

PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN NATURE
PSYC 182/PHIL 182/CGSC 282
YALE UNIVERSITY
FALL 2016

I. BASIC INFORMATION

Instructor: Joshua Knobe
Office: SSS, 412
Office Hours: Wednesdays 1:30-3:00 and by appointment
E-mail: joshua.knobe@yale.edu

Course time: Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:30-2:20
Course website: Classesv2

II. OVERVIEW

Much of the most influential work in the history of philosophy has been concerned with questions about human nature. Philosophers asked about whether human beings could attain true happiness, about whether we were endowed with an innate moral sense, about why we were drawn to religious belief.

In recent years, researchers have returned to these questions with a new set of tools. The fundamental aim is still to go after questions about human nature, but the prevailing methodologies now include all the resources of scientific psychology (experimental studies, statistical analyses, etc.).

The aim of this class is to bring together these two strands of research. We will be reading some of the great classics of Western philosophy, but we will also be looking in depth at recent work in experimental psychology. The goal is not so much to provide definite answers to the age-old questions of human nature but rather to examine the most powerful evidence on each side.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Grades will be based on two papers (each 7 – 9 pages), a midterm and a final exam.

For each of the papers, students will be given the opportunity to choose from a number of possible assignments. These assignments will be constructed in such a way that students can focus either on primarily psychological questions (e.g., by submitting an experiment proposal) or on primarily philosophical questions (e.g., by constructing a philosophical argument or objection). Either way, it will not be considered acceptable for students simply to rehearse ideas from the readings or lectures – the expectation is that students will come up with their own original ideas regarding these questions.

The final exam will consist entirely of short-answer questions, with no longer essays and no multiple-choice items. The goal of the final is to assess students' understanding of the key concepts and theories discussed in the readings and lectures.

Finally, students will submit a quick response to the reading by email each week. This emailed response will be due each week twelve hours before section. Responses can pose a quick question or introduce a possible objection or suggest some connection between the reading and various other material. Please do not spend more than 10 minutes working on them each week. They will be graded only on a pass/fail basis and are simply intended to get students thinking a little bit about the readings before sections begin.

Grades will be computed as follows: First paper 20%, second paper 20%, midterm 20%, final exam 30%, class participation (including weekly responses) 10%.

IV. READINGS

9/1	Introduction
9/6	Happiness Arthur Schopenhauer, <i>The World as Will and Representation</i> , § 57 (Read from the second paragraph onward)
9/8	Daniel Gilbert et al., 'Immune Neglect: A Source of Durability Bias in Affective Forecasting' Read the Introduction, Studies 1 – 3 and the General Discussion (If you are not familiar with statistical methods, feel free to quickly skim the results sections.)
9/13	Dan Moller, 'Love and Death'
9/15	Altruism Plato, <i>Republic</i> Book II
9/20	
9/22	Daniel Batson and Laura Shaw, 'Evidence for Altruism: Toward a Pluralism of Prosocial Motives' Read up to 'Empathy-Specific Reward' and then the 'Implications'
9/27	Stephen Stich et al., 'Altruism' Read Section 4, except for 4.6
9/29	Virtue and Character Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Book II
10/4	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Book III
10/6	Judith Rich Harris, 'Where Is the Child's Environment? A Group Socialization Theory of Development'
10/11	Kiley Hamlin et al., 'Social evaluation by preverbal infants'
10/13	Gilbert Harman, 'Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology'
10/18	<i>Midterm</i>
10/25	Morality and Motivation Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>Genealogy of Morals</i>
10/27	
11/1	Peter Ditto et al., 'Motivated Moral Reasoning'
11/3	Joe Paxton and Joshua Greene, 'Moral Reasoning: Hints and Allegations'
11/8	Belief in God René Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> Third Meditation: 'Of God: That He Exists' <i>First Paper Due</i>
11/10	
11/15	Paul Bloom, 'Is God an Accident?'
11/17	Karl Marx, 'On the Jewish Question'
11/29	Kurt Gray and Dan Wegner, 'Blaming God for Our Pain: Human Suffering and the Divine Mind'
12/1	Benedict Spinoza, <i>Ethics</i> Appendix to Book I

12/6	Deborah Kelemen, 'Are Children "Intuitive Theists"? Reasoning About Purpose and Design in Nature'
12/8	Review for Final Exam <i>Second Paper Due</i>

Saturday, December 17 (2:00 pm): Final Exam