Welcome, Human Beings (Course Description)

The course is designed as an introduction to philosophy through exploration of human nature. Self-contemplation has long been a human preoccupation. Socrates urged us to “know thyself.” We are wondering who we are? We want to know in what humanity consists. Without a conception of what it is to be human, no one can say much about human society or human life. Although people have been struggling to understand themselves for thousands of years, it cannot be said that human nature is currently “known,” nor does it seem likely to be fully understood any time soon. Such efforts have been rewarding, however, and that is why you want to take (I sincerely hope so) and I want to teach this course. No matter what human nature is, the fact that human reason is capable of such self-contemplation already tells us something of human nature. To start to think this question itself is sufficient to make you as a Human Being.

Course Objectives

- To introduce the works of many greatest philosophers of history and to examine some of your own unconscious assumptions and biases through being exposed to the writings of these philosophers who challenge the conventional wisdom of our times
- To understand the basic philosophical issues involved in reflecting on human nature and human life, and to know different philosophical, theological, and scientific lines of disagreement over human nature
- To gain a deeper understanding of contemporary cultural controversies about morality, social justice, politics, gender, and education (the so-called “culture wars”) by exploring the philosophical roots of these controversies in different conceptions of human nature
- To appreciate the significance of the philosophical study of human nature with other areas of philosophy (ethics, social and political philosophy), other areas of academic study (biology, psychology), and with our lives as we live them each day
- To learn to exercise reason and civility in interacting with people with whom you have radical disagreements
- Hopefully, to initiate you into the lifelong project of developing, testing and refining your own conception of human nature that will guide your personal and professional life effectively.

Class Format

Every effort will be made to engage you personally in the philosophical enterprise through philosophical conversations. While there will be many lectures, to the extent possible our classes will be organized in the format of a philosophy seminar, i.e., philosophical dialogues and discussions. That means that our class time will be devoted to lecture-discussion, with emphasis on class discussion. Lectures will be devoted primarily to presenting some necessary background, explaining and clarifying some difficult issues in the readings, and asking/answering your concerns and questions. That is why it is essential for you to do the assigned readings faithfully and thoroughly before you come to each class. Please feel free to interrupt me anytime in class if you suspect that you may miss something, disagree with something, or would like to share some insights with us. Your active participation in all kinds of class activities are the key to the success of our class.

Required Texts and Readings

3. Handouts on P drive from the following books of reference; you are required to bring the copies of the readings to the classes for reference and discussion (all readings will be deleted from P drive in two weeks; so you should print or save all the readings before that).
Books of Reference:
9) Steven Cahn and Christine Vitrano, *Happiness: classical and contemporary readings in philosophy*, Oxford University Press 2008 [HAP]

Course Requirements
1. Attendance, Preparation, and Participation [10 %]
   • Class attendance is mandatory: there will be some grade reduction (1 point out of total 100 points of your maximum course grade) for the classes you miss without an official excuse. The first absence is automatically excused. Excessive unexcused absences (more than FIVE) could result in the lowering of your course grade up to one full letter grade (10 points).
   • You are strictly required to complete the reading assignments before each class. I will check whether you have done so from time to time (either ask you questions about the readings or have pop quizzes from time to time).
   • Class participation is an essential component of philosophical studies. Active participation will definitely boost your course grade.

2. Pop Quizzes and Small-group Discussions [10-15 %]: (a) there will be many unannounced quizzes, usually in the format of multiple-choices or true/false choice, to make sure that you finish the reading assignments faithfully and effectively. Each quiz will only take a few minutes to finish at the beginning of a class. (b) We will have many in-class group discussions graded based on group performance.

3. One Class Debate [10 %]: We will organize three class debates (6 students for each debate). Each student will participate in ONE debate and serve ONCE as a student judge. You need to sign up for your debate before Friday, 2/1/2013. How to sign up: check the class debate schedule on P drive for available spots and send me an email to sign up. You are encouraged to sign up individually even if you do not know who will be your teammates. You only need to know which debate topic you want to participate when you sign up (do not worry about which side you will argue for, which will be decided later when all of your teammates get together to prepare for the debate). First come, first serve.

4. Three Position Essays [65-70 %]: Each position paper should be about 5-7 double-spaced pages in length. The instructor will provide assignments with topic suggestions, requirements, and writing guidance later.

Course Policies
1. Withdrawal: you can withdraw from the course at any time before or on the last day of classes, Tuesday, 5/7/2013 we both agree that it is in your best interest.
2. Learning Difference: the Americans Disabilities Act mandates accessibility in all aspects of the learning environment. If you have an identified disability and are in need of specific accommodations, please notify the Office of Academic Support Services and discuss your needs with me at the beginning of the semester.

3. Academic integrity: “The College considers academic integrity one of the foundation stones of a liberal arts education and asks all students to use good sense and judgment in preparing and submitting material for examination and evaluation. Particularly at mid-semester and semester’s end, under work and deadline pressure, students may make false assumptions or uninformed decisions that could lead to a charge of academic dishonesty.” (from the provost office website)

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1 (1/21-25)
M Introduction (a) Stevenson, introduction; (b) Abel, general introduction; (c) Wall, “The Questions of Human Nature” (OHN, P drive)

I. Three Religious Traditions: Is there an essential human nature/self?
WF The Bible: humanity in relation to God: our double human natures (a) selections of the Old and the New Testaments (SHN, P drive); (b) Stevenson, ch. 6

Week 2 (1/28-2/1)
M Hinduism: essential self and shared human nature (a) Stevenson, pp. 35-39; (b) Sarma, et.al., “Hinduism” (RH, P drive); (c) selections from Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad (SHN, P drive)
W Hinduism: (a) Stevenson, pp. 39-44; (b) Dandekar, “The Role of Man in Hinduism” (RH, P drive); (c) Zaehner, “the Brahman-Atman synthesis” (HIN, P drive); (d) selections of Katha Upanishad (HNR, P drive)
F Hinduism: Stevenson, pp. 44-53

Week 3 (2/4-8)
M Buddhism: no-self and enlightened human nature (a) Stevenson, pp. 55-68; (b) Mitchell, “The Teachings of the Buddhism” (BUD, P drive, pp. 33-45); (c) selections from Dhamapada (HNR, P drive); (d) selections from Anattalakkhana Sutta and Bhara Sutta (BTB, P drive)
W Buddhism: (a) Stevenson, pp. 68-72; (b) Mitchell, “The Teachings of the Buddhism” (BUD, P drive, pp. 45-52, 60-62); (c) “Two Sermons of the Buddha” (OHN, P drive)
F Buddhism: Stevenson, pp. 72-78

Week 4 (2/11-15)
II. Human Mind: Which Should Rule, Reason or Passion?
MW Plato: the tripartite theory of the human soul (a) selections from The Republic, in Abel, ch. 1; (b) Stevenson, ch. 4
F Descartes: humans as rational thinking beings (a) selections from Meditations on First Philosophy, in Abel, pp. 177-179 (first meditation); (b) Wall, “The Ghost in the Machine: Rene Descartes” (OHN, 189-195, P drive)

Week 5 (2/18-22)
M Descartes: (a) selections from Meditations on First Philosophy, in Abel, pp. 179-185 (Second meditation); (b) Wall, “The Ghost in the Machine: Rene Descartes” (OHN, 196-197, 202-205, P drive)
W Descartes: (a) selections from Meditations on First Philosophy, in Abel, pp. 189-91 (Sixth meditation); (b) Wall, “The Ghost in the Machine: Rene Descartes” (OHN, pp. 205-208, P drive)
F Hume: reason as the slave of passion (a) selections from An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, in Abel, ch.8; (b) Trigg, “Hume” (IHN-T, P drive)

Week 6 (2/25-3/1)
M Hume
Week 7 (3/4-8)
  M **Class debate #1:** Which should rule, reason or passion?
  ➢ **First position paper** on section I or II due on 3/4, Monday

III. Is Original Human Nature Good or Evil?
  W **Confucianism:** Heavenly given human nature
  F Mencius: goodness of human nature
  selections from *the Book of Mencius*, in Abel, ch.3

Week 8 (3/11-15) Spring Break

Week 9 (3/18-22)
  M Hsun-Tzu: “human nature is evil”
  W **Hobbes:** humans are innately selfish
  F Rousseau: human original goodness
  (a) selections from *Leviathan* (IHN-B, P drive);
  (b) Trigg, “Hobbes” (IHN-T, P drive)

Week 10 (3/25-29)
  M Rousseau
  W **Class debate #2** on the original human nature: Is there an original human nature? If so, is it good or evil?
  F Good Friday, no class

IV. Are Humans Free or Determined?
  MW **St. Augustine:** on evil and free will
  (a) selections from *The Free Choice of the Will*, in Abel, ch. 5;
  (b) Pojman, “St. Augustine Theory of Human Nature” (WAW, P drive)
  ➢ **Second position essay** on section III due on 4/5, Monday
  F **Sartre:** “condemned to be free”
  (a) excerpts of “Existentialism Is a Humanism”, in Abel, ch.12;
  (b) Stevenson, ch.11

Week 12 (4/8-12)
  MW Sartre
  F **Skinner:** behaviorism--beyond freedom and dignity
  (a) selections from *About Behaviorism*, in Abel, ch.14;
  (b) Stevenson, “Behavioral Psychology: Skinner on Conditioning” (TTHN, P drive)

Week 13 (4/15-19)
  M Skinner

V. The Ideals of Human Fulfillment
  WF **Aristotle:** striving for human excellences
  (a) “the soul”, selections from *De Anima* (OHN, P drive);
  (b) selections from *Nicomachean Ethics*, in Abel, ch. 2 (read book I & II); (c) Stevenson, ch. 5

Week 14 (4/22-26)
  M **Seneca:** following the guidance of nature
  (a) selections from *On the Happy Life*, in Abel, ch. 4;
  (b) Melchert, “The Stoics” (GC, P drive)
  WF **St. Aquinas:** complete happiness through union with God
  (a) “Treatise on Happiness”, selections from *the Summa Theologiae*, in Abel, pp. 157-164;
  (b) Melchert, “Aquinas on Human Goodness” (GC, P drive)

Week 15 (4/29-5/3)
MW  Marx: individual self-realization through labor (a) selections from Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, in Abel, ch.9; (b) Stevenson, ch.9

F  Class Debate #3 on human happiness: Is happiness positive feeling (pleasure) or subjective state of mind (satisfaction)?
References:
Pro: (a) Davis, “Happiness as Pleasure” (HAP, P drive); (b) Kekes, “Happiness as Satisfaction” (HAP, P drive)
Con: (c) Haybron, “Happiness Does Not Consist in Pleasure” (HAP, P drive); (d) Nozick, “the Experience machine” (HAP, P drive); (e) Annas, “Happiness as Achievement” (HAP, P drive)

Week 16 (5/6-8)
M  Final reflections  Stevenson, “Conclusion”
   Or possible Class Debate #4 on feminism: do men and women have distinct natures?
   References: (a) Wall, “Gender” (OHN, P drive); (b) Moller, “Social Construction of Gender” (OHN, P drive); (c) Pinker, “The Biological Basis of Gender Differences” (OHN, P drive); (d) Midgley, “Nature and Nurture” (OHN, P drive)

W  Third position essay on section IV or V due on 5/8, Wednesday

Appendix: the format of debates and evaluation
The instructor will give the topic to the students in advance to allow sufficient preparation. The students will divide themselves into two teams, three students in each team, of which one team is advocates and the other is opponents. The students choose the side they wish to represent. Two teams (one pro and the other con) are paired off conducting one debate. Each debate proceeds according to the following schedule:

Stage I: Introduction (present your team’s position and an outline of major arguments)
   Advocates for proposal (2 - 3 minutes)
   Opponents to proposal (2 - 3 minutes)

Stage II: Rebuttal (cross fire: challenge other team’s position and arguments)
   Opponents to proposal (8 - 10 minutes)
   Advocates for proposal (8 - 10 minutes)

Stage III: Summary (last chance to respond to challenges)
   Opponents to proposal (1 minute)
   Advocates for proposal (1 minute)

Stage IV: Answer questions from the floor (5 - 10 minutes)

Evaluation
An independent panel of 6 students who are not part of either team will judge each debate. The student judges develop their own scoring procedure that they share with the competing teams before the debate. Some of the criteria might be:
• The currency and adequacy of the evidence
• The relevance of the arguments used
• The soundness and validity of the arguments presented
• Consistency and logic of ideas used
• Degree to which opposing arguments are directly addressed
• Clarity and articulativeness of the presentation
• Overall persuasiveness
• Handling questions from the floor.
• Degree to which emotional appeal is used or avoided
• The appearance (voice and posture) of the advocates during their presentation

Each team’s performance will be evaluated as excellent (9-10 point), very good (8-9 points), good (7-8 points), pass (6 points), or poor (below 6 points). The instructor reserves the right to make necessary adjustment of the score from the student judges.