

**PHL 312: Contemporary Moral Problems—
Humanity and Inhumanity**
Miami University, Fall 2019

Professor: Aleksy Tarasenko-Struc

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Office location: 222 Hall Auditorium

Office hours: Monday, 4h10–6h10 PM, and by appointment

Course meetings: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 2h50–4h05 PM, 224 McGuffey Hall

Course Description:

The topic of this course is dehumanization, broadly construed. We will try to understand what it is for human beings to treat one another as less than full persons—as things, animals, or sub-human creatures. We will be especially concerned with the question of 'man's inhumanity to man': how it is possible for us to subject others to torture, rape, genocide, and slavery despite recognizing them as human beings, and whether there is a sense in which the humanity of others can be invisible to us.

We will approach this large task by taking up four main lines of inquiry. First, which modes of relating to another subject count as objectifying—as seeing and/or treating her as a thing? And how useful is the concept of objectification for shedding light on the moral character of such acts as torture, rape, and sexual harassment? Second, to what extent, if any, is it clarifying to compare certain dehumanizing acts and practices (such as slavery and genocide) to our treatment of nonhuman animals? Third, what is it to see or regard another person as a person? Specifically, what are the differences between this form of recognition and the kind of awareness that we normally have of objects and animals? Fourth, does racism consist in a failure to recognize members of the target group as persons? Are acts of racial hostility informed by a view of the other person as subhuman and if so, what does this consist in?

Our main goal is to assemble the materials for an account of these morally objectionable stances toward other people—an account that is adequate to their psychological and moral complexity.

Note: There are no official prerequisites for this course. Nevertheless, it is *strongly recommended* that you enroll in this course only if you have already taken a philosophy course—and, ideally, PHL 131.

Texts

There are two required texts for this course:

Axel Honneth, *Reification*

David Livingstone-Smith, *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others*

Each is relatively inexpensive and can be ordered online. The majority of the readings for this course, however, will consist in articles or book chapters, which will be made available on the course website.

Course Requirements and Grades

Final grades are determined on the basis of (1) participation (and thus attendance), (2) a short paper (5–7 pages), (3) an extended abstract (~2 pages) for the long paper, and (4) a long paper (8–10 pages).

The breakdown of grades will be as follows:

- 25%: *Participation*
- 30%: *Short Paper*: due September 29
- 10%: *Extended abstract* for long paper: due November 17
- 35%: *Long paper*: due December 11

In order to pass this course, all written work must be submitted to the instructor. In addition to the above assignments, there will be occasional—and unannounced—opportunities to obtain extra credit.

Couse Policies:

- **Respect:** Discussions in this course should be respectful, constructive, and inclusive. We will follow the NYU Guidelines for Respectful Philosophical Discussion, which can be found [here](#).
- **Structure of Meetings:** I will generally try to give equal weight to lecture and discussion, both large-scale discussions that we will have as a class and smaller discussions in individual groups.

Participation and attendance are important in this course—as reflected by the fact that your participation score accounts for a significant proportion of your final grade. Everyone is expected to contribute to class discussions in some way. (In particular, I encourage you to ask clarificatory questions about the material: if you are confused about some topic that we are studying in this course, it is overwhelmingly likely that other students are, too!) But I'm also very willing to count conversations after class, over e-mail, and during office hours toward your participation score.

This means that you will be penalized for frequent unexcused absences or lack of engagement. Because the best way to achieve philosophical understanding is in dialogue with others, however, it is independently in your interests to participate as well. Indeed, in my experience, students who attend class and participate in discussions regularly perform better than students who do neither.

- **Punctuality:** Please make every effort to get to class on time. Also, please inform me beforehand if you anticipate that you will be absent from class or late, or if you will have to leave early.
- **Plagiarism:** You are encouraged to discuss the material with your peers outside of class, but all work must contain your own thoughts, written in your own words. Feel free contact me if you would like clarification concerning what counts as plagiarism or what proper citation consists in. I will outline what sorts of things amount to plagiarism as preparation for your first paper.

You can also find a definition of plagiarism, along with Miami University's plagiarism policy, [here](#)

- **Technology.** Use of laptops is not allowed. The temptation to misuse them is too strong (even for me!), and because I give you a detailed handout before every session, you will likely not need a laptop for wholesome note-taking purposes. I'm happy to make exceptions for students who can show that they have legitimate need of a laptop, such as students with documented disabilities.

For this reason, you should plan on bringing paper copies of relevant reading(s) with you to class.

Use of cellphones is not allowed, either. Please have your phone put away and your ringer silenced.

- **Readings:** Required readings should be completed *before* the session for which they are assigned.

This is a reading-intensive course. We will typically read between 40 and 70 pages of material each week. Some selections will be dense and difficult, so you may have to reread them once or twice.

- **Extensions:** Extensions for any valid reason will be granted *only if* they are requested at least one full day before the due date. Keep in mind that *no extensions will be granted on the long paper*.

Note: If you take an extension, you effectively waive your right to receive comments on time!

- **Late Work:** It is important that you submit your work on time. Except in unusual circumstances, late work will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day (e.g. from A to A-, etc.).

Note: If you submit work late, you effectively waive your right to receive comments on time!

- **Drafts:** If you want me to look over a draft, send it to me *at least* four days before the due date.

- **Accommodations:** Students who need special accommodations for a documented disability should contact me immediately, so that necessary arrangements can be made in a timely manner.

You may obtain the requisite documentation at the [Miller Center for Student Disability Services](#).

- **Office Hours:** Feel encouraged to meet with me, individually or in a group, for any academic reason, whether related to the course or not, especially if you want to discuss my comments on your work. You should make an appointment with me if you cannot come to my office hours.

- **E-mail:** I will strive to answer your e-mails within one business day, where this excludes weekends and holidays. If a day has gone by and you have not yet received a response, please remind me.

Note: I do not generally respond to e-mails asking for information contained in the syllabus!

Schedules of Meetings and Assignments

*Note: I may occasionally change reading assignments. If I do so, I will inform you well in advance.

1. Main Themes of the Course

August 26: [No Readings: Introduction to Main Themes]

Recommended: Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society*, ch. 6. ('Being Beastly to Humans')

August 28: Sandra Lee Bartky, 'On Psychological Oppression'

August 30: [No Readings: Normative Ethics Bootcamp]

2. Treating a Person as a Thing I: Objectification

September 2: [Labor Day: No Class!]

September 4: Catharine MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, pp. 123–30

Sally Haslanger, 'On Being Objective and Being Objectified', pp. 223–32

September 6: Martha Nussbaum, 'Objectification'

Recommended: Rae Langton, 'Autonomy-Denial in Objectification'

September 9: Timo Jütten, 'Sexual Objectification'

September 11: Rae Langton, 'Sexual Solipsism'

Recommended: Nancy Bauer, *How To Do Things with Pornography*, ch. 3 ('What Philosophy Can't Teach Us about Sexual Objectification')

September 13: [No Readings: Catch-up and Capstone]

3. Paradigmatic Forms of Wrongdoing: Rape and Torture

September 16: John Gardner and Stephen Shute, 'The Wrongness of Rape'

Mari Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, ch. 6 ('Dehumanization'), pp. 153–57

Recommended: Susan Brison, *Aftermath*, ch. 1 ('Surviving Sexual Violence')

September 18: Jean Hampton, 'Defining Wrong and Defining Rape' [focus on pp. 134–52]

September 20: [No Readings: Workshop on Philosophical Writing]

September 23: David Sussman, 'What's Wrong with Torture?' [skim or skip pp. 16–18]

Recommended: Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, chs. 1–2

September 25: J.M. Bernstein, *Torture and Dignity*, ch. 3 ('The Harm of Rape, the Harm of Torture')

Recommended: J.M. Bernstein, *Torture and Dignity*, ch. 2 ('On Being Tortured')

September 27: [No Readings: Catch-up and Capstone]

***Short Paper Due*: Sunday, September 29 by 11h59 PM**

4. Seeing a Person as Subhuman: Slavery, Colonialism, Genocide

- September 30: David Livingstone Smith, *Less Than Human*, chs. 1–2
Recommended: Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, ch. 3 §1 ('Understanding, Taking Possession, Destroying')
- October 2: Livingstone Smith, *Less Than Human*, chs. 3, 6
- October 4: Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, pp. 372–78
Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*, chs. 1–4
- October 7: Livingstone Smith, 'Paradoxes of Dehumanization'
- October 9: Kate Manne, *Down Girl*, ch. 5 ('Humanizing Hatred')
- October 11: [No Readings: Fall Break!]

5. Seeing the Humanity of Others II: Alternatives

- October 14: Bertrand Russell, 'Analogy'
Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, excerpt
Peter Winch, *Eine Einstellung zur Seele*
- October 16: Alex Hyslop, *Other Minds*, ch. 8 ('Wittgenstein's "Attitudinal Approach" to Other Minds')
- October 18: Victoria McGeer, 'The Skill of Perceiving Persons'
- October 21: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Part 3, ch. 1, §4 ('The Look'), pp. 340–62
Recommended: Thomas Nagel, 'Sartre on the Look and the Problem of Other Minds'
- October 23: Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Part 3, ch. 3, pp. 471–74, pp. 494–534 [skim pp. 498–517]
- October 25: [No Readings: Catch-up and Capstone]

6. Seeing the Humanity of Others II: Racism, Social Invisibility, Domination

- October 28: [Finish Capstone Activity from Last Week]
Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Racisms'
- October 30: J.L.A. Garcia, 'The Heart of Racism', pp. 5–29
- November 1: Garcia, 'The Heart of Racism', continued
Tommy Shelby, 'Is Racism in the "Heart"?'
- November 4: Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, prologue
Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, ch. 5 ('The Lived Experience of the Black Man')
Recommended: Lewis Gordon, 'Existential Dynamics of Theorizing Black Invisibility'
- November 6: Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, ch. 5, continued
- November 8: Axel Honneth, 'Recognition'

November 11: Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, ch. 4 ('Racism')

November 13: Gaita, *Good and Evil*, ch. 9 ('Individuality'), pp. 156–63
Gaita, *A Common Humanity*, ch. 13 ('A Common Humanity')

November 15: [No Readings: Catch-up and Capstone Activity]

***Extended Abstract for Long Paper Due*: Sunday, November 17 by 11h59 PM**

Treating a Person as a Thing II: Reification and the Basis for Critical Theory

November 18: Axel Honneth, *Reification*, preamble, ch. 1 ('Reification in the Work of Lukász')

Recommended: Axel Honneth, *Reification*, ch. 2

Karl Marx, *Paris Manuscripts*, excerpt on estranged labor

[Peer Review Workshop: Abstracts]

Note: Please bring four (4) copies of your extended abstract to class!

November 20: Honneth, *Reification*, ch. 3–4

November 22: Honneth, *Reification*, ch. 3–4, continued
Jonathan Lear, 'The Slippery Middle' (in *Reification*)

November 25: Judith Butler, 'Taking Another's View: Ambivalent Implications' (in *Reification*)
Honneth, 'Rejoinder' (in *Reification*)

November 27: [Thanksgiving Break: No Class!]

November 29: [Thanksgiving Break: No Class!]

December 2: [Final Capstone Activity and Review]

***First Draft of Long Paper Due*: Tuesday, December 3 by 11h59 PM**

December 4: [In-class Writing Workshop: Peer Review of Introduction and Exposition]

Note: Please bring four copies of your first draft to class!

December 6: [In-class Writing Workshop: Peer Review of Positive View and Arguments]

Note: Please bring four copies of your first draft to class!

***Long Paper Due*: Wednesday, December 11 by 11h59 PM**