**PHIL 110: HUMAN NATURE**

Spring 2017
mtwr: 9-950
Room: FEN 105
Instructor: Martina Ferrari

Office Hours: R 10:00–12:00 & by appt.
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**Course Description:**

What is human nature? What does it mean to be human? And is there a human nature? Much of the history of philosophy wrestles with these questions in one way or another. From Plato and Aristotle through Rousseau and Hobbes, philosophers have thought that answers to these questions are not only central to understanding ourselves, but also to stipulating good political, social, and ethical arrangements. In this course, we will explore notions of human nature from a variety of philosophical traditions and contexts, with attention to how some of the answers to these questions have resulted in legacies of sexism, racism, and speciesism with which we still live today. The course is divided in five sections, beginning from a conception of human nature that understands it as fixed, created, and finite, and concluding by being challenged by thinkers who claim that there is no such thing as a human nature. In the interim, in section II, we will explore views that take human nature to be essentially linked with their rational capacity at the expense of bodily desires and emotions, problematizing what counts as "reason" and who gets to be rational. In Section III, we will reflect upon how theories of human nature matter when it comes to the institution and organization of our political and moral communities, paying particular attention to the exploitative norms that underlie our political institutions. In section, IV, we will turn to phenomenology as a resource to theorize human nature beyond the mind/body dualism. This move will invite us to reflect on the difference that embodiment makes when thinking about human nature. Is there a gendered nature? Is there a racialized one? Is sexuality innate? This course will be an opportunity for deep and pluralistic reflection upon a central philosophical concept. You will be asked to explore your assumptions about yourself and others and, hopefully, you will find some tools for the transformation of those same assumptions.

**Course Goals:**

- Develop intellectual generosity and critical skills
- Develop clarity in expression (both written and verbal expression) and rigor in argument
- Gain exposure to central philosophical ideas and texts dealing
- Become fluent in various approaches to the question of human nature
- Become a better writer and a thoughtful thinker

**Required Texts:**

Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, ISBN-13: 978-0801484636

All additional readings will be available on Canvas.

**Course Requirements:**

***Written Work* (80%), broken down as follows:**

- **2 Midterm Exams (26%x2)**: For this class, you will have two midterms of approximately 1500 words each. The midterm exams will be due on Sunday, 4/23 and Sunday, 5/14 no later than 11:59 pm. Exams should be submitted on Canvas via VeriCite. Exam questions will be provided a week prior to the exams' due dates.

- **Final Paper (26%):** The **final paper** will be 5-6 pages in length. It will be due on Sunday, 6/11 no later than 11:59 pm. Papers should be submitted on Canvas via VeriCite.
  - **Workshops (2%):** Successfully writing your paper entails writing and bringing to class two copies of a rough draft of your final paper on 6/8. By rough draft I do NOT mean an outline of your paper, but a **completed**

version of what will become your midterm paper. You will turn in one copy to me. You will use the second copy to write notes, comments, and feedback that your classmates will provide you. You will then take the paper home and further work on it prior to turning in the final version of your paper the following week. Getting full credit for this part of the assignment entails providing and incorporating feedback.

→ **Late** midterm and final papers are **penalized one letter grade** for every day the paper is late.

***Oral Contribution* (20%), broken down as follows:**

- **Participation and Attendance (20%):** I expect you to be prepared each day to 1) discuss the reading, 2) ask questions about its meaning and merit, 3) help others find the answers, 4) discern presuppositions, 5) trace consequences, 6) reconstruct arguments, and 7) evaluate strengths and weaknesses of positions.

- Needless to say, good participation presupposes attendance. Participation is not a function of quantity, but it does require presence in body and spirit. Therefore, your participation grade will be determined both by your attendance of class, together with your participation. You have up to **3 unexcused absences**. After the 3rd unexcused absence your participation grade will be reduced of **a letter grade** every class you miss.

**Writing Workshops: 2%**
**Midterm Exams: 52%**
**Final Paper: 26%**
**Participation: 20%**

**Grading Criteria:** To do excellent work on the papers in this course, you need to be able to do more than just reiterate what various authors have said in your reading or what was said in class. An "A" indicates that you not only understand and comprehend the material, but that you have thought critically about it, fully fleshing out its subtleties and implications so that you can creatively apply the material at many levels. A "B" reflects an above-average understanding of the material without any major errors; however, "B" work doesn't capture the complexity of the issues and tends to accurately summarize what has been read or said in class. A "C" suggests a struggle with the material that manages an average, basic comprehension of it but is flawed by some significant misunderstandings or errors. A "D" indicates only a rudimentary comprehension of part of the material with most of the material being misunderstood. An "F" indicates no understanding of the material

Grades on papers and exams will be given on the standard 0-100 point grading scale:

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| 100-97: | A+ | 79-77: | C+ |
| 96-93: | A | 76-73: | C |
| 92-90: | A- | 72-70: | C- |
| 89-87: | B+ | 69-60: | D |
| 86-83: | B | 59-0: | F |
| 82-80: | B- | | |

**Additional Course Policies:**

Incompletes and extensions will be given *only* in the event of documented emergencies.

No Electronics. If I warn you to put an electronic device way, expect it to reflect on your grade. If I have to warn you a second time, I will ask for you to leave and/or you will be marked absent for the day.

Emergencies: In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances.

Sexual Violence: The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and gender-based stalking. If you (or someone

you know) has experienced or experiences gender-based violence (intimate partner violence, attempted or completed sexual assault, harassment, coercion, stalking, etc.), know that you are not alone. UO has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

Please be aware that all UO employees are *required reporters*. This means that if you tell me about a situation, I may have to report the information to my supervisor or the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity. Although I have to report the situation, you will still have options about how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.
If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, you can call 541-346-SAFE, UO's 24h hotline, to be connected to a confidential counselor to discuss your options. You can also visit the SAFE website at safe.uoregon.edu

Accessibility: If you have a documented disability, please contact me in advance. If you need accommodations in this class, I will work with the Accessible Education Center to find a solution for you.

Academic Honesty: There will be **zero tolerance** for plagiarism in this course. Plagiarized papers will receive a 0, the student will automatically fail the course, and their name will be handed given to the university authorities. For more on the University of Oregon policy on plagiarism, see the following website:
http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/
In order to avoid plagiarizing from a source, both direct quotations and paraphrases or summaries of material found in traditional print media or on the internet must be acknowledged. If you have any questions about how this definition will be interpreted, please do not hesitate to discuss the matter with me.

**** I will do my best to create a productive environment and inspire free thinking throughout the course. I will treat everyone fairly and with respect. In return, I expect you to do your best and treat everyone with respect. I want all of us to hold each other accountable. For this, communication is the key. Please come and talk to me if anything is bothering you. The subject matter will at times be sensitive and the discussions may be heated – and this is quite alright, as long as we don't stop communicating. We shall build our classroom community together and contribute in our own unique way.*

**Readings and Assignment Schedule**
Class schedule and readings are *subject to revision*. You will be notified ahead of time if and when this happens. (If there is anything you find pertinent to this class or the topics we discuss – readings, videos, images, etc. contact me about including it in our schedule).

| **Week 1** | **Part I – Humans as Created Beings** |
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| 4/3 | Introduction & Remarks on human nature & implications |
| 4/4 | Niebuhr, "Man as a Problem to Himself," from *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, pp. 1-7; 12-18<br>Recommended: "Man as a Problem to Himself," 18-25 |
| 4/5 | Niebuhr, "Man as Image of God and as Creature," pp. 150-166 |
| 4/6 | Niebuhr, "Man as Image of God and as Creature," pp. 167-177 |
| | **Part II—Human Beings as Rational Beings** |
| 4/10<br>*Last day to drop w/o 'W'* | Plato, *Phaedo* 64a-84b |
| 4/11 | Plato, continued |
| 4/12 | Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I |
| 4/13 | Aristotle, continued<br>Recommended: Nussbaum, "Human Functioning & Social Justice: A Defense of Aristotelian Essentialism," pp. 214-223 |

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| **Week 3** | |
| 4/17 | Descartes, *Meditations 1&2* |
| | Recommended: Elizabeth of Bohemia, from *Correspondence between Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia and Rene Descartes* |
| 4/18 | Singer, "Speciesism and Moral Status" |
| 4/19 | Collins, "Black Feminist Thought" |
| | Recommended: Lloyd, "The Man of Reason" |
| 4/20 | Colling, continued |
| | Recommended: Alcoff, "Sotomayor's Reasoning" |
| 4/23 | **Midterm Exam #1** |
| **Week 4** | **Part III—Humans as Social and Political Beings** |
| 4/24 | Plato, *Republic* Book II 357b-368c |
| 4/25 | Plato, *Republic* Book II 368c-369b, Book IV 427d-428a, 441c-445b |
| 4/26 | Aristotle, *Politics* Book 2 selections |
| 4/27 | Aristotle, Continued |
| **Week 5** | |
| 5/1 | Hobbes, from *Leviathan* |
| 5/2 | Locke, "On property," from *Second Treatise on Government* |
| 5/3 | Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* |
| 5/4 | Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* |
| | Recommended: Holmstrom "Is Human Nature Important for Feminism?" |
| **Week 6** | |
| 5/8 | Mills, *The Racial Contract* |
| 5/9 | Mills, continued |
| 5/10 | Mills, continued |
| 5/11 | Mills, continued and Watch documentary *13th* |
| 5/14 | **Midterm Exam #2** |
| **Week 7** | **Part IV—Human Beings as Embodied Beings** |
| 5/15 | Holmstrom, "Do Women Have a Distinct Nature?" |
| 5/16 | Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, "Refiguring Bodies," pp. 3-10 and 13-24 |
| | Recommended: Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, "Lived Bodies Phenomenology and the Flesh," pp 86-97 |
| 5/17 | Beauvoir, "Introduction," from *The Second Sex*; |
| 5/18 | Beauvoir, continued |
| | Recommended: Young, *Throwing like a Girl* |
| 5/21 *Last day to Withdraw* | |
| **Week 8** | |
| 5/22 | Alcoff, "Sotomayor's Reasoning" |
| 5/23 | Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, selections |
| 5/24 | Burke, "Sexuality as Becoming" |
| 5/25 | Discuss video from *National Geographic* |
| **Week 9** | **Part V – Is there a Human Nature?** |
| 5/29 Memorial Day | No Class |
| 5/30 | Sartre, "Existentialism as Humanism" |
| 5/31 | Foucault, "The Perverse Implantation," *History of Sexuality Vol. 1* |
| 6/1 | Foucault, continued |

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| **Week 10** | |
| 6/5 | Hacking, "Making Up People" |
| 6/6 | Sally Haslanger "A Social Constructionist Analysis of Race" |
| 6/7 | Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." |
| 6/8 | **Final Paper Workshop** |

**Week 11**

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| **6/ 11** | **Final Papers due at 11:59 pm** |