

# PHIL222: HUMAN NATURE

## FALL 2022

*Class schedule:* TR 1:00-2:20pm  
*Class Instructor:* Katherine Valde  
*Office:* DB 206

*Class Location:* Main 124  
*E-mail:* valdekg@wofford.edu  
*Office Hours:* bookable online

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*Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom. Thus, while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to what things are, it greatly increases our knowledge as to what they may be; it removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never traveled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect.*

-Bertrand Russell

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### Course Objectives:

This course is designed to both introduce some questions about human nature and to inspire your curiosity for such questions. You will learn to:

- Understand some the central questions and claims about human nature
- Explain and summarize some different approaches to human nature
- Identify the positions being advocated for, the assumptions being made about human nature, and the implications of such positions
- Articulate your own opinions using supporting reasons
- Evaluate the quality of. Various claims about human nature

It is the ultimate goal of this course to help you become a thoughtful consumer of information and participant in our society.

### Required Text:

*All readings/ videos/ podcasts will be provided via Moodle.*

### Class Expectations:

Do the readings. *Think* about the readings. Our class will not be engaging for you if you do not come to class prepared. Treat each other and the instructor with respect. Be prepared to be challenged. Some of the readings will be difficult, and you may have more questions than clarity. That's ok!

### Course Outline:

The course will be built around our exploration of ten key questions:

1. Where did humans come from?
2. Does human life have a purpose? If so, what is the nature of that purpose?
3. How are humans different from other living creatures?
4. Are humans naturally good(moral)?
5. Are humans naturally cooperative or selfish?
6. Do humans have innate personalities?
7. Are humans trapped by biological urges or free to make our own choices?
8. Is war an inevitable consequence of human nature?
9. Is a state necessary to protect humans from each other?
10. Does a unified human nature exist?

Our collective goal is to explore human nature and investigate questions as they arise in our discussions. As we progress through course material, new questions will become of interest to our class. Thus, we cannot chart our entire trajectory from the outset. **Check Moodle and your email regularly for updates on assigned resources (readings, videos, podcasts, etc.).**

## Important Dates:

Thursday 9/7	No Class Meeting
Thursday 9/14	<b>Written reflection #1 due at 5pm</b>
Thursday 9/28	<b>Written reflection #2 due at 5pm</b>
10/4 and 10/5	1-on-1 meetings with Dr. Valde
Thursday 10/5	No class
Tuesday 10/17	<b>Written reflection #3 due at 5pm</b>
Thursday 10/19	No Class Meeting – Fall Break
Thursday 11/2	<b>Written reflection #4 due at 5pm</b>
11/15 and 11/16	1-on-1 meetings with Dr. Valde
Thursday 11/16	No Class Meeting
11/20-11/24	No Classes – Thanksgiving Break
12/5 and 12/7	<b>Small Group Presentations</b>
Finals Week	<b>Final Reflections due &amp; 1-on-1 meetings with Dr. Valde</b>

## Grading:

This course will focus on qualitative not quantitative assessment, something we'll discuss during the class, both with reference to your own work and the works we're studying. While you will get a final grade at the end of the term, I will not be grading individual assignments, but rather asking questions and making comments that engage your work rather than simply evaluate it. You will also be reflecting carefully on your own work and the work of your peers. The intention here is to help you focus on working in a more organic way, as opposed to working as you think you're expected to. If this process causes more anxiety than it alleviates, see me at any point to confer about your progress in the course to date. If you are worried about your grade, your best strategy should be to join the discussions, do the reading, and complete the assignments.

Most of our assignments will involve writing. Writing is a personal process that is ever evolving. I want you to know that I strongly believe that we all (and by all, I mean myself, too) can improve our writing. Therefore, on specific assignments in this class that involve submission of a written product, I will allow you to revise and resubmit your paper in order to develop the best final version that meets the goal of mastering course objectives. For each assignment, I will provide specific suggestions on how to improve your submission that you should implement with each new submission.

## Example Module Content:

1. Where did humans come from?  
*Skywoman Falling* (from Braiding Sweetgrass) by Robin Wall Kimmerer  
*Social Orders and Creation Stories: Crash Course World Mythology #5*  
NOVA: Becoming Human (Part 1)  
*Human Evolution: Crash Course Big History #6*
2. Does human life have a purpose? If so, what is the nature of that purpose?  
*Existentialism is a Humanism* John Paul Sartre  
*Ethics*, I, 1-2, 7, 13 by Aristotle  
*Does Life Have a Purpose* by Michael Ruse  
*Existentialism: Crash Course Philosophy #16*
3. How are humans different from other living creatures?  
*Introduction: The only True Voyage* from An Immense World by Ed Young  
*Animal Agents* by Amanda Rees  
Selections from *The Emotional Mind: The Affective Roots of Culture and Cognition* by Stephen T. Asma and Rami Gabriel

4. Are humans naturally good(moral)?  
 Selections from *Mengzi* by Mengzi  
 Selections from *Xunzi* by Xunzi
  
5. Are humans naturally cooperative or selfish?  
*A Theory of Jerks* by Eric Schwitzgebel  
*The self is not always selfish: Mary Midgley takes on Richard Dawkins* (video on AEON)  
*Neither Nasty Nor Brutish* by Cathryn Townsend
  
6. Do humans have innate personalities?  
*The Big 5 Personality traits* from Psychology Today  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/big-5-personality-traits>  
*The Self is Moral* by Nina Strohminger  
*Does anyone have the right to sex?* by Amia Srinivasan  
*The Unreliability of Naïve Introspection* by Eric Schwitzgebel  
*Descartes was wrong: 'a person is a person through other persons'* by Abeba Birhane
  
7. Are humans trapped by biological urges or free to make our own choices?  
*The clockwork universe: is free will an illusion?* by Oliver Burkeman  
*Determinism vs Free Will* PBS CrashCourse Philosophy #24  
*Compatibilism* PBS CrashCourse Philosophy #25  
 Selections from *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir  
 Selections from *Black Skin, White Masks* (Introduction” and The Lived Experience of the Black Man) by
  
8. Is war an inevitable consequence of human nature?  
*War may not be in our nature after all* by R. Brian Ferguson  
*Leviathan* ch. 13:by Thomas Hobbes  
*A Dissertation on the Origin and Foundation of the Inequality of Mankind* (part 1) by Jean-Jacques Rousseau  
 War & Human Nature: Crash Course World History 204
  
9. Is a state necessary to protect humans from each other?  
*The Second Treatise on Civil Government*, chapters 2 – 5 by John Locke  
 Selections from *The Racial Contract*, (Chapter 1 and Chapter 2) by Charles Mills  
*The Origins of Totalitarianism* Hannah Arendt  
*Republic*, “Book II” Plato,
  
10. Does a unified human nature exist?  
*Spot the WEIRDo* by Robert Colvile  
 Selections from *The Righteous Mind*- (Introduction and Ch. 2) by Jonathan Haidt  
*Ch. 4 The I of the Storm* (from “The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience”) by Francisco J. Varela, Eleanor Rosch, Evan Thompson