



UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

## COURSE SYLLABUS

### Theoretical Philosophy - A-L

2021-1-E1901R016-AL

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#### Course title

*On Birth. Philosophical categories and educational action*

#### Topics and course structure

Birth is a neglected theme in philosophy and the human sciences, whose reflection on the human has often focused on the other extremity of life. But we can think of ourselves as not only mortal, but also natal: as coming into the world to make a beginning.

How does this origin mark our existence? Contemporary philosophy has investigated the existential and formative implications. Reflecting on birth means drawing on the categories of initiality (the capacity to act), creativity (the capacity to introduce what is new into the experience), and generativity (being oriented toward the future in a confident way) as indispensable to thinking about the human condition. The implications of this coming-into-the world, as a place of possibilities, and a space of trust and growth, are particularly evident in the field of education, because birth accompanies all the seasons of existence, but especially influences the seasons closest to it: childhood; adolescence and youth

#### Objectives

### *Knowledge and understanding*

The first objective of this course in theoretical philosophy is to accustom students to a style of inquiry suited to critically analysing the categories of thought that explicitly or implicitly underpin discourses in the human sciences and the associated research practices and forms of intervention. Students will be led to recognize and problematize the interpretive approaches and conceptual distinctions underpinning understandings of the world in real-life contexts.

### *Application of knowledge and understanding*

The second objective of the course is to help students develop the capacity to reflect on the less obvious, and thus even more crucial, assumptions underlying their actions (whether theoretical or practical) in typical educational situations and settings. The expected learning outcome is enhanced awareness of the horizons of meaning that come into play in diverse sociocultural contexts and the main cognitive and normative structures underpinning mutual expectations in educational settings, which in turn will inform educational action.

### *Transferable learning outcomes*

The third objective of the course is to enhance students' capacity to revisit and organize their knowledge, using their own independent judgement, while attending to underlying concepts, the layers of semantic meaning implicit in key terms, the logical-formal structure of arguments, and different possible regimes of truth.

## **Methodologies**

Introductory lectures and discussions on the course's key themes and theoretical bases; guided analysis of the course books; active learning sessions based on audio-visual materials and worksheets; joint recap sessions based on outlines presented in PowerPoint or guest lectures.

## **Online and offline teaching materials**

Course books, PowerPoint presentations, worksheets and other documents for individual exercises and group work, audio-visual materials.

## **Programme and references for attending students**

The course examines the theoretical reasons for renewed contemporary interest in birth, offering in-depth analysis of selected leading philosophical models on this theme.

It set out the key elements of a philosophy of birth and the relationship between such a philosophy and processes of formation.

To this end it explores the thought of two important philosophers of the twentieth century who have dialogued with each other, placing the theme of birth at the center of their researches: Hannah Arendt and Hans Saner.

It is divided into two parts:

1. Theoretical introduction to the theme of birth in philosophy and categories to think about the human condition in the light of birth: natality, initiality and creativity, uniqueness and plurality.
2. Educational implications. In this second part we will explore the notions of: action, capacity, freedom, authority, education, generations, joy, trust, imagination, fantasy, dissidence.

### Bibliography

1. H. Arendt, *Vita activa. La condizione umana*, Bompiani, Milano 1991, only pp. 1-57 e 127-182 (tot. pag. 110).
2. H. Arendt, *Tra passato e futuro*, Garzanti, Milano 2017, only pp. 25-39 e 130-289 (tot. pag. 139)
3. Hans Saner, *Nascita e fantasia. La naturale dissidenza del bambino*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2017, only pp. 59-112 e 149-198 (tot. pag. 102)
4. M. Vergani, *Nascita. Una fenomenologia dell'esistenza*, Carocci, Roma 2020, only pp. 9-19, 110-137, 158-190, 199-216, 253-263. (tot. pag. 104)

### **Programme and references for non-attending students**

The course examines the theoretical reasons for renewed contemporary interest in birth, offering in-depth analysis of selected leading philosophical models on this theme.

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### **Assessment methods**

Attending students: oral exam.

During the oral exam the student will be required to discuss the course themes; the examiner will evaluate both the precision of their knowledge and their ability to critically rework it.

Assessment will be based on:

- a. Pertinence of answers,
- b. appropriate use of terminology
- c. coherence of argument,
- d. ability to identify and problematize theoretical issues and open questions.

Non-attending students: oral exam.

As above, except that the questions will evaluate the student's knowledge of the prescribed reading materials without reference to the additional analysis conducted in class

### **Office hours**

Prof. Vergani receives students on Wednesdays from 12.30 to 14.30. Tel. 4896 U6 4th Floor, Room 4146 (students requiring an appointment should request it in advance via email). Routine information may be requested via email, or before or after classes.

## **Programme validity**

The current programme is valid for two academic years.

## **Course tutors and assistants**

Course tutor: dott. Claudio Belloni.

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