

Human Nature

Professor: Kranti Saran

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Lecture: MW 14:50–16:20, (new) LT 110

Office Hours: MW 1–2PM, 310 New Academic Block

and by appointment

Class webpage: <https://canvas.instructure.com/courses/880073>

TFs: Megha Devraj, Jishnu Ghose

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Sections: TBA

Office Hours: TBA

Course Description

What kind of creature are you? A human being, no doubt. But what kind of creature is *that*? How should such a creature live? We will critically explore influential models of human nature in the Indic and Western philosophical traditions and their profound implications both for how we ought to live and our place in the social world. Readings include selections from the Upanishads, Vasistha's Yoga, Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Freud, Mill, Railton, Śāntideva, Korsgaard, Foot, O'Neill, Frye, Kahneman, Haidt, Milgram, Hobbes, Rawls, Bilgrami and others.

Learning Objectives

What will this course do for you? I anticipate that by the end of the course you will:

- develop a critical understanding of some of the major models of human nature (both Indic and Western), and their implications for how we ought to live;
- understand the strengths and weaknesses of different disciplinary methodologies in the investigation of mind and behaviour;
- be able to relate the theoretical models studied to your context;
- develop better analytical writing and critical reading skills and be better at giving and taking constructive criticism.

Instructional Materials

Most readings are in the course-pack that you are required to purchase. For the rest, you must purchase these books:

Śāntideva. (1995). *Śāntideva: The Bodhicaryāvatāra* (K. Crosby A. Skilton, Trans.). Oxford: Oxford.

Plato. (1992). *The Republic* (2nd revised ed.; G.M.A. Grube, revised by C.D.C. Reeve, Trans.). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.

Aristotle. (2000). *Nicomachean Ethics* (2nd ed.; T. Irwin, Trans.). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.

Schedule of Meetings, Topics, and Readings

You are expected to complete the assigned readings for each class *before* we meet.

Day	Date	Topics and Readings
Mon.	27/8	<i>Introduction to the course</i> “A Brief Guide to Logic and Argumentation,” in Rosen et al. (2015) <i>Optional Video:</i> https://youtu.be/kdJ6aGToDlo <i>Optional Video:</i> https://youtu.be/3P0fUHUaZcs
Wed.	29/8	<i>The Enduring Self</i> “Katha Upanishad,” Olivelle (1996)
Mon.	3/9	“On the Behaviour of the Seeker,” Venkatesananda (1993)
Wed.	5/9	<i>The non-existent Self & Caste</i> “Non-Self: Empty Persons,” till §3.6 Siderits (2007) “Canonical antecedents,” pp. 17–55 (skip the footnotes), Eltschinger (2000/2012)
Mon.	10/9	<i>The Self divided</i> Book IV (427a–444a) of <i>The Republic</i> , Plato (1992) “The Dissection of the Psychological Personality,” Freud (1933/1966)
Wed.	12/9	First Four-Sentence Paper Due “Of the influencing motives of the will,” Bk. II Pt. III, Sec. III <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> , Hume (1739/1978) Chap. 1, <i>Thinking, Fast and Slow</i> , Kahneman (2011)
Mon.	17/9	<i>Morality?</i> “Book Six” by Mengzi, pp. 140–147 in Ivanhoe & Norden (2000) “Human Nature is Bad” by Xunzi, pp. 284–291 in Ivanhoe & Norden (2000)

Optional Video: <https://youtu.be/qvmxbDomk90>

Optional Video: <https://youtu.be/hEgLzTtQj7l>

- Wed. 19/9 **Second Four-Sentence Paper Due**
Book II (357b–368c) of *The Republic*, Plato (1992)
Optional Video: https://youtu.be/-oJs5u_GAYA
- Mon. 24/9 Book IV (441c–445b) & Book IX (580d–583b, 588b–592a) of *The Republic*, Plato (1992)
- Wed. 26/9 **Third Four-Sentence Paper Due**
Goals, Virtues, and Character
“Virtues and Vices,” Foot (1978)
Book I, Chapter 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (2000)
- Mon. 1/10 Book II, Chapter 1 and 4 & Book III, Chapter 5 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (2000)
Optional Video: <https://youtu.be/VFPBf1AZOQg>
- Wed. 3/10 **Fourth Four-Sentence Paper Due**
“A behavioural study of obedience,” Milgram (1963)
§I & §III, “Persons, Situation, and Virtue Ethics,” Doris (1998)
“Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the content of our character,” Kamtekar (2004)
- Mon. 8/10 *Consequentialism*
Chap. 2 of *Utilitarianism*, Mill (1861/2003)
Optional Video: <https://youtu.be/uvmz5E75ZIA>
- Wed. 10/10 “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality,” Railton (1984)
Optional Video: <https://youtu.be/uGDk23Q0S9E>
- Mon. 15/10 No Class (Midterm Break)
- Wed. 17/10 No Class (Midterm Break)
- Mon. 22/10 *Kantian Approaches and the Value of Life*
“A Simplified Account of Kant’s Ethics”
- Wed. 24/10 “Personhood, Animals, and the Law,” Korsgaard (2013)
“Origins and Traditional Articulations of *Ahimsā*,” Chapple (1993)
- Mon. 29/10 *The Limits of Reason?*
“Gut Feelings,” Gigerenzer (2007)
“The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail,” Haidt (2001)
- Wed 31/10 **First 500-word Paper Due**

- “Moral Heuristics,” Sunstein (2005)
- Mon. 5/11 “At the Core of Our Capacity to Act for a Reason,” Railton (2017)
- Wed. 7/11 No Class (Diwali)
- Mon. 12/11 *Schooling Affect*
Chap. 5 & 6 of *The Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Śāntideva (1995)
- Wed. 14/11 Chap. 8 of *The Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Śāntideva (1995)
Optional: “The Difficulty of Tolerance,” Scanlon (2003)
- Mon. 19/11 *Politics*
Chap. XIII–XV of *The Leviathan*, Hobbes (1996)
Play the online game, “The Evolution of Trust”, <https://ncase.me/trust/>
- Wed. 21/11 **Second 500-word Paper Due**
Selections from *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls (1971/1999)
§3, §4
Selection from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Nozick (1974)
pp. 149–164
Optional Video: https://youtu.be/nO5me_5c8dM
- Mon. 26/11 *Gender*
“Sexism” in Frye (1983)
“Oppression” in Frye (1983)
- Wed. 28/11 *Identities*
“What is a Muslim?,” Bilgrami (1992)
“White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” McIntosh (1989)
- Mon. 3/12 Catch-up & Wrap-up

1250-word Final Paper due at 5pm on Friday Dec. 14th.

How to Read the Material

The assigned material is quite dense. Plan to read it 3-4 times before class:

- First, read the opening and closing paragraphs and all section headings to get a sense of the piece.
- Second, read it through word by word, marking it up with any questions and comments you have, and noting passages that require a closer reading.

- Third, go back and reread the passages you marked up for special attention.

Student Responsibilities

- **Lecture attendance:** There is no attendance requirement. Because the Reading Quiz will begin right on time at the start of class and late arrivals disturb other test takers, the classroom doors will be locked at the start of class. If you arrive after the doors have been locked you cannot take the quiz or attend lecture. If you attend class, you are required to stay till the end (unless you inform me beforehand).
- **Discussion Section attendance:** Attendance is mandatory. You are permitted four excused absences, but you must inform your Teaching Fellow beforehand.
- **Behaviour in the Classroom:** Treat the instructor, Teaching Fellows, and your fellow classmates with respect. Be considerate when speaking and make sure others get a chance to voice their views too. While your participation is actively encouraged, remember that listening is as much a form of participation as speaking. Do not confuse the volume of your participation with its value. You are welcome to vigorously disagree, but remember not to be disagreeable! If you are rude or disruptive, you will be asked to leave the classroom. Reading non-class material during class is not permitted.
- **Electronic Etiquette:** Your phone must be off or on silent mode, and out of sight. No laptops are permitted in class. (For those interested in some of the research motivating this policy, see <https://goo.gl/y2dphK>.)
- **Ever wondered how to email your professor?** Nobody is born knowing how to do this, but luckily there's a useful guide: <http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor>
- **Academic Integrity:** You are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Your work must be your own. Submitting work which you have not composed yourself, or using another person's ideas without due credit, or failing to mark another person's words with appropriate quotation marks all constitute plagiarism. The instructor reserves the right to assess penalties for violations of academic integrity, which may include giving a failing grade for an assignment, for the entire course, or referral to a University disciplinary committee.
- **Work submission:** All work must be submitted on time. Work that is submitted past the deadline will be docked a full letter grade for every successive 24-hour period after the deadline. If you miss a Reading Quiz, you will not be able to make it up.
- **Students with Disabilities:** Reasonable academic accommodation will be made for students with documented disabilities. You must contact me, or Megha, or Jishnu before our next meeting if you need such accommodation.

Course Requirements and Grade Distribution

Your grade will be a function of the following distribution:

Reading Quizzes	25%
Four-Sentence Paper (x4)	2.5% for each paper
500-word Paper (x2)	15% for each paper
1250-word Final Paper	25%
Class & Discussion Section Participation	10%

Reading Quizzes

There will be a short quiz on the reading assigned for that day at the start of class. You must be physically present in class to take the quiz. The quiz aims to test your understanding of some of the main claims and arguments covered in the reading. It presupposes that you have carefully read and reflected on the material. No notes or texts or any kind of study aids are allowed during the quiz. Importantly, the quiz is cumulative: *any* material that we have covered till date is fair game. Your four lowest quiz scores will be dropped from the calculation of your final reading quiz grade.

Papers

All papers must be submitted as a PDF file to Canvas by the start of class on the due date mentioned in this syllabus. The writing assignments are a carefully structured sequence of papers starting with short papers that are only four sentences long, to papers that are 500-words long, culminating in a final paper that is 1250-words long. The four sentence paper should be written on the following template:

_____ argues that _____ because _____. However, I object that _____ because _____. One might respond to my objection by arguing that _____. I reply that _____.

More information will be distributed regarding the papers during class.

Class Participation

Class participation is not primarily about the volume of your spoken contribution. Rather, it is about your attentive presence in a community of learning. Your class participation grade has two components:

- Your participation during our class meetings.
- Your participation in discussion sections.

References

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