**Course description**

What are humans like? What is the purpose of human life? These basic questions can be answered from different points of view, and focused on different aspects of being human. What does it mean to be a human animal? Are we fundamentally selfish? How should we live? What is the connection between body and mind, or body and soul? This course is a survey designed to introduce philosophical ideas and modes of thought, with a central focus on problems arising from human nature. We will analyze and criticize topics that fall under four major aspects of the human condition: body, mind, soul, and society. We’ll raise questions and discuss the implications of each topic for the meanings of our own lives, for how we ought to behave as individuals, and for how we should treat one another in order to build the best lives possible for ourselves.

**Course goals**

* *Content-oriented goals*:
  + Learn how classic and contemporary philosophers and other scholars have understood human nature and shaped our culture’s views on it.
  + Practice distinctively philosophical thinking and explore what it has to offer us in our quest to understand ourselves.
  + Work toward a “love of wisdom” by appreciating that we are complex creatures, and that our complexity raises many interesting philosophical problems.
* *Skill-oriented goals*:
  + Work on critical philosophical reading: understand an author’s point of view.
  + Begin to understand what makes a good philosophical argument—reasons and support—and practice producing good arguments.
  + Recognize interesting philosophical problems posed by our human situation, demonstrated by picking out and/or raising philosophical questions.
  + Practice contributing to productive classroom discussion.
  + Produce and criticize philosophical arguments and views, both in writing and orally.

**Texts**

Barash, David P. *Ideas of Human Nature: From the Bhagavad Gita to Sociobiology*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1998. (ISBN 0-13-647587-6)

Bloom, Paul. *Descartes’ Baby.* New York: Basic, 2005. (ISBN 0465007864)

Other readings will be made available on Moodle.

**SCHEDULE**, subject to revision as the semester unfolds—see Moodle for definitive schedule.

**0. What is philosophy all about?**

1. Introductions: “They’re Made of Meat”
2. Philosophical overview, methods and modes of thinking
   1. reading you should have done for today:
      1. syllabus
      2. Barash text intro (p. ix-x)
      3. Schick and Vaughn intro (posted on Moodle)
3. Philosophical reading and raising questions
   1. Articles TBA (Moodle)

**Unit 1: Humans, egoism and altruism**

**Q1. What does the fact that we’re animals with DNA suggest about what humans are like and what our purposes in life are? What are the advantages and limitations of the scientific point of view of human nature?**

1. The scientific view: humans as animals
   1. Darwin (IHN 255-264)
2. The scientific view: origins of egoism
   1. Dawkins (IHN 272-277)
3. The scientific view: origins of altruism
   1. Wilson (IHN 264-272) (you might want to read the sections in reverse order)
4. The scientific view: Gattaca
   1. Watch “Gattaca” (film showing TBA)
5. Workshop/metacognition day

**Q2. The scientific view of human nature suggests that everything we do is aimed at reproduction and survival—including our moral behavior. From the inside, however, it doesn’t feel like everything we do is aimed at these things. What reasons do we have to be moral? How do moral motivations elucidate and challenge the scientific take on what humans are and what our purpose is?**

1. Humans in society: Humans are egoistic
   1. Plato (IHN 127-130)
   2. half of Hobbes (IHN 133-137 [end with the second paragraph of 137])
2. Humans in society: Humans are altruistic
   1. Rousseau (IHN 142-148)
   2. Kropotkin (IHN 152-158)
3. Humans in society
   1. Watch “Lord of the Flies” (film showing TBA)
4. Humans in society
   1. “Chilean Miners” article (Moodle)
   2. Bloom (preface, chapters 4-5)
5. Humans in society: Ethics
   1. Aristotle (TBA)
6. Workshop/metacognition day

**Unit 2: Human minds and bodies**

**Q3. Humans are generally said to have minds. What is a mind, and what is the mind’s relationship to the body? How do the answers to these questions help to define what it is to be human?**

1. Mind and body
   1. No new reading (discuss Jill Bolte Taylor’s TED talk, shown in class)
2. Mind and body
   1. Descartes (IHN 80-83)
3. Mind and body
   1. Crick (IHN 85-92)
4. Mind and body
   1. Bloom (ch. 1, 7-8)
5. Mind and body
   1. Andy Clark (Moodle)—“Extended Minds” column from “The Stone”
6. Workshop/metacognition day

**Q4. For much of Western philosophical history, reason has been idolized as humans’ best quality and our defining characteristic; will, desire, and emotion were despised as unruly and out of control. In what ways are we characterized by our intellect and reasoning abilities? How do other mental functions like will and emotion contribute to our understanding of what it is to be human?**

1. Mind: Role of reason
   1. Plato (IHN 50-56)
   2. Aristotle (IHN 56-58)
2. Mind: Limits of reason: reason vs. will
   1. Doyle (IHN 61-66)
   2. Dostoyevsky (IHN 68-78)
3. Mind: Limits of reason: reason vs. emotion
   1. Ben-Ze’ev (Moodle)
4. Workshop/metacognition day

**Unit 3: Soul and meaning**

**Q5. We have something we call “souls.” (a) What is a soul? (b) Are we more essentially souls, or bodies? How do the answers to these questions help to define what it is to be human?**

1. Body and soul: humans are essentially incorporeal soul
   1. Plato (IHN 17-20)
2. Body and soul: humans are essentially body *and* animating soul
   1. Lucretius (IHN 25-28)
3. Body and soul: body is nothing to be ashamed of; soul *is* body
   1. Whitman (Moodle)
4. Body and soul:
   1. Bloom 8
5. Body and soul: Soul Patrol activity/discussion
   1. No reading
6. Discussion/debriefing of Soul Patrol activity; workshop/metacognition day

**Q6. Overall, what are the requirements for a distinctively *human* life? How about a *meaningful* human life?**

1. Mind and body
   1. Watch “Bicentennial Man” (showing TBA)
2. Meaning in life
   1. Tolstoy (Moodle)
3. Meaning in life
   1. TBA (some existentialist, probably)
4. Meaning in life
   1. Wolf (Moodle)
5. Meaning in life
   1. Plato, *Apology* (Moodle)
6. Catch-up day