4) class protocols.

I. Response Journal Entries

You will have 15 weeks of entries. Organization is essential to a productive and meaningful Response Journal. Consequently, each entry in your Response Journal must be dated. In addition, all entries **MUST BE TYPED**. In addition, the length of each week's entries must be at least 700 words. **A WORD COUNT MUST BE SPECIFIED AT THE END OF EACH WEEKS ENTRIES.**

These entries are essential to this course. The goal of this activity is to develop your own independent thoughts, ideas and questions about the material we are wrestling with. This can take many forms, from that of a two column response journal, to writing paragraph or short essay entries. The common denominator however is that you go beyond the passive activity of merely taking notes, and instead generate your own position vis a vie the readings and themes of our course. Consequently, your entries can and should take the form of *rough drafts* of arguments you could use in your formal essays. Most importantly, your work writing in your Response Journal prepares you to be able to come into seminar with several ideas that you find important, and which you are ready to discuss and interrogate.

II. Free Writes (FW) or Focus Free Writes (FFW)

The goal of these exercises is to develop the habit of trusting your pen more than your mind. That is, when engaged in a FW of any sort you strive to just let the ideas come as they please, without reflecting about their form or 'correctness.' **KEEP THE PEN MOVING.** Like wind sprints or push-ups, this is an exercise to keep that holistic connection between your mind and hand in shape. If you have nothing to write about, then write about that.

It is always quite clear who is seriously engaged in this aspect of the Language & Thinking curriculum: their entries are always obviously robust and productive. Just as obvious are anemic entries indicative of a mind definitely not into the groove of this exercise.

III. In Class Notes

Since the format of our seminar demands active discussion and participation by all of us, this section of your Response Journal will no doubt be the least developed. Nonetheless, I do regularly assume the role of instructor, often providing you with concrete information, technical terms, names and dates, that you should be recording. These entries will inform the development of your **30 WORD DICTIONARY**, made up etymologies and **YOUR OWN** definitions, that you will submit at the end of the semester.

Again, as it is with FWs and FFWs, so it is with Response Journal entries: it is obvious who is seriously engaged in this exercise and who is merely going through the motions (or not even doing that).

2. Essay: 15%

You will write one 5 page argumentative essay. Essays must be submitted with a bibliography and in agreement with the BHSEC Style Guide.

Late papers lacking a justifiable reason for their tardiness always results in a lowered grade -- usually one letter grade per day late. *To pass the course, you must turn in all required papers.*

Plagiarized work always earns an F. The second such occurrence earns an F for the entire course, and an last blemish on your permanent academic record, which means: the transcript you send out to college admission offices.

The first essay may be re-written and submitted on May 7th. The highest grade possible for a re-write is a B+.

3. Exams: 40%

There will be a mid-term and final exam. Each will consist of three sections: 1) definition of terms, 2) short answer questions, and 3) lengthy essay questions.

4. Participation: 25%

One of the essential skills this seminar seeks to cultivate is the ability to think on one's feet and spontaneously engage others in debate about ideas. This all-important skill grows out of -- and complements -- the work you have been doing in your RJ. Drawing on the ideas and questions you have been wrestling with, you are expected to be able to initiate discussion on several points or questions at any time, during any seminar meeting. Consequently, active participation by all members is essential to the success of our seminar class. This means that some of us (and the instructor) may have to control a tendency to dominate discussion in order to hear what others have to say, while others will have to make a special effort to put forth their views.

This area of our course easily divides into two subsidiary components: 1) Protocols and 2) Expert Focus.

I. Protocols.

A protocol is a prose recounting of the significant themes discussed in the preceding seminar. Only the first paragraph should be devoted to any logistical announcements made in the previous class. The rest of this writing piece should interpret -- and **not describe** -- the ideas debated in our last meeting. The best protocols will be those that do not simply reproduce word for word everything that was said during class, but that instead rearrange the material thematically, editing out what was unimportant and emphasizing what was significant. In other words, your protocol should never be a mere stenographic record of who said what in which sequence; it should instead be an analysis of arguments made whose perceptive insight generates fruitful questions ripe for further discussion. An average protocol will be one single-spaced page in length.

For the first class of every week, a student will compose a protocol that A) will be posted on the course website before class, B) will be read aloud at the beginning of the period, and C) will be given to Matthews at the end of the seminar.

II. In-Class Presentations.

Each of you will also be responsible for giving at least one in-class presentation. Whereas protocols look **backwards** to the events of the preceding seminar, presentations look **forward** to the material under consideration for that day's seminar. The presenter's first task is to read the texts ahead of time and prepare a ten to fifteen minute long talk that you will give to the seminar. Your 'mini-lecture' should capture the essence of the day's reading, and end by raising questions that will provoke discussion. Every effort should be made to make these presentations engaging, compelling and never longer than 15 minutes. As a verbal activity, there need not be a 'text' developed by the presenter. But if you do have one, great.

A skill essential to a successful and meaningful future is the ability to speak spontaneously, i.e., extemporize about a subject in which you are knowledgeable. During the presentation you are the 'expert' on the topic of the day. For example, you will be capable of providing a succinct analysis of your text's central argument by examining A) its assumptions and implicit premises, B) the argument's structure and evidence, in order to ultimately C) critically reflect on the strength of the argument, deciding D) whether it is sound or unsound.

Absences and Lateness

One last word about attendance and lateness to class. First, there are NO UNEXCUSED ABSENCES. Three of any such absences from class will result in reducing your final grade at least one full letter grade (i.e., from a 'B' to a 'C'). The same goes for LATENESS: if you arrive ten or more minutes late you earn one unexcused absence. One unexcused absence will result in reducing your final mark 1/3 of a grade (i.e., from a 'B+' to a 'B'). If you are not ON TIME you will be marked late. Two tardy arrivals equals

one unexcused absence. Thus six late appearances will bring your final grade down one full letter (i.e., from a 'B' to a 'C'). ***This pasts semester more than a few students saw their final grade lowered by as much as a full grade due to their tardy behavior.***

COMPUTER POLICY

You are expected to:

1. Be able to use either Netscape or Internet Explorer or an equivalent browser.
2. Maintain a BHSEC e-mail account and check e-mail regularly. I will assume you have read all e-mail I send out. Within a 24 hour period.
3. Use a word processing program (preferably Microsoft Word or WordPerfect) and maintain two electronic files (either two diskettes or a hard-drive copy and a diskette copy) of all work submitted. Files should be saved until the final grade is received.
4. Set up use a Turnitin.com account. How to do this will be covered in class.

Course Outline

The readings are organized on a class-by-class basis: the schedule below lists topics, expected readings, and any important dates. This is a tentative schedule, to be modified as necessary. You are responsible for following the class assignments even if you miss a class.

Date	Topic and Reading	Presenter
	Introductory remarks on Philosophy. The purpose of this course, its structure and organization.	
	Doing Philosophy. Exercising your mind, taking off your blinders and learning to see things from different perspectives. Chapter 1, <i>What is Philosophy</i>	
	Albert Camus' <i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i>	
	Jiddu Kishnamurti <i>On Education</i>	
	A Philosophy Work-Out: Getting in Shape. Language and reality. Reason and emotion. Education and Indoctrination. Thinking and Intuition. Chapter 2, <i>A Philosophy Work-Out</i>	
	GEORGE ORWELL'S <i>1984</i> and <i>Newspeak</i>	
	ALDOUS HUXELY'S <i>The Art of Selling</i>	
	The ABCs of Materialist Dialectics	
	Education versus Indoctrination: Reason, Evidence, Argument and Justification. Chapter 3 Logic	
	Rationalism: RENE DESCARTES' <i>Meditations I and II</i>	
	Empiricism: THOMAS HOBBS on <i>Sense</i> , from <i>The Leviathan</i>	
	How Do You Know What You Know is True? Chapter 4, Judging Arguments	
	FRIEDRICH PAULSEN: Rationalism and Empiricism	
	A Method of Philosophy: How the methods of philosophy differ from the method of the Natural Sciences. Ethics as the condition of possibility of an integrated identity, and the prescriptive-descriptive divide revisited. Plato's Allegory of the Cave. The duality of Truth and Appearance, and Being and Becoming.	

	Chapter 5, <i>Putting the Tools to Work: A Method of Philosophy</i>	
	PLATO'S <i>REPUBLIC</i> , <i>The Allegory of the Cave</i>	
	1 st Mid-Term Exam	
	ON HUMAN NATURE	
	The Rational Human: the Classical Paradigm. Plato and Aristotle on knowing and doing the Good. Plato's Cosmogony and Doctrine of Human Nature. Ontology of the Good. Reason and passions. The simile of the soul as charioteer.	
	PLATO'S <i>TIMAEUS</i> : The Creation Myth and Platonic Human Nature	
	PLATO'S <i>PHAEDRUS</i> : On the Nature of the Soul and its Communion with the Divine	
	PLATONIC SOCIAL THEORY from <i>The Republic</i>	
	Summary of Relevant Platonic Teachings	
	ARISTOTLE'S METAPHYSICS. Overview of the Philosophy of Aristotle	
	The Purpose of Human Existence: Happiness. The Reasonable Human. The Classical Model continued. The role of 'deliberate choice' and the absence of the 'will.' <i>ARISTOTLE'S NICOMACHEAN ETHICS</i>	
	The Purpose of Human Existence: Happiness	
	The Nature of Deliberation and Choice	
	On Justice Natural and Conventional	
	The Fallen Human: the Abrahamic Model. Creation and Fall of Man, St. Paul and St. Augustine on law and sin, flesh and spirit, and the fallibility of human nature.	
	GENESIS: The Creation(s) of Man and the Origin of Evil	
	The Christian Position: ST. PAUL's Epistle to the Romans	
	ST. AUGUSTINE's <i>Confessions, Book VIII</i>	
	The Selfish Human. Individualism and the varieties of self-interest.	
	THOMAS HOBBS: Leviathan and Self-Interest	

	ADAM SMITH: <i>The Wealth of Nations</i> and Enlightened Self-Interest	
	The Utopian Human. The common good and unconditional demands. Socialism, altruism and deontology.	
	J.S. MILL: Utilitarianism Refined	
	IMMANUEL KANT: The Categorical Imperative	
	MARX AND ENGELS: Socialism and the Common Good,	
	FRANCIS WILLIAMS: A Defense of Socialism	
	Two Ethics: Consequentialism and Deontology	
	Human Nature as Animal Nature. The difference between rats and humans. Scientific Materialism and the possibility of Metaphysics. Monisms and dualisms part i.	
	HUGH ELLIOT: Scientific Materialism	
	C.M. JOAD: Dualism Defended	
	SOCIAL DARWINISM: an overview	
	HUMAN NATURE AS MACHINE NATURE. Artificial Intelligence: are humans just complicated machines? The argument from analogy for the existence of other minds. Being a person distinguished from being a human being. Monisms and dualisms part ii.	
	JOHN SEARL: Minds, Brains, and Programs	
	HILLIAM LYCAN: The Civil Rights of Robots	
	HUMAN NATURE OR WOMAN NATURE? HUMAN NATURES: ONE HUMAN NATURE OR MANY? Identity Epistemology.	
	JEAN GRIMSHAW: Are women a species distinct from men?	
	2 nd Mid-Term Exam	
	Introductory Remarks on Freedom and Determinism. Fatalism and Scientific Determinism. Closed systems, monisms and dualisms part iii. RICHARD TAYLOR: Fatalism ROBERT BLATCHFORD: Scientific Determinism	

	Freedom: So What?	
	W.T. STACE: Compatibilism and the Problem of Free Will	
	CLARENCE DARROW: Free Will and Justice	
	CORLISS LAMENT: Freedom of Choice and Moral Responsibility	
	Recommended Reading: ARISTOTLE'S <i>NICOMACHEAN ETHICS</i> : The Nature of Deliberation and Choice, ST. AUGUSTINE'S <i>CONFESSIONS</i> , The Two Wills	
	Skinner's <i>Walden Two</i>: Science, Prediction and Control. Behaviorism and the illusion of freedom.	
	B.F. SKINNER: Behaviorism and <i>Walden Two</i>	
	Existentialism: Absurdity and Meaninglessness.	
	MARTIN HEIDEGGER: What is Metaphysics?	
	Existentialism: Existence = freedom as creation.	
	PAUL SARTRE: <i>Man as Self-Creator</i>	
	Existentialism and Self-Creation continued. Subjectivity, consciousness and critical self-reflection. Self-determination revisited.	
	IMMANUEL KANT The Categorical Imperative	
	Freedom and Authenticity. The Allegory of the Cave Take Two. Images, Tommy Hilfiger, and the possibility of Democracy.	
	STANLEY ARONOWITZ: Mass Culture and the Eclipse of Reasoning: The Implications for Pedagogy.	