

HUMAN NATURE

Phil 303: 40515

Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays

via Zoom: 301 495 1953

10:00am-10:50am

DESCRIPTION

There are several senses of “nature” that give investigations into human nature shape. In this course, we’ll think of natures as *essences*. Something’s essence consists of the features that make it the thing it is. Everything has an essence. It’s essential to bachelors that they’re unmarried men, to water that it’s H₂O, and to crimson that it’s red, for instance. As a result, there’s a sense of “human nature” that corresponds to this sense of “nature.” An investigation into human nature in this sense amounts to an investigation into what makes humans the things they are; that is, into what’s essential to humans.

As a result, we’ll investigate several distinctive human kinds – in particular, gender, race, disability, and sexuality – and ask: Are they essentially biological or social kinds? In particular, we’ll ask questions like the following:

- Why should we think that gender is socially constructed when the term “women” refers to “adult human females”?
- What does it mean to say that a given *impairment* – for instance, deafness – is socially constructed?
- If race is socially constructed, are doctors justified in making inferences about one’s health on the basis of one’s race?
- If sexuality is socially constructed, is there any sense in which we were “born this way”?

As a result, students will become familiar with a debate both in and outside the academy concerning the metaphysical status of politically significant human kinds.

ME

I’m Emilie! (Please, call me “Emilie”!) I’m working on a Ph.D. in the Department of Philosophy. I like to think about what social groups – like the Supreme Court, Rutgers University, and men and women – are, and why they matter. Meta-ethics was my first love, though.

I’ll hold office hours on Mondays and Wednesdays from 2:00pm-3:30pm. However, I’ll take appointments, whether in person or via Zoom, if you’re either unable to make it to office hours, or would like to speak with me privately. You don’t have to have a

question or comment worked out to come office hours, however. Our meetings are for doing philosophy *together*, and that starts with casual conversation.

Lastly, it's important that you know that I'm here to support you, both philosophically and otherwise. If you need anything, please don't hesitate to reach out to me.

TEXTS

All texts are available on [Perusall!](#)

LOGISTICS

Because of the current pandemic

- ❖ The course will meet Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays via Zoom (301 495 1953) from 10:00am to 10:50am.
 - Mondays and Wednesdays will consist primarily of lectures which will be given synchronously via Zoom (301 495 1953). In lecture, I'll clarify – and, often, complicate – the readings you've been assigned. I'll pause for questions every ten minutes.
 - However, everyone has the option to attend lecture asynchronously. I'll post lecture recordings to Canvas by 12:00pm on Mondays and Wednesdays.
 - Fridays will consist primarily of discussion via Zoom (301 495 1953). Again, we'll use the “hand-raising” function for questions.
 - Though everyone has the option to attend lectures asynchronously, you *do not* have the option to attend review/discussions asynchronously. Attendance on Fridays is mandatory.
 - ❖ In general, unless you're asking a question or contributing to discussion, I ask that you keep your microphones muted. Moreover, I ask that you keep your cameras on.
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ASSIGNMENTS

There are four kinds of assignment:

1. **Reading & Reading Responses:** You will be required to read material I've assigned throughout the semester. Additionally, you'll be required to submit a reading response six times throughout the semester – three times before your short papers are due, and three times before your long papers are due. You can choose which weeks to write, and you're welcome to write about anything that's covered in the readings for the week you write. (See “Reading Responses – Human Nature (Fall 2020)” for more details.) [60/200]
2. **Short Paper:** You'll be required to write a three-page (maximum) paper on a prompt I'll provide. I'll give you a day off (on Wednesday, October 7th) to work on them. (See “Short Papers – Human Nature (Fall 2020)” for more details.) [60/200]
3. **Long Paper:** You'll be required to write a four- to six-page paper on a prompt I'll provide. Additionally, you'll be required to meet with me at least one week before the deadline to discuss your paper. Not doing so will result in an automatic three-point deduction. You can sign up to meet with me under “Collaborations” on Canvas. (See “Long Papers – Human Nature (Fall 2020)” for more details.) [70/200]
4. **Attendance:** I'll be taking attendance on Fridays, and I expect that everyone will attend. You'll be allowed three unexcused absences. [10/200]

SCHEDULE

WEEK	DATE	IN GENERAL	IN PARTICULAR	READING: PERUSALL	DUE
1	W, 8/26	Introduction: <i>What is philosophy?</i>			
	F, 8/28				
2	M, 8/31	<i>Why does human nature matter?</i>	Historical Precedents	Antony , “Human Nature’ and its Role in Feminist Philosophy”	
	W, 9/2		Essentialist Explanations	Lowe , “Biological Explanations of Social Inequalities”	
	F, 9/4		Review/Discussion		
3	M, 9/7	Social Construction: Causal and Non-causal	Essences and Reality	Bird & Tobin , “Natural Kinds”	
	W, 9/9		Social Constructions and Reality	Haslanger , “Ontology and Social Construction”	

	F, 9/11		Review/Discussion			
4	M, 9/14	Gender	The Sex/Gender Distinction	de Beauvoir , <i>The Second Sex</i>		
	W, 9/16		Rejecting the Sex/Gender Distinction	Byrne , "Are Women Adult Human Females?"		
	F, 9/18		Review/Discussion			
5	M, 9/21		Amelioration: How should we theorize about gender?	Haslanger , "Gender & Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?" (Part I)		
	W, 9/23		Focal Analysis of Gender	Kincaid , "Girl" (in Pages); Haslanger , "Gender & Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?" (Part II)		
	F, 9/25		Review/Discussion			
6	M, 9/28		Externalist Accounts of Gender	Haslanger , "Gender & Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?" (Part III)		
	W, 9/30		The Exclusion and Normativity Problems	Jenkins , "Amelioration and Inclusion: Gender Identity & The Concept of Woman"		
	F, 10/2		Review/Discussion			
7	M, 10/5	Disability	Haslangerean Accounts of Disability	Barnes , <i>The Minority Body</i> (Part I)		
	F, 10/16		Solidarity Accounts of Disability	Barnes , <i>The Minority Body</i> (Part II)		
			Review/Discussion			Short papers due @ 11:59pm! CST
9	M, 10/19		The Impairment/Disability Distinction	Howard & Aas , "On Valuing Impairment," (Part I)		
	W, 10/21		Re-defining Impairment	Howard & Aas , "On Valuing Impairment," (Part II)		
	F, 10/23		Review and Discussion			
10	M, 10/26	Race	Transracialism	Oluo , "The Heart of Whiteness"		
	W, 10/28		Racial Hierarchy	Mills , "But What Are You <i>Really</i> ?"		
	F, 10/30		Review and Discussion			
11	M, 11/2		Pluralism about Race	Spencer , "How to be a Biological Racial Realist" (Part I)		
	W, 11/4		Reimagining Biological Essentialism	Spencer , "How to be a Biological Racial Realist" (Part II)		
	F, 11/6		Review and Discussion			

12	M, 11/9		Amelioration and the Normativity Problem: Historical Precedents	Jeffers, "Cultural Constructionism" (Part I)	
	W, 11/11		Political versus Cultural Racial Realism	Jeffers, "Cultural Constructionism" (Part II)	
	F, 11/13		Review and Discussion		
13	M, 11/16	Sexuality	Objectivity and Subjectivity about Sexuality	Stein, <i>Forms of Desire</i>	
	W, 11/18		Revising the Concept of Sexual Orientation	Dembroff, "What is Sexual Orientation?"	
	F, 11/20		Review and Discussion		
14	M, 11/23		Social Construction and Sexuality	<i>Optional: Diaz-Leon</i> , "Sexual Orientation as Interpretation?"	
	Thanksgiving break!				
15	M, 11/30	Sexuality	Sexual Discrimination and the Law	Rubin, "Thinking Sex" (Part I)	
	W, 12/2		All Sex is Political	Rubin, "Thinking Sex" (Part II)	
	F, 12/4		Review and Discussion		
16	M, 12/7	Conclusion: Good Conversation and Good Snacks	What's next for theories of human nature?		Long papers due @ 11:59pm CST

