



PH 300 HUMAN NATURE IN EUROPEAN THOUGHT

IES Abroad Vienna

DESCRIPTION:

A conception of human nature underlies our understanding of social behaviour in an array of disciplines from psychology to philosophy, political science to history. This course takes a philosophical approach in reflecting on different conceptions of human nature in European thought. Through time many thinkers have advanced different models of human nature. Some have argued that humans are determined by biological processes; others have maintained that we are connected to some form of divinity. There are those who believe we are by nature good, as well as those who make the opposite case. Finally, some models of human nature suggest that our nature is grounded in how we act: do we apply reason in acting? What ends do we aim for in acting? Do we seek merely to survive or dominate our environment, or do we wish to act according to some conception of the good life? And, if so, is this concept inherent in our nature? This course will explore the aforementioned and have students consider the possibility of human nature changing in the face of technological advancements, in order to ask what, if anything, separates humans from other sentient beings such as animals and robots. Assuming that human nature is essentially social, the course concludes with having students reflect on community and love.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45 hours

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: None.

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

The methodology will be seminar-style philosophical discussions and lectures.

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Participation – 10%
- Homework – 10%
- Midterm Video – 25%
- Final Exam – 25%
- Research Paper – 30%

Course Participation

Course participation refers to the extent to which students are involved, active, and prepared when coming to class. This includes reviewing the assigned readings *before* class meetings, preparing relevant discussion questions for the unit, and actively taking part in class discussions and activities online and during class time.

Midterm Video

The midterm video is a conversation recorded by students (groups of 2-3) discussing the perspectives learned thus far in the course. Students are expected to speak for roughly equal time as one another and to debate the relative merits and demerits of the different philosophies of human nature. Students will receive a group grade.

Final Exam

The final exam is a written in-class exam covering the entire course, consisting of identification questions, short answer, and long answer questions.

Research Paper

The research paper is approximately 2000 words long and should deal with a topic of the student's choice concerning the philosophy of human nature.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course students will be able to:

- Articulate a basic understanding of the different conceptualizations of human nature and their social consequences (e.g. mating, religion, community, conflict, war).
- Connect the models of human nature to concrete historical and contemporary examples.
- Compare the models and articulate arguments for opposed intellectual perspectives (in written and oral form).
- Evaluate the tenets of, and the logical coherence between, the conceptions of human nature presented in class.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

IES Abroad Vienna requires attendance at all class sessions. Attendance will be taken every class. Students must attend at least 60% of their class sessions to qualify for a passing grade, regardless of whether their absences have been excused or not. Your attendance is required in-person unless otherwise noted in the syllabus. Students are highly encouraged to communicate absences as soon as possible to their professors and for excused absences using the processes described in the absence policy.

Please refer to the IES Abroad Vienna Absence Policy for a more precise overview of all attendance policies at IES Abroad Vienna as well as an overview of possible grade penalties.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

At IES Abroad Vienna, we hold ourselves to the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity. Any form of academic dishonesty undermines the principles of trust and fairness essential to a thriving learning community. As such, plagiarism and cheating are considered serious violations of our code of conduct, and students found engaging in such activities will face swift and severe consequences, ranging from a failing grade on an assignment, to an academic review and possible expulsion from the program.

USE OF AI:

Should they wish, students are permitted to use GenAI to aid in brainstorming, composing, and/or editing their assignment(s), and are asked to clarify within their work how they used this software. Please note that students are responsible for verifying the content they turn in. Note that GenAI’s output is generally mediocre. The student’s task is to go beyond mediocrity.

CONTENT:

Week	Content	Readings
Week 1	Introduction 1. Introduction 2. Philosophy and great texts 3. Plato’s Allegory of the Cave	• Plato, <i>The Republic</i>, pp. 193-200
Week 2	Nature, Convention, and Existentialism 1. Sartre 2. Existentialism	• Sartre, <i>Existentialism is a Humanism</i>
Week 3	Human Nature as Determined 1. Darwinism, natural selection 2. Humans as animals 3. Science, progress, AI	• Darwin, <i>The Descent of Man</i>, pp. 34-106

Week 4	Human Nature as Fundamentally Good 1. Rousseau 2. Man as good 3. Problem of civilization 4. Amour-propre and authenticity	• Rousseau, <i>Second Discourse</i>
Week 5	Human Nature as Fundamentally as Evil 1. Man as evil 2. Problem of Enlightenment 3. Sin and vice	• Kinneging, <i>Geography of Good and Evil</i>
	MIDTERM WEEK	
Week 6	Virtue and Nature 1. Cicero 2. Ancient views of virtue 3. Modern virtues	• Cicero, <i>On Duties</i>, pp. 1-62
Week 7	Human Nature in Motion: Thumos 1. Julius Caesar and the fall of the Roman Republic 2. Power and jealousy 3. Rhetoric	• Shakespeare, <i>Julius Caesar</i>
Week 8	Human Nature in Motion: The Tragedy of Man 1. Greek tragedy 2. Conflicting views of justice	• Sophocles, <i>Antigone</i>
Week 9	Human Nature in Motion: Suffering 1. Suffering, Loneliness and Friendship 2. Wisdom and God	• <i>The Book of Job</i>
Week 10	Love, Desire, Community 1. Plato 2. Love 3. Beauty and divinity	• Plato, <i>Symposium</i>
	FINAL EXAM	

COURSE-RELATED TRIPS:

- Mauthausen Memorial Site (Date TBA – Mandatory Weekend Day Trip): Students visit the memorial site to gain a deeper understanding of Austria's historical role in the Holocaust as well as the impact of this genocide on our understanding of human nature. The day trip includes an introductory lecture, a guided tour of the memorial site, access to the memorial museum, its permanent and temporary exhibitions, as well as a debriefing session at the end of the day. Before the visit students will read Moshman, D. (2007). Us and them: identity and genocide. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 7(2), 115-135.

REQUIRED READINGS:

- *The Book of Job*.
- Cicero, M. T. (2016). *On Duties*. Cambridge University Press.
- Darwin, C. (2010). *The descent of man and selection in relation to sex, vol. 1*. Cambridge University Press.
- Machiavelli, N. (2014). *The Prince*. Cambridge University Press.
- Moshman, D. (2007). "Us and them: identity and genocide. *Identity: An international Journal of Theory and Research* 7(2), 115-135.
- Plato (2016). *The Republic of Plato*. Basic Books.
- Plato (2003). *The Symposium*. Penguin.
- Rousseau, J.-J. (1997). *The Discourses and other early political writings*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sartre, J. P. (2007). *Existentialism is a Humanism*. Yale University Press.
- Shakespeare, W. (2008). *Julius Caesar*. Oxford University Press.
- Sophocles (1984). *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus*. Penguin.

OPTIONAL READINGS:

- Arendt, H. (2013). *The Human Condition*. University of Chicago Press.
- Aron, R. (1968). *Progress and Disillusion: The Dialectics of Modern Society*. Pall Mall Press. (Ch.10, pp.295-310)
- Bess, M. (2016). *Our Grandchildren Redesign: Life in the Bioengineered Society of the Near Future*. Beacon Press. (Part IV, pp. 176-216)
- Browning, C. (1992). *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. New York: Harper Collins. (Ch.5, 7, 18; pp. 38-48; 55-70; 159-189)
- Buss, D. M. (2017). Sexual conflict in human mating. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 26(4), 307-313.
- Cozolino, L. (2014). *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships: Attachment and the Developing Social Brain*. WW Norton & Company. (Ch. 13-14, pp. 205-242)
- Dainton, B. (2004). The self and the phenomenal. *Ratio*, 17(4), 365-389.
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books.
- Fuentes, A. (2015). *Race, Monogamy, and Other Lies They Told You: Busting Myths About Human Nature*. University of California Press.
- Gray, J. (2015). "What scares the new atheists". *The Guardian*.
- Harris, S. (2010). *The Moral Landscape*. Free Press. (Ch.4, pp. 145-176)
- Haslam, S. A., & Reicher, S. (2007). Beyond the banality of evil: three dynamics of an interactionist social psychology of tyranny. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 33(5), 615-622.
- Hobbes, T. (2016). *Leviathan* (Longman Library of Primary Sources in Philosophy). London: Routledge. (Part 1, Chapter 13)
- Ignatieff, M. (2015). *The Needs of Strangers*. New York: Picador. (Introduction, pp. 7-24)
- Maslow, A. H. (2013). *Toward a Psychology of Being*. Simon and Schuster. (Part 3: Growth and Cognition, pp. 81-126)
- Mill, J.S. (1859) *On Liberty*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. (Ch.4, pp. 95-118)
- Miller, J. (2001). Innate ideas in Stoicism and Grotius. *Grotiana*, 22(1), 157-176.
- Nietzsche, F. (2017). *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*. Cambridge University Press.
- Popper, K. R. (1962). *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*. New York: Basic Books.
- Puts, D. (2016). Human sexual selection. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 7, 28-32.
- Rogers, C. R. (1995). *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. (p. 183-197. A Therapist's View of the Good Life: The Fully Functioning Person)

- Scruton, R. (2017). *On Human Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. (Ch.1, pp. 1 - 49)
- Singer, P. (1989). All animals are equal. *Philosophic Exchange*, 5(1), 103-115
- Skinner, B. F. (1972). *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*. New York: Bantam Books. (Ch.2, pp. 26-43)
- Storr, A. (2001). *Freud: A Very Short Introduction*. (Ch. 2-5, pp. 17-69)
- Strauss, L. (1953). *Natural Right and History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Ch.3, pp. 81 - 119)
- Watson, J. S. (1966). The development and generalization of "contingency awareness" in early infancy: some hypotheses. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly of Behavior and Development*, 12(2), 123-135.
- Weber, M. (1946). Science as a vocation. *In Science and the Quest for Reality* (pp. 382-394). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Weber, M. (2002). *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der Verstehenden Soziologie*. Mohr Siebeck.
- Wilson, E. O. (2012). *On Human Nature*. Harvard University Press. (Ch.7, pp. 149-168)
- Zimbardo, P. (2007). *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*. NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks (Ch.1 & 12, pp. 3-22; 258-296)