

Philosophical Anthropology (A000432)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 5.0 **Study time 150 h**

Course offerings and teaching methods in academic year 2023-2024

A (semester 2)	Dutch	Gent	lecture seminar
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Lecturers in academic year 2023-2024

Vervisch, Thomas	LW01	staff member
Focquaert, Farah	LW01	lecturer-in-charge

Offered in the following programmes in 2023-2024

	crdts	offering
Bachelor of Arts in Moral Sciences	5	A
Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy	5	A
Bachelor of Science in Sociology	5	A

Teaching languages

Dutch

Keywords

Philosophical anthropology, conceptions of human nature, meaning of life, art of living, philosophy of neuropsychiatry, neurosciences, criminal justice, free will and agency

Position of the course

This basic course wants to help students gain insight into historical and contemporary philosophical and scientific thoughts on human nature.

Contents

In this course, we study how both western and eastern philosophical and religious traditions thought about the fundamental traits of man. We will deal with questions such as: what kind of being is man? How does man distinguish himself from (other) animals? What is the place of man in nature and the cosmos? Is man a splendid accident or the pinnacle of creation? How can man - in light of modernity and scientific developments such as the neurosciences and evolutionary theory - find meaning? On what basis can we live an authentic and meaningful life? Is that even possible, given the views of several authors that human behaviour is determined and often succumbs to selfdeception? We critically discuss these and related questions from the perspective of the writings of various authors. We consider their views in light of the art of living and how to construct an authentic life.

- the mind/body problem
- the place of man in nature and the cosmos
- the relationship between nature and culture
- the relationship between free will and responsibility
- various philosophical discussions related to modern medicine, neuropsychiatry, genetics and the cognitive neurosciences.

Initial competences

No prior knowledge necessary.

Final competences

- 1 Critical understanding of historical and contemporary theories of human nature in the social sciences and brain sciences.
- 2 To be able to identify relevant philosophical-anthropological questions and problems related to diverse contemporary social debates and contexts.

- 3 To have general knowledge of various important current scientific and philosophical attempts to resolve these problems and questions.
- 4 To have critical insight in the philosophical positions and theories that underlie such attempts.
- 5 To be able to form and defend one's own opinion on philosophical-anthropological questions, based on such critical insight.
- 6 To be able to apply the acquired abilities independently on debates and contexts concerning existential and ethical questions.
- 7 To be able to independently read basic philosophical anthropology texts.
- 8 To have general insight in philosophical attempts to describe what it means to have an authentic and meaningful life.

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is unrestricted: the student takes into consideration the conditions mentioned in 'Starting Competences'

Conditions for exam contract

Access to this course unit via an exam contract is unrestricted

Teaching methods

Seminar, Lecture, Independent work, Peer teaching

Extra information on the teaching methods

The majority of the classes (36h) involve lectures. During the seminars (9h), a number of additional themes are introduced through guest lectures. Students are then asked to write a paper on one of the themes (opinion piece, +/- 1500 words). In an introductory seminar, the assignment is discussed. The rest of the seminars is used for peer feedback in group (micro-teaching) and individual feedback by the assistant (guided self-study).

Because of COVID19, modified working methods can be rolled out if necessary

Learning materials and price

Reader or a book plus articles.

For example: Paul Bloom (2023). *Psych. The story of the human mind*. HarperCollins.

Nicholas Humphrey (2022). *Sentience. The invention of consciousness*. Oxford University Press.

Daniel C. Dennett, Gregg D. Caruso: *Just Deserts: Debating Free Will*. Wiley, 2021.

Powerpointslides via Minerva.

Estimated price: ca 45 €

Alternative course material is also an option in case of Dutch articles (to be discussed with the lecturer).

References

C. Darwin: *On the Origin of Species* (Oxford World Series, 1859/2009)

D. Eagleman: *The brain. The story of you* (Canongate books, 2016)

B. Waller: *The stubborn system of moral responsibility* (MIT Press, 2014)

Janet Radcliffe Richards: *Human Nature after Darwin: A Philosophical Introduction* (Routledge, 2001)

Thomas Suddendorf: *The Gap. The Science of What Separates us from Other Animals* (Basic Books, 2013)

Andrea L. Glenn & Adrian Raine, *Psychopathy: An introduction to biological findings and their implications* (NYU Press, 2014).

Course content-related study coaching

By the lecturer or assistant (by appointment).

Assessment moments

end-of-term and continuous assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Written assessment with open-ended questions

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Written assessment with open-ended questions

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Assignment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

not applicable

Extra information on the examination methods

- written examination
- essay

The examination form may change if deemed necessary due to COVID19.

Calculation of the examination mark

The essay comprises 8 points out of 20.

The exam comprises 12 points out of 20.

Students who eschew one or more parts of the evaluation can no longer pass the course. Final scores will be reduced to the highest non-deliberative quotation (7/20) in case the final score is higher.

Facilities for Working Students

Facilities:

- 1 Possible exemption from certain educational activities requiring student attendance.
- 2 Possible oral examination on a different time in the same academic year
- 3 Feedback can be given during an appointment during office hours

Extra information:

For more information concerning flexible learning: contact the monitoring service of the faculty of Arts and philosophy