

BOWIE STATE UNIVERSITY  
SYLLABUS  
SEMESTER: FALL 2009  
Department of History and Government  
Philosophy 300 Philosophies of Human Nature

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OfficeHours: T/TH 12:30-01:00PM; 2:30PM-04:30PM Wed. 12:00PM - 03:00PM

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Philosophy of human nature studies a number of different theories of what constitutes being human. The course is interdisciplinary because it includes naturalistic, dialectical, and feminist points of view. It is also multicultural, because it encourages examination of philosophical perspectives from around the world. Among the questions raised are: Do human beings have a (unique) nature? Is there an unconscious mind? Is there a universal aspect to being human? Do human beings have a (singular) destiny? Is there a divine being to which or to whom human beings are related? Will high-technology computers be able to have conscious mental states? Are humans basically animals?

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Contemporary: Selected Contemporary Readings (S. Blackmore; D. Dennett)  
Classical: Abel, Donald C., ed. *Theories of Human Nature: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992.

**STUDENT OUTCOMES**

- theoretical understanding of differing conceptions of human nature
- historical comprehension of the development of various theories
- analytical and critical knowledge of controversial aspects of being human
- practical experience in developing oral presentation/public speaking skills

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

The student will demonstrate attainment of the following competencies by attaining at least an overall average of 75% in the course:

1. Identify, compare, and critique a variety of theories of human nature (see course units);
2. compare physicalist to mentalistic and functionalist models of human nature;
3. critically evaluate the influence of race and gender on the concept of human nature;
4. articulate the reasons why an interdisciplinary approach is necessary for an understanding of human reality.

## EVALUATION SCHEMA

Eight Unit Quizzes	40%
Midterm draft of term paper	10%
Participation/oral report on term paper	10%
<u>Final paper</u>	<u>40%</u>
TOTAL	100%

## ATTENDANCE POLICY

Participation in class is important to the success of the course. Absences and lateness will be treated in accord with the BSU student handbook. Online class participation is available once per week for students who were originally assigned to an independent study but requires the permission of the instructor and the use of a discussion board that is supervised by the instructor.

## FINAL EXAM/PAPER POLICY

The final paper will be due on the last day of class prior to the end of class. It must be hand delivered by the end of the normal classroom period. Plan to submit your paper well before the deadline to prevent any logistical problems or emergencies that could arise on the due date.

## READING UNITS

### Philosophies of Human Nature

- |  |                     |             |
|--|---------------------|-------------|
| 1. PLATO   | Abel, pp. 7 - 42    | WEEKS 1 - 2 |
| a. The Republic (selection)                                  |                     |             |
| b. On the nature of the human soul                           |                     |             |
| c. Does justice pay?   |                     |             |
| 2. MENCIOUS  | Abel, pp. 73-95     | WEEK 3      |
| a. Are humans good by nature?                                |                     |             |
| b. The role of the environment.                              |                     |             |
| 3. DESCARTES   | Abel, pp. 175 - 193 | WEEKS 4 - 5 |
| a. The Meditations (selection)                               |                     |             |
| b. The Cogito.   |                     |             |
| c. Mind/Body dualism.  |                     |             |
| 4. MARX  | Abel, pp. 223 - 247 | WEEK 6      |
| a. Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 (selections) |                     |             |
| b. The nature of labor.                                      |                     |             |
| c. Alienation: four aspects.                                 |                     |             |

5. SARTRE Abel, pp 311 - 330    WEEK 7
  - a. "Existentialism Is a Humanism" (selections)
  - b. Human freedom (being-for-itself)
  - c. Responsibility
  
6. SIMON DE BEAUVOIR Abel, pp. 333 - 350    WEEK 8
  - a. The Ethics of Ambiguity (selections)
  - b. Anguish of freedom
  - c. Character types
  
7. SKINNER Abel, pp. 353 - 378    WEEK 9
  - a. About Behaviorism (selections)
  - b. Behaviorism
  - c. Free will as mentalistic illusion
  
8. COGNITIVISM Selected readings provided
  - a. Evolutionary Psychology
  - b. Computationalism
  - c. Memetic Evolution of Human Culture
  - d. Natural Born Cyborgs

## **Announcements**

### ADA Policy

Students who have a disability and who would like accommodations should report immediately to Disability Support Services (DSS), located in Room 311 in the Center for Learning and Technology or call Mr. Michael S. Hughes, DSS Coordinator at 301-860-3292.

### English Proficiency Examination

After completing ENGL 101 and 102, Composition and Literature I and II, students must take and successfully pass the Bowie State University English Proficiency Examination. Transfer students who completed their English composition requirements at another university should take the English Proficiency Examination during their first semester of enrollment at the University.

### Inclement Weather

During inclement weather tune in to a local radio or television station. Local Media will announce whether the university will open late or be closed, depending on the degree of weather severity. Many of these sources will begin announcing late openings and closings by 6:00 a.m. Consult university publications for additional information.

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