

Phil 110 Human Nature

Spring 2018, CRN: 34699

Class meets MTWR 9:00-9:50 pm in 106 Friendly Hall

Instructor: Kaja Jenssen Rathe **Email:** krathe@uoregon.edu **Office hours:** Thursdays 10-12, 232 SCH

Course Description:

What kind of creatures are we? What does it mean to be human? Is the question of human nature at all important? And *is* there a human nature? Much of the history of philosophy wrestles with these questions in one way or another. From Ancient philosophy to contemporary science, thinkers have engaged in discussion of whether humans are inherently “good,” “rational,” “ignorant” or “evil”, in connection with seemingly endless debates over the question of “nature versus nurture”. Many have thought that answering 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. The course is divided in two main sections. In the first section, we look at the notion of human nature as it appears (and changes) throughout in the history of Western philosophy, from Ancient philosophy, through the Enlightenment period, to the 19th century. In section two, we zoom in on more contemporary discussions concerning human nature from the 20th and 21st century, concerning gender, race, contemporary neurobiology, social constructivism and the question of human rights.

Course schedule:

Reading assignments will be announced in advance, and they are listed in the tentative schedule given below. Every student is expected to attend all lectures and to read the assigned texts by the assigned dates (i.e., to have printed, read and annotated the text before it is discussed in the lecture).

Section I: Human Nature in the History of Western Thinking

Week 1:

Introduction and the Christian-Aristotelian view of human nature

- 4/2: Introduction to the course: What does it mean to ask the question of human nature?
- 4/3: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 349 BCE. Book 1, Ch. 1-7 (18 pages).
- 4/4: Aristotle (cont.)
- 4/5: The Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, *Genesis* 1-3

Week 2:

Modern philosophy and the Enlightenment

- 4/9: Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651 (excerpts)
- 4/10: Hobbes (cont.)
- 4/11: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, 1762. Excerpts from book I and book V (Sophie)
- 4/12: Rousseau (cont.)

Week 3:

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- 4/16: Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1792. Introduction.
 - 4/17: Wollstonecraft (cont.)
 - 4/18: Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”, 1784
 - 4/19: Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, 1789
- NB: First in-class exam-quiz!**

Week 4:

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- 4/23: Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, 1789; *Religion within the boundaries of mere reason*, 1793.
 - 4/24: Kant (cont.)

19th century philosophy

- 4/25: John Stuart Mill, essay on “Nature”, 1854.
- 4/26: Mill (cont.)

Week 5:

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- 4/30: Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 1871 (excerpts)
5/1: Darwin (cont.)
5/2: Friedrich Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals*, (excerpts from Second Treatise), 1887
5/3: Nietzsche (cont.)
NB: Midterm essay due Sunday 5/6 (11:59 pm)

Section II: Contemporary debates (20th and 21st centuries)

Week 6:

Human beings as embodied beings

- 5/7: Nancy Holmstrom, "Do Women Have a Distinct Nature?", 1982.
5/8: Holmstrom (cont.)
5/9: Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1949. (Introduction)
5/10: Beauvoir (cont.)

Week 7:

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- 5/14: Megan Burke, "Sexuality as Becoming", 2016
5/15: Burke (cont.)
5/16: Franz Fanon, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man," from *White Skin Black Masks*, 1967
Recommended: Henry M. Bracken, "Essence, Accident, Race", 1973.
5/17: Fanon (cont.)

Week 8:

Human nature and neurobiology

- 5/21: Rose, Lewontin, & Kamin, *Not in Our Genes: Biology, Ideology, and Human Nature*, 1984.
5/22: Catherine Malabou, "Plasticity's Fields of Action," from *What Should We Do With Our Brain?*, 2004.
Recommended: Siddharta Mukherjee, "Same but Different. How Epigenetics can blur the difference between nature and nurture", 2017. (<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/05/02/breakthroughs-in-epigenetics>)
5/23: Steven Pinker: "Why Nature & Nurture Won't Go Away", 2004.
5/24: Neurobiology (cont.): Discussion/review
NB: Second in-class exam-quiz!

Week 9:

Is there a human nature? Social constructivism, power and ideology

- 5/28: Memorial Day – No class
5/29: Michel Foucault, TBA
5/30: Foucault (cont.)
5/31: Ian Hacking, "Making Up People", 1986.

Week 10:

Human (and animal) rights revisited

- 6/4: United Nations, "U.N. Declaration of Human Rights", 1948. Hannah Arendt, "The Perplexities of the Rights of Man" from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1951.
6/5: Martha Nussbaum, "Human Functioning & Social Justice: A Defense of Aristotelian Essentialism", 1992 (read only from p. 214 'An Essentialist Proposal' up until p. 223 'Answering Objections')
6/6: Peter Singer, "Speciesism and Moral Status", 2009.
6/7: Final paper workshop
NB: Final essay due Tuesday of finals' week, 6/12 (by 11:59 pm)

Course Format:

Classes will consist of lectures combined with discussion of the readings for that day. It is therefore crucial to the progress of the class that students come prepared, having read the material thoroughly.

Canvas:

Any changes to the course schedule, as well as all readings, will be available on Canvas.

Learning outcomes:

- **Critical reading:** Students will learn to identify the positions being advocated for in each reading, the assumptions being made about human nature by each author, and the implications of each position. Students will take an inquisitive and charitable approach to all readings.
- **Critical thinking through discussion:** Students will have meaningful, engaged discussions responding to both the discussion prompts and to their colleagues. This means learning to support your own opinions and positions using the arguments presented in both the texts and lectures, and rearticulating the claims and the implications made by your colleagues before assessing your own stance as a response.
- **Critical writing through essay assignments:** Students will show their understanding of the main concepts of the texts through succinct, written assignments. All positions will be adequately supported by drawing on relevant text passages showing an ability to both articulate and evaluate philosophical arguments and positions in an organized manner.
- **Content:** Students will complete the course with a knowledge of some of the most central and pertinent positions addressing the question of what human nature is, and should be able to explain and summarize the different approaches to human nature addressed in the course.

Readings:

- Readings will be available online through the canvas site for the course. Go to the canvas site and look under “modules”. Students are expected to *print out* the Canvas readings and bring them to lecture and discussion section each week, having read them closely and carefully.

Requirements:

- Reading responses: 15% of final grade (five responses, 3% each)
- Two in-class exam quizzes: 20% (10% each)
- Midterm essay (4 pages): 25%
- Final essay (4-5 pages): 30%
- Active participation: 10%

Explanation of Requirements:

- **Reading responses (15%):** Five times over the term you are required to write a brief reading response that you submit to your instructor the day before class, with (a) a brief *summary/précis* of one of the texts assigned for that week that you found engaging, interesting or problematic, and (b) a *commented question or reflection* concerning one or more aspects of the text. The reading response should be around 300-500 words in total and must be typewritten. Please email the reading response to your instructor *before 3 pm the day before class the reading is due*. The reading response will be graded.
- **Two in-class exam quizzes: 20% (10% each)** There will be two in-class exam quizzes, one in each section, covering basic notions from the readings and lectures.
- **Midterm essay (25%):** There will be a first essay due Sunday of Week 5. The topic will be given in advance.
- **Final essay (30%):** The final essay is due Tuesday of finals week and constitutes 30% of your grade. The topic will be given in advance.
- **Participation (10%):** Every Thursday, you will be asked to evaluate and grade your own participation for the past week. Within reasonable limits, you will thus be responsible for your own participation grade. Your total participation grade constitutes 10% of your final grade. When you grade your own participation, please take into consideration the following (in a holistic manner): Attendance/absences; level of preparation (having done the readings thoroughly); your active and thoughtful contributions to discussions in groups and/or in class; respectful engagement with other students in class (active listening, generosity in communication); coming to office hours.

Further policies:

1. If you miss a class it is your responsibility to keep up with the course material.
2. The uses of electronic devices like laptops, cell phones, tablets, iPads, etc. during class is not allowed unless a student has a documented need for using a specific device (note from the *Accessible Education Center*). If the latter is the case, please notify your instructors right away.
3. You are expected to follow the rules of academic honesty. Failure to do so will result in failure of the whole course ("F").

Rules of academic honesty: Academic dishonesty (e.g., cheating, plagiarism) is strictly prohibited and may result in severe penalties. Procedures, and penalties for such cases are spelled out on the UO website for Academic Dishonesty

- **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the inclusion of someone else's product, words, ideas, or data as one's own work. When a student submits work for credit that includes the product, words, ideas, or data of others, the source must be acknowledged by the use of complete, accurate, and specific references, such as footnotes. By placing one's name on work submitted for credit, one certifies the originality of all work not otherwise identified by appropriate acknowledgements. Verbatim statements by others must be enclosed by quotation marks or set off from the regular text as indented extracts.
- In order to find out how to avoid plagiarism, see <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/>
- **Fabrication:** Fabrication is the intentional use of information that the author has invented when he or she states or implies otherwise, or the falsification of research or other findings with the intent to deceive. Examples include, but are not limited to: 1) citing information not taken from the source indicated; 2) listing sources in a reference not used in the academic exercise; 3) inventing data or source information for research or other academic exercises.
- **Cheating:** Cheating is an act of deception by which a student misrepresents or misleadingly demonstrates that he or she has mastered information on an academic exercise that he or she has not mastered, including the giving or receiving of unauthorized help in an academic exercise. Examples include but are not limited to: 1) copying from another student's work; 2) collaborating without authority or allowing another student to copy one's work in a test situation; 3) using the course textbook or other material not authorized for use during a test; 4) using unauthorized material during a test; for example, notes, formula lists, cues on a computer, photographs, symbolic representations, and notes written on clothing; 5) resubmitting substantially the same work that was produced for another assignment without the knowledge and permission of the instructor; 6) taking a test for someone else or permitting someone else to take a test for you.

Assistance/Resources:

- If you need a **special learning assistance**, (for example, use of electronic devices, extended time in exams) please notify me right away and contact the *Accessible Education Center*.
- **Accessible Education Center (AEC):** coordinates services, provides advocacy and support to students with documented physical, learning, and psychological disabilities and provides assistance to the general campus community in responding appropriately to requests for accommodations based on disability. Location: 164 Oregon Hall. Web page: <http://aec.uoregon.edu/>. Phone: 541-346-1155. Email: uoac@uoregon.edu
- **Teaching & Learning Center (TLC):** TLC provides numerous resources (including courses, workshops, and tutoring) to help UO students succeed. They work with a diverse student body with a wide range of needs. If you are unsure which resources would work best, they are happy to answer questions and share suggestions. Location: 68 PLC. Web page: <http://tlc.uoregon.edu/>. Phone: 541-346-3226.
- **University Counseling and Testing Center (UCTC):** The UCTC provides comprehensive mental health care and testing services to the University of Oregon campus. The primary mission of the UCTC is to provide quality clinical/therapeutic services, psychological testing and assessment, psychoeducational workshops and outreach as well as emergency services. Location: 2nd floor, University Health, Counseling, and Testing Center Building. 1590 E 13th Ave. Web site: <http://counseling.uoregon.edu/dnn/>. 24-Hour Crisis Hotline: 541-346-3227
- **Discrimination and Sexual Harassment:** 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 most UO employees holding administrative positions (Heads, Deans, ecc.) are required reporters. This means that if you tell them about a situation, they may have to report the information to the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity. Even if you talk with a required reporter 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 24-hour hotline, to be connected to a confidential counselor to discuss your options. You can also visit the SAFE website at safe.uoregon.edu.