

## Phil 024: Human Nature

**Instructor:** Devin Sanchez Curry  
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**Room:** Van Pelt 302  
**Time:** T/R 10:30–12:00

“What an immature, self-destructive, antiquated mischief is man! How obscure and gross his prancing and chattering on his little stage of evolution! How loathsome and beyond words boring all the thoughts and self-approval of his biological by-product! this half-formed, ill-conditioned body! this erratic, maladjusted mechanism of his soul: on one side the harmonious instincts and balanced responses of the animal, on the other the inflexible purpose of the engine, and between them man, equally alien from the *being* of Nature and the *doing* of the machine, the vile *becoming*!” –Professor Silenus, from Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall*

In this course, we will investigate whether or not there is such a thing as 'human nature', and, if there is, what sorts of vile becoming it comprises. We will begin by surveying the history of philosophical and scientific theories about the relationship between bodies and minds. We will then consider what, if anything, makes humans unique within the animal kingdom. Finally, we will examine (purported) racial, sexual, and ability differences between humans. Throughout the course, we will come to understand and critically assess a variety of philosophical and scientific methods of studying human beings (and other animals).

### Required books

Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments* (Hackett, 2008 4<sup>th</sup> edition; purchase [here](#))  
Kristin Andrews, *The Animal Mind* (Routledge, 2014; purchase [here](#))

All other required readings will be provided electronically through the [course Canvas site](#). Please contact me if you have trouble locating any recommended readings.

### Schedule

#### Introduction

First day: Aesop  
Week 1: Thinking critically with Aristotle

#### Human Bodies and Human Minds

Week 2: Descartes and Hobbes  
Week 3: Darwin and the evolution of mind  
Week 4: Ryle and the identity theory  
Week 5: Functionalism and the extended mind

#### Human Uniqueness

Week 6: Is consciousness uniquely human? Is thinking?  
Week 7: Is language uniquely human? Is interpretation?  
Week 8: Is teaching uniquely human? Is cumulative culture?  
Week 9: Adaptationism I: the sociobiology of human uniqueness

#### Human Differences

Week 10: Adaptationism II: the evolutionary psychology of human differences  
Week 11: Race and ethnicity  
Week 12: Sex and gender  
Week 13: Disability and human kinds

#### Conclusion

Last day: Student presentations

**Grading**

Reading quizzes: 20%  
First take-home exam: 20%  
Second take-home exam: 20%  
Third take-home exam: 20%  
Research project: 20%

**Twenty-four reading quizzes**

Five multiple choice questions on the reading. Due online before class. Lowest four quiz grades will be dropped.

**Three required take-home exams**

Three essay prompts, answer two in 500-750 words each.

**One required research project**

1. Locate a story about the science of human nature in a major media source.
2. Locate and read the original scientific journal article(s).
3. Write a four paragraph presentation evaluating the portrayal of human nature in the media:
  - a first paragraph explaining the relevant finding(s) in your own words,
  - a second paragraph assessing the accuracy of the media portrayal of the science,
  - a third paragraph explaining how the research is relevant to philosophical views on human nature, and
  - a fourth paragraph assessing how this philosophical issue is (or is not) dealt with by the media.
4. Give a 5 minute presentation of your research on the last day of class.

**Tardiness**

Late quizzes will not be accepted. Other assignments will lose one point per twelve hours late.

**Required work**

The failure to turn in all three take-home exams and the research project by May 2<sup>nd</sup> will result in an automatic F for the course.

**Participation**

Come to each class having read—and, if necessary for comprehension, reread—the assigned readings. Contribute to class discussion when you have something to say. Listen to your peers carefully and respectfully whether or not you have something to say.

**Plagiarism**

Don't do it. Exercise academic integrity, as defined [here](#). Or [else](#). Plagiarism (or abetting another student plagiarizing) will result in an automatic zero on the plagiarized assignment, as well as the possibility of an official report to the Office of Student Conduct.

**Accommodations**

If you have good reason to be exempt from any policy on this syllabus, please let me know. We'll work something out.

## Detailed Schedule

Unless otherwise noted, assignments and required readings should be completed before the start of class. Additional readings are recommended solely for your edification; knowledge of them is not required for quizzes, exams, or class discussion.

### Introduction

**First Day:** A literary take on human nature

**Date:** January 12

**Topic:** Aesop (and a synopsis of the course to come)

**Assignments due:** none

**Required readings:** Clifford Simak, “Aesop”

**Recommended:** Clifford Simak, *City*

**Week 1:** Thinking critically with Aristotle

**Date:** January 17

**Topic:** (Aristotelian) logic

**Assignments due:** Quiz 1

**Required readings:** Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, xi-xiv, 1-47

**Recommended:** Weston, 49-72

Daniel Dennett, *Intuition Pumps and other Tools for Thinking*

J. David Velleman, [Blogic](#)

**Date:** January 19

**Topic:** Thinking through Aristotle’s psychology

**Assignments due:** Quiz 2

**Required readings:** Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, 73-86

Aristotle, selections from *De Anima*

**Recommended:** Christopher Shields, [“Aristotle’s Psychology”](#)

Peter Adamson, [podcast on Aristotle’s psychology](#)

Ibn Rushd, *Long Commentary on the De Anima of Aristotle*

Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on De Anima*

### Part 1: Human Bodies and Human Minds

**Week 2:** Descartes and Hobbes

**Date:** January 24

**Topic:** Descartes and the real distinction between mind and body

**Assignments due:** Quiz 3

**Required readings:** René Descartes, selections from *Principles of Philosophy*

**Recommended:** Gary Hatfield, [“René Descartes”](#)

René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*

René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*

Gary Hatfield, *Descartes' Meditations*

**Date:** January 26

**Topic:** The Descartes-Elisabeth correspondence and the mechanistic philosophy

**Assignments due:** Quiz 4

**Required readings:** Descartes-Elisabeth correspondence, selections  
Thomas Hobbes, selection from *Leviathan*

**Recommended:** Lisa Shapiro, "[Elisabeth, Princess of Bohemia](#)"  
Stewart Duncan, "[Thomas Hobbes](#)"  
René Descartes, *Treatise of Man*  
Peter Machamer, [Galileo Galilei](#)  
Galileo Galilei, *Mechanics*

### **Week 3: Darwin and the evolution of mind**

**Date:** January 31

**Topic:** Darwin

**Assignments due:** Quiz 5

**Required readings:** Charles Darwin, selection from *The Origin of Species*  
Charles Darwin, selection from *The Descent of Man*

**Recommended:** Carl Zimmer, *The Tangled Bank*  
Janet Browne, *Darwin's Origin of Species*  
Janet Browne, *Charles Darwin: A Biography*  
Sterelny & Griffiths, *Sex and Death*

**Date:** February 2

**Topic:** The evolution of mind

**Assignments due:** Quiz 6

**Required readings:** C. Lloyd Morgan, selections on ascribing mental states to scorpions  
Kristin Andrews, *The Animal Mind*, Chapters 1 & 2

**Recommended:** Sara Shettleworth, "Clever animals and killjoy explanations in comparative psychology"  
Elliott Sober, "Comparative Psychology Meets Evolutionary Biology"  
Kristin Andrews, "Beyond Anthropomorphism: Attributing Psychological Properties to Animals"  
Cameron Buckner, "Morgan's Canon meet Hume's Dictum: Avoiding anthropofabulation in cross-species comparisons"

### **Week 4: Ryle and the identity theory**

**Date:** February 7

**Topic:** Ryle

**Assignments due:** Quiz 7

**Required readings:** Gilbert Ryle, selections from *The Concept of Mind*

**Recommended:** Gilbert Ryle, *Dilemmas*  
Gilbert Ryle, *On Thinking*  
E.C. Tolman, *Purposive Behavior in Animals and Men*  
Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*  
G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention*  
Daniel Dennett, *The Intentional Stance*

**Date:** February 9

**Topic:** The identity theory

**Assignments due:** Quiz 8

**Required readings:** U.T. Place, "Is Consciousness a Brain Process?"

**Recommended:** J.J.C. Smart, ["The Mind-Brain Identity Theory"](#)  
J.J.C. Smart, "Sensations and Brain Processes"  
Herbert Feigl, "The 'Mental' and the 'Physical'"  
Donald Davidson, "Mental events"  
Thomas Polger, *Natural Minds*

## **Week 5: Functionalism and the extended mind**

**Date:** February 14

**Topic:** Functionalism

**Assignments due:** Quiz 9

**Required readings:** Hilary Putnam, "The Nature of Mental States"

**Recommended:** Janet Levin, ["Functionalism"](#)  
Jerry Fodor, *The Language of Thought*  
Polger & Shapiro, *The Multiple Realization Book*  
D.M. Armstrong, "The Causal Theory of Mind"  
David Lewis, "Psychophysical and Theoretical Identifications"  
John Searle, "Can Computers Think?"  
Michael Rescorla, ["The Computational Theory of Mind"](#)

**Date:** February 16

**Topic:** The extended mind

**Assignments due:** Quiz 10

**Required readings:** Andy Clark and David Chalmers, "The Extended Mind"

**Recommended:** Lynne Rudder Baker, "Persons and the Extended-Mind Thesis"  
Adams & Aizawa, "Defending the Bounds of Cognition"  
Wilson & Foglia, ["Embodied Cognition"](#)  
Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind*  
Lawrence Shapiro, *Embodied Cognition*

## **Part 2: Human Uniqueness**

## **Week 6: Consciousness and thought**

**Date:** February 21

**Topic:** Consciousness

**Assignments due:** Mind/Body Take-home

**Required readings:** Kristin Andrews, *The Animal Mind*, Chapter 3  
"Cambridge Declaration of Consciousness"

**Recommended:** Colin Allen, ["Animal Consciousness"](#)  
Cecilia Heyes, "Beast Machines?: Questions of Animal Consciousness"  
George Gallup, "Self-Recognition in Primates: A Comparative Approach to the Bidirectional Properties of Consciousness"  
Cecilia Heyes, "Reflections on Self-Recognition in Primates"

Peter Carruthers, "Suffering without Subjectivity"  
Temple Grandin, *Animals in Translation*  
Daniel Dennett, *Kinds of Minds*

**Date:** February 23

**Topic:** Thought

**Assignments due:** Quiz 11

**Required readings:** Kristin Andrews, *The Animal Mind*, Chapter 4

**Recommended:** Donald Davidson, "Rational Animals"  
Stephen Stich, "Do Animals have Beliefs?"  
Susan Carey, *The Origins of Concepts*  
Susan Hurley and Matthew Nudds (eds.), *Rational Animals*

### **Week 7: Language and mindreading**

**Date:** February 28

**Topic:** Language

**Assignments due:** Quiz 12

**Required readings:** Kristin Andrews, *The Animal Mind*, Chapter 5

**Recommended:** Sue Savage-Rumbaugh and Roger Lewin, *Kanzi*  
Irene Pepperberg, *The Alex Studies*  
Dorothy Cheney and Robert Seyfarth, *How Monkeys See the World*  
Dorothy Cheney and Robert Seyfarth, *Baboon Metaphysics*  
Elisabeth Camp, "A Language of Baboon Thought?"  
Michael Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication*  
Jose Bermudez, *Thinking Without Words*  
Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*  
Barbara King, *The Dynamic Dance*  
Brian Skyrms, *Signals: Evolution, Learning and Information*

**Date:** March 2

**Topic:** Mindreading

**Assignments due:** Quiz 13

**Required readings:** Kristin Andrews, *The Animal Mind*, Chapter 6

**Recommended:** Premack and Woodruff, "Does the chimpanzee have a theory of mind?"  
Daniel Dennett, "Intentional Systems in Cognitive Ethology"  
Call and Tomasello, "Does the chimpanzee have a theory of mind? 30 years later"  
Povinelli and Vonk, "Chimpanzee Minds: Suspiciously Human?"  
Robert Lurz, *Mindreading Animals*

**Spring Break: no class March 7 or March 9**

### **Week 8: Teaching and culture**

**Date:** March 14

**Topic:** Teaching

**Assignments due:** Quiz 14

**Required readings:** Cecilia Heyes, "Human nature and natural pedagogy"

**Recommended:** Csibra and Gergeley, “Natural pedagogy as evolutionary adaptation”  
Hoppitt et al, “Lessons from animal teaching”  
Sarah Hrdy, *Mothers and Others*  
Kim Sterelny, *The Evolved Apprentice*

**Date:** March 16

**Topic:** Cumulative culture

**Assignments due:** Quiz 15

**Required readings:** Kim Sterelny, “The Informational Commonwealth”

**Recommended:** Tim Lewens, [“Cultural Evolution”](#)  
Kim Sterelny, “What is Behavioral Modernity?”  
Tad Zawidzki, *Mindshaping*

### **Week 9: Adaptationism (and its discontents) I**

**Date:** March 21

**Topic:** Sociobiology and human uniqueness

**Assignments due:** Quiz 16

**Required readings:** E.O. Wilson, “On Human Nature”

**Recommended:** Catherine Driscoll, [“Sociobiology”](#)  
Downes & Machery, *Arguing about Human Nature*  
E.O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*  
E.O. Wilson, *On Human Nature*  
Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works*

**Date:** March 23

**Topic:** Against sociobiology

**Assignments due:** Quiz 17

**Required readings:** David Hull, “On Human Nature”

**Recommended:** Gould & Lewontin, “The spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian paradigm: a critique of the adaptationist programme”  
John Dupre, “Normal People”  
Kim Sterelny, “Evolutionary Explanations of Human Behavior”  
Elisabeth Lloyd, *The Case of the Female Orgasm: Bias in the Science of Evolution*

### **Part 3: Human Differences**

### **Week 10: Adaptationism (and its discontents) II**

**Date:** March 28

**Topic:** Evolutionary psychology and human differences

**Assignments due:** Human Uniqueness Take-home

**Required readings:** Leda Cosmides & John Tooby, “Evolutionary Psychology: A Primer”

**Recommended:** Stephen Downes, [“Evolutionary Psychology”](#)  
Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate*  
Robert Kurzban, *Why everyone (else) is a hypocrite: Evolution and the modular mind*

**Date:** March 30

**Topic:** Against evolutionary psychology

**Assignments due:** Quiz 18

**Required readings:** Stephen Downes, "The Basic Components of the Human Mind were not Solidified During the Pleistocene Epoch"

**Recommended:** Paul Griffiths, "Ethology, Sociobiology, and Evolutionary Psychology"  
John Dupre, "Against Maladaptationism: Or, what's wrong with evolutionary psychology?"  
Edouard Machery, "A Plea for Human Nature"

## **Week 11: Race and ethnicity**

**Date:** April 4

**Topic:** Racial nature?

**Assignments due:** Quiz 19

**Required readings:** W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races"  
Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race"

**Recommended:** W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*  
K.A. Appiah & Amy Gutmann, *Color Conscious*  
Richard Lewontin, "The Apportionment of Human Diversity"  
A.W.F. Edwards, "Human Genetic Diversity: Lewontin's Fallacy"  
Quayshawn Spencer, "A Radical Solution to the Race Problem"

**Date:** April 6

**Topic:** The social construction of race

**Assignments due:** Quiz 20

**Required readings:** Paul Taylor, "Appiah's Uncompleted Argument: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Reality of Race"

**Recommended:** Sally Haslanger, "Gender and race: (what) are they? (What) do we want them to be?"  
Ron Mallon, "Race: Normative, Not Metaphysical or Semantic"  
Philip Kitcher, "Does 'Race' have a Future?"  
Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*  
Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration*

## **Week 12: Sex and gender**

**Date:** April 11

**Topic:** Gendered nature?

**Assignments due:** Quiz 21

**Required readings:** Nancy Holmstrom, "Do Women Have a Distinct Nature?"

**Recommended:** Mari Mikkola, ["Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender"](#)  
Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*  
David Buss, *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating*  
John Dupre, "The Evolutionary Psychology of Sex and Gender"

**Date:** April 13

**Topic:** Human nature and feminism



**Assignments due:** Quiz 22

**Required readings:** Louise Antony, “‘Human Nature’ and its Role in Feminist Theory”

**Recommended:** Carl Fehr, [“Feminist Philosophy of Biology”](#)

Nancy Holmstrom, “Is Human Nature Important for Feminism?”

Sarah Hrdy, *The Woman who Never Evolved*

### **Week 13: Disability and human kinds**

**Date:** April 18

**Topic:** Disability

**Assignments due:** Quiz 23

**Required readings:** Ron Amundson, “Against Normal Function”

**Recommended:** Wasserman et al, [“Disability: Definitions, Models, and Experiences”](#)

Anita Silvers, “A Fatal Attraction to Normalizing: Treating Disabilities as Deviations from ‘Species-Typical’ Functioning”

Christopher Boorse, “Health as a Theoretical Concept”

Rachel Cooper, “What’s Special about Mental Health and Disorder?”

Ian Hacking, *Mad Travelers: Reflections on the Reality of Transient Mental Illnesses*

Elizabeth Barnes, *The Minority Body*

**Date:** April 20

**Topic:** Human kinds and character

**Assignments due:** Quiz 24

**Required readings:** Ian Hacking, “Looping Effects of Human Kinds”

**Recommended:** Nancy Holmstrom, “Humankind(s)”

Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?*

John Doris, *Lack of Character*

Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*

Mark Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction*

### **Conclusion**

**Last Day:** Student presentations

**Date:** April 25

**Topic:** Student presentations of research projects and wrap-up

**Assignments due:** Research projects

**Human Differences Take-home due on May 2<sup>nd</sup> by midnight.**