



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
School of Continuing Studies

Science, Nature and Human Nature BLHV 456 Summer 2020

Instructor: John Shook, PhD

Contact: jrs384@georgetown.edu, text to 703-801-3645

Dates: May 18 – August 16, 2020

Class Meetings: Mondays 5:15 PM – 8:15 PM, Location: 640 Mass Ave., Room C214

Office Hours: Mondays 3pm – 5pm, or by appointment

Course Description

The natural sciences and social sciences have constructed “nature” and conceptions of human nature. If our species is entirely natural, according to physics, biology, and ecology, these sciences may determine what human beings basically are, and what features make us human. From this anthropological standpoint, sociology and psychology try to explain human drives, behaviors, and cultures, with theories yielding insights into our values, ethics, laws, and politics. We still think of ourselves in ways not fitting into naturalistic paradigms, such as beliefs about conscious choice, free will, moral responsibility, and spirituality. What is natural may not always be best. Nature remains important, as humanity looks to natural ways for guidance and healing, yet conventional societies require more than simply doing “what comes naturally.” Society’s reformers often affirm humanity’s purer nature to resist an unnatural modern life, or they deny that humans have a given nature so that easily remolded people can populate new utopias. Either way, leaving human nature in the hands of science’s nature might impede progress towards freedom, happiness, equality, and justice.

Course Learning Objectives

Students will analyze and apply core theories and paradigms of selected Natural Sciences (physics, biology, ecology) and Social Sciences (anthropology, psychology, sociology) to the controversial search for a common human nature and an authentically human way of life. In their studies and assignments, students will exhibit these academic abilities:

1. Critically analyze and engage with historical, contemporary, and enduring questions of the human experience.
2. Understand fundamental concepts and methodologies in the humanities, the sciences and mathematics/statistics, and the social sciences; apply these methods to the analysis of complex problems.
3. Discover and analyze primary and secondary sources relevant to specific research questions in particular academic disciplines.
4. Recognize and respond to social justice issues, locally and globally; enact ethics-based approaches in study and work.
5. Write well and present information clearly for specific audiences in appropriate forms and media.
6. Demonstrate the ability to apply intercultural knowledge and competence by meaningfully and ethically engaging others.

Students will pursue interdisciplinary questions and compare empirical approaches in the natural sciences, life sciences, and behavioral sciences that carefully observe, and try to account for, humanity’s capacity for group cooperation, social organization, and moral conduct. Students will review empirical research and competing theoretical explanations for these human phenomena, and examine their implications with regard to humanity’s quest for a meaningful life.

Required Texts

Leslie Stevenson et al. *Thirteen Theories of Human Nature*. Oxford UP, 2018. ISBN: 9780190604721.

Publisher's abstract:

A remarkably popular introduction to some of the most influential developments in Western and Eastern thought. The seventh edition adds a chapter on feminist theory to those on Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Plato, Aristotle, the Bible, Islam, Kant, Marx, Freud, Sartre, and Darwinism. The authors juxtapose the ideas of these and other thinkers and traditions in a way that helps students understand how humanity has struggled to comprehend its nature. To encourage students to think critically for themselves and to underscore the similarities and differences between the many theories, the book examines each one on four points—the nature of the universe, the nature of humanity, the diagnosis of the ills of humanity, and the proposed cure for these problems.

Joseph Henrich. *The Secret of Our Success: How Culture is Driving Human Evolution, Domesticating Our Species, and Making Us Smarter*. Princeton UP, 2017. ISBN: 9780691178431.

Publisher's abstract:

What has enabled us to dominate the globe, more than any other species, while remaining virtually helpless as lone individuals? This book shows that the secret of our success lies not in our innate intelligence, but in our collective brains--on the ability of human groups to socially interconnect and learn from one another over generations. Henrich demonstrates how our collective brains have propelled our species' genetic evolution and shaped our biology. Our early capacities for learning from others produced many cultural innovations, such as fire, cooking, water containers, plant knowledge, and projectile weapons, which in turn drove the expansion of our brains and altered our physiology, anatomy, and psychology in crucial ways. Later on, some collective brains generated and recombined powerful concepts, such as the lever, wheel, screw, and writing, while also creating the institutions that continue to alter our motivations and perceptions. Henrich shows how our genetics and biology are inextricably interwoven with cultural evolution, and how culture-gene interactions launched our species on an extraordinary evolutionary trajectory.

Maria Kronfeldner. *What's Left of Human Nature? A Post-Essentialist, Pluralist, and Interactive Account*. MIT Press, 2018. ISBN: 9780262038416.

Publisher's abstract:

A philosophical account of human nature that defends the concept against contemporary criticism. In particular, she takes on challenges related to social misuse of the concept that dehumanizes those regarded as lacking human nature (the dehumanization challenge); the conflict between Darwinian thinking and essentialist concepts of human nature (the Darwinian challenge); and the consensus that evolution, heredity, and ontogenetic development result from nurture and nature. After answering each of these challenges, Kronfeldner presents a revisionist account of human nature that minimizes dehumanization and does not fall back on outdated biological ideas. Her account is post-essentialist because it eliminates the concept of an essence of being human; pluralist in that it argues that there are different things in the world that correspond to three different post-essentialist concepts of human nature; and interactive because it understands nature and nurture as interacting at the developmental, epigenetic, and evolutionary levels.

Handouts: Lectures on hominid evolution, technological advancement, and cultural development.
 Additional readings, distributed through Canvas.

Course Requirements

This course consists of 14 weeks. You are expected to do the readings, observe lectures, and engage with the course material in depth. Your responsibilities include completing all the assignments. Participation is essential to your success in this class. Students should plan on spending approximately 12-15 hours per week on the work for each module.

1. Class Participation. Regular participation in class discussion, and a 10-minute classroom presentation of the term paper (see below). 200 points possible. 20% of total grade.
2. Short Paper. 2000 words. On a topic selected from the subjects covered in Henrich's *The Secret of Our Success*.

This paper will fulfill two goals: (1) explain how bio-cultural evolution can account for a universal feature of humans; (2) describe how this universal feature in turn explains a powerful factor influencing society (positively or negatively) today. 200 points possible. 20% of total grade.

3. Term Paper. 4000 words. On a topic of students' choice from the course topics, except for the topic chosen for the short paper. You will first develop a one-page prospectus outlining your plan, to be approved by the instructor. A successful term paper will synthesize relevant information gained throughout the course (lectures and readings), and additional information from secondary literature. 300 points possible. 30% of total grade.

4. Examination. A test consisting of short-answer questions. Any of the topics covered in the course may be subjects of this examination's questions, so preparation upon all course topics is essential. 300 possible points. 30% of final grade.

Citation Style: The APA Style (APA Publication Manual 6th Edition) is used widely in SCS courses. Consult <http://pitt.libguides.com/citationhelp/APA>

5. Final Grade

Total Points	Grade	Quality Points
920-1000	A	4.00
900-919	A-	3.67
881-899	B+	3.33
800-880	B	3.00
781-799	B-	2.67
761-780	C+	2.33
700-760	C	2.00
690-699	C-	1.67
680-689	D+	1.33
660-679	D	1.00
Less than 660	F	0.00

Course Policies

This course may use VoiceThread, TurnItIn and Zoom.

VoiceThread is a tool that enables teachers and students to upload and asynchronously present images, video, and/or other media and respond to others presentations with audio, video, and/or text comments. Instructions for VoiceThread are available [here](#).

TurnItIn is a writing assessment tool that is used to detect plagiarism and allows teachers to provide assignment feedback to students. Instructions for TurnItIn are available [here](#).

Zoom enables users to conduct synchronous ("real-time") conferences, presentations, lectures, meetings, office hours and group chats via audio, video, text chat and content sharing. Instructions for Zoom are available [here](#).

Notifications:

In this course we will use Canvas to send email for private messages. You can either check your messages in the Canvas system or set your notifications to your preferred method of contact. Please check your messages at least once per day.

Support Services:

SCS offers a variety of support systems for students that can be accessed online, at the School of Continuing Studies downtown location, and on the main Georgetown campus:

- [Academic Resource Center](#)
- 202-687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu
- [Counseling and Psychiatric Services](#)
- 202-687-6985
- [Institutional Diversity, Equity & Affirmative Action \(IDEAA\)](#)
- (202) 687-4798

Students' Religious Observances: The following is university policy: Georgetown University promotes respect for all religions. Any student who is unable to attend classes or to participate in any examination, presentation, or assignment on a given day because of the observance of a major religious holiday or related travel shall be excused and provided with the opportunity to make up, without unreasonable burden, any work that has been missed for this reason and shall not in any other way be penalized for the absence or rescheduled work. Students will remain responsible for all assigned work. Students should notify professors in writing at the beginning of the semester of religious observances that conflict with their classes.

Disabilities: Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, individuals with disabilities are provided reasonable accommodations to ensure equity and access to programs and facilities. Students are responsible for communicating their needs to the Academic Resource Center, the office that oversees [disability support services](#), (202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu;) before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. The University is not responsible for making special accommodations for students who have not declared their disabilities and have not requested an accommodation in a timely manner. Also, the University need not modify course or degree requirements considered to be an essential requirement of the program of instruction. For the most current and up-to-date policy information, please refer to the [Georgetown University Academic Resource Center website](#). Students are highly encouraged to discuss the documentation and accommodation process with an Academic Resource Center administrator.

Extreme weather, Emergencies, and Instructional Continuity: During inclement weather or other emergencies on a day when we are scheduled to meet face-to-face, check the university's Web site or call (202) 687-7669 for information on whether the university is open. If the university is open, this class will meet. Check your e-mail for a message from me on how we will proceed in that situation. Due dates for written assignments submitted through Blackboard will not be changed due to campus closings. The university recently has acquired the capability to send text messages and recorded messages about emergencies to cell phones and other mobile devices. Sign up on MyAccess.

Georgetown Honor System: All students are expected to follow Georgetown's honor code unconditionally. We assume you have read the honor code material located at <http://scs.georgetown.edu/academic-affairs/honor-code>, and in particular have read the following documents: Honor Council Pamphlet, What is Plagiarism, Sanctioning Guidelines, and Expedited Sanctioning Process. Papers in this course will all be submitted to turnitin.com for checking.

Submitting material in fulfillment of the requirements of this course means that you have abided by the Georgetown honor pledge: *In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.*

Plagiarism: In accord with university policy, all incidents of suspected plagiarism or other Honor Code violations will be reported to the Honor Council without fail. If the Honor Council finds that a student has plagiarized or has violated the Honor Code in any other way, the student may receive a grade of F for the course.

Turnitin.com: Students acknowledge that by taking this course all required papers can be submitted for a Textual Similarity Review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the terms of use agreement posted on the Turnitin.com site.

Sexual Misconduct: Georgetown University and its faculty are committed to supporting survivors and those impacted by sexual misconduct, which includes sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, and stalking. Georgetown requires faculty members, unless otherwise designated as confidential, to report all disclosures of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator or a Deputy Title IX Coordinator. If you disclose an incident of sexual misconduct to a professor in or outside of the classroom (with the exception of disclosures in papers), that faculty member must report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator, or Deputy Title IX Coordinator. The coordinator, will, in turn, reach out to the student to provide support, resources, and the option to meet. [Please note that the student is not required to meet with the Title IX coordinator.]. More information about reporting options and resources can be found on the [Sexual Misconduct Website](#).

If you would prefer to speak to someone confidentially, Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources that can provide support and assistance. These resources include:

1. Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention: confidential email sarp@georgetown.edu
2. Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS): 202. 687.6985 or after hours, call 202. 444.7243 and ask for the on-call CAPS clinician.

Thank you for supporting our students impacted by sexual violence. If interested, other helpful more general resources are included below:

- [Georgetown Self-Care Resource Guide](#)
- [Georgetown Wellness Wheel](#)
- [Georgetown Guide to Recognizing Students in Distress](#)

Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. These resources include:

Jen Schweer, MA, LPC

Associate Director of Health Education Services for
Sexual Assault Response and Prevention
[\(202\) 687-0323](tel:(202)687-0323)
jls242@georgetown.edu

Erica Shirley

Trauma Specialist
Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS)
[\(202\) 687-6985](tel:(202)687-6985)
els54@georgetown.edu

More information about campus resources and reporting sexual misconduct can be found at:
<https://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/get-help>.

Pregnancy Adjustments and Accommodations: Georgetown University is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive environment for pregnant and parenting students. Students may request adjustments based on general pregnancy needs or accommodations based on a pregnancy-related complication. Specific adjustments will be handled on a case by case basis and will depend on medical need and academic requirements. Students seeking a pregnancy adjustment or accommodation should follow the process laid out at the [Pregnancy Adjustments and Accommodations for Students webpage](#).

Class Schedule

This tentative schedule is subject to change as necessary.

Week	Topics	Readings, Events
Week 1. May 18	Hominid evolution, Cognitive development, Social complexity	Shook, “Anthropos, Technos, and Technology”
Week 2. May 25	Human universals, Cultural universals – the Symbolic Spheres Signs of human nature: preference, proficiency, proclivity, promotion	Brown, “Human Universals” Richter & Ostovaran, “The Evolution of Dance and Music in Human Beings” Dutton, “Landscape” in <i>The Art Instinct</i>
Week 3. June 1	Henrich. <i>The Secret of Our Success</i> . Bio-cultural co-evolution. What is a “cultural species”?	Henrich, Chaps. 1-5 Stevenson, Chap. 12
Week 4. June 8	Henrich. <i>The Secret of Our Success</i> . Do we control our society, or does the social order control us?	Henrich, Chaps. 6-10
Week 5. June 15	Henrich. <i>The Secret of Our Success</i> . What is a “collective brain” and what would it be thinking about?	Henrich, Chaps. 11-13 Laland & Brown, “The Social Construction of Human Nature”
Week 6. June 22	Henrich. <i>The Secret of Our Success</i> . Are humans still “animals”, or has humanity transcended the animal realm?	Henrich, Chaps. 14-17
Week 7. July 2	Humans as merely Physical beings Physicalist determinism, Biological determinism, Social determinism	Mele, “Free Will and Substance Dualism” Skinner, “Freedom” in <i>Beyond Freedom and Dignity</i> Wiley, “Evolution of Free Will” Stevenson, Chap. 10
Week 8. July 9	<i>Theories of Human Nature</i> Hinduism, Christianity, Islam	Stevenson, Chaps. 2, 6, 7 Edwards, “Freedom of the Will” Maharaj, “Hard Theological Determinism”
Week 9. July 16	<i>Theories of Human Nature</i> Confucianism, Buddhism, Aristotle	Stevenson, Chaps. 1, 3, 5 Short Paper due
Week 10. July 23	<i>Theories of Human Nature</i> Plato, Kant, Marx, Sartre	Stevenson, Chaps. 4, 8, 9, 11 Term paper prospectus due
Week 11. July 30	Kronfeldner, <i>What's Left of Human Nature</i>	Kronfeldner, Chaps. 1-7
Week 12. Aug 6	Kronfeldner, <i>What's Left of Human Nature</i>	Kronfeldner, Chaps. 8-11 Stevenson, Chap. 13
Week 13. Aug 13	Student Presentations	Student Presentations Term Paper Due