HUMAN NATURE (BA)

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Teaching assistant: Dilara Boga

Winter Term, AY 2020-2021
B.A. level course
1st year, CPS and PPE Mandatory course
Credit value: 2 credits (4 ECTS credits)
Moodle-site: https://ceulearning.ceu.edu/course/view.php?id=11413
Prerequisites: None

Consultation: After classes, during office hours, or by appointment. See people.ceu.edu/maria_kronfeldner (see e-learning site for updates; also for consultations with Teaching Assistant)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What it means to be a human being is a very fundamental issue. In this course, which aims at an introduction to theories of human nature, we will focus on the following questions: Why do we believe in one global humanity? How are differences between humans conceptualized and accounted for? How do animals and machines relate to our self-understanding? Are we free or does our biological heritage determine us to do what we do? Students will study different classic positions and develop a reflective stance towards claims about human nature in sciences and the public by developing substantive reactions to certain ontological or epistemological issues related to the concept of human nature dealt with in the mandatory readings of this course.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will learn how to ask philosophical questions about a perennial topic such as human nature and also how to integrate historical insights and contemporary empirical research on human nature. Students will learn to develop their own questions and thus to analyze ontological and epistemological assumptions in those sciences that study humans (parts of the life sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities). They will also learn that some problems are interdisciplinary and how to deal with such a problem situation.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND TEACHING METHODS

Weekly set-up:
Wk 1-2: After a 40-60min introductory lecture (Monday), we will have a Knowledge Café in the first week (Wednesday) (details to be announced at the e-learning-site for the course). The second week will have lectures and exercises on classic accounts.

Wk 3-11:
- Monday meetings will normally start with student activity (structured discussion, with focus groups) related to the weeks mandatory reading.
- Faculty reacts to the overall Monday discussion with a feedback lecture for the Wednesday meeting, clarifying things and adding background where necessary.
- The weekly cycle ends with a final Q&A.
- If necessary or advisable the feedback lecture gets shortened and further student activities are added, e.g. break-out groups that focus on specific questions.

Wk 12 is dedicated to test preparation (Monday) and the test (Wednesday). Test preparation will also be integrated into the interaction during Wk 2-11.

**Formats of student activities:**
- *Format for structured discussion:* All students have to sign up for one of the weeks marked with a * (week 4,5,7,8,10,11) as their major study focus and submit a short reaction paper (500-700 word) till Saturday midnight before the Monday class.
- *Format for reaction papers:* Reaction papers should include a brief summary of the main points of the respective reading (1-2 sentences; not more!) and some engagement in critical thinking about that reading (i.e. substantive issues and suggestions followed-up or developed in the student’s own words).
- *Format of the Q&As:* We will use a mix of break-out groups and the so-called fishbowl method, depending on how things develop. But we might ask you to select a second study focus for special responsibility during that week’s Q&A.
- *Format for end of term test:* 60 min closed-book exam.

**Mode of participation:** The blended synchronous set-up of the course allows for some asynchronous participation in a flexible manner, but only if technical problems prevent adequate online synchronous participation. Students can in such cases temporarily move from synchronous to asynchronous participation mode if necessary, till the technical problem is fixed. The technical assistant of the course has to be consulted in such a case and permission need to be secured beforehand. Details on the asynchronous back-up will be provided when necessary since it also depends on how long the asynchronous participation will be in the respective case.

**Mandatory readings** have been specified for each session. We will provide access to the texts via the online Moodle course site (to which you get access via SITS registration). Students will have to actively react to course readings and lectures. **Class attendance** (or asynchronous participation) is mandatory each week. University and program rules with respect to absences apply as usual.

**ASSESSMENT**

The final grade is based on
- the reaction paper (30%) and
- the final test (70%)

Excellent class participation can contribute up to plus one grade to the final grade (e.g. from B to B+).

Details on grading criteria for the reaction paper will be provided in Wk 1 and for the test in Wk 11.
COURSE PLAN

Introduction and background
1. Introduction and Knowledge Café (No mandatory background reading)
2. Humanity from the axial age to the age of human rights, with a special focus on 150 years of Darwin’s Descent of Man (1871) (Reading: Stuurman, selections from ancient texts (e.g., the Analects, the Upanishad, the Popol Vuh, etc.) and Darwin)

Focus 1: Unity and diversity
3. Form is norm (Reading: Aristotle)
4. *Human nature, sex and gender (Reading: Witt)
5. *Human nature and racial differences (Reading: Mills)

Focus 2: Animas, machines and human
6. The animal, the machine, and the human (Reading: Descartes)
7. *Agency and Experience (Reading: Machery)
8. *A future as a Cyborg? (Reading: Haraway)

Focus 3. Born to be free?
9. The existentialist imperative (Reading: Beauvoir)
10. *The informational commonwealth (Reading: Sterelny)
11. *Why biology won’t settle the issue (Reading: Kitcher)

V. Test
12. Final test preparation and test
LIST OF RECOMMENDED REFERENCES

The mandatory readings mentioned above are from the set of references listed here. Additional material might be added on short notice.

INTRODUCTORY AND GENERAL


ANTHOLOGIES WITH EXCERPTS OF CLASSIC ACCOUNTS


INTERPRETATIONS OF CLASSIC ACCOUNTS


HANDBOOKS OR COLLECTIONS ON CONTEMPORARY DEBATES


MONOGRAPHS (WITH DIFFERENT DISCIPLINARY AND TOPICAL FOCI)


HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS OF THE HISTORY OF IDEAS ABOUT HUMAN NATURE (FROM DIFFERENT SCHOLARLY PERSPECTIVES)


