

### Tentative Schedule

#### **1. Introduction. Why is the question about human nature important for us?**

- a. Our conception of human nature affects our conceptions of the good life and our views about the best political models.
- b. Our conceptions of the good life and of the best political models affect our conception of human nature.
- c. The dangers of the naturalistic fallacy: deriving an “ought” from an “is”.
- d. Two debates: universalism vs. constructionism, situationism vs. character-based theories.

### **Myths Concerning Human Nature: Ancient and Modern**

#### **2. Ancient Myths of the Origin of Human Beings (I). Lessons from the *Genesis*.**

- a. What is the specifically human condition before the Fall?
- b. What is the consequence of the Fall? How does it change the human condition?

*Readings: Genesis* (selections); Augustine, *The City of God* (selec. from book 14)  
Velleman, D. ‘The Genesis of Shame’ (selec., from *Self to Self*, ch. 3, §§1-4, pp. 45-52).

#### **3. Ancient Myths of the Origin of Human Beings (II). Lessons from the *Protagoras*.**

- a. What is the human condition before Prometheus’ intervention?
- b. What is the present that we get from Prometheus? How does it change the human condition?
- c. What is the present that we get from Zeus? How does it change the human condition?

*Readings: Plato, Protagoras* (selec.: Myth of Prometheus).

#### **4. Ancient Myths of the Origin of Civilization. The nature vs. convention debate.**

- a. What is human nature before culture’s intervention according to Callicles? Notion of *pleonexia*.
- b. What is the effect of civilization according to Callicles?
- c. What are Socrates’ views about the human condition?
- d. Diogenes of Sinope’s views on nature and convention: an alternative to Callicles.

*Readings: Plato, Gorgias* (selec.), Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (selections from book 6).

**5. Modern Myths concerning Human Nature and Civilization (I).  
Pessimistic views of the state of nature.**

6. How are human beings before civilization? '*Homo homine lupus*'.
7. Why civilization and what are its effects?

*Readings:* Machiavelli, *The Prince* (selections); Hobbes, *Leviathan* (selections).

**6. Modern Myths concerning Human Nature and Civilization (II).  
Optimistic views of the state of nature.**

- a. How are human beings before civilization? The noble savage.
- b. Why civilization and what are its effects?

*Readings:* Butler, *Sermons 1-3*; Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* (selections); Rousseau, *Second Discourse* (selections).

**7. Modern Myths on Human Nature and Civilization (III). Civilization and its discontents.**

*Readings:* Freud, *Civilization and its discontents* (selections).

**Midterm exam, in class.**

**Debate on the Universality of Human Emotions**

**8. The Evolution Theory. Issues related to the expression of emotions.**

- a. Issues about innatism.
- b. Darwin's distinction between instinct and habit.
- c. Darwin's discoveries about the expression of emotions

*Readings:* Darwin, Ch. *The Origin of Species* (ch. 7) & *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (ch. 14: 'Concluding remarks and summary').

**9. Debate about Universal Traits vs. Infinite Malleability in Human Emotions.**

- a. Ekman's conclusions from Darwin's *Expression*: the Universality of Emotional Expressions.

*Readings:* Ekman, P. 'Afterword' to *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*

**10. 'Blank slate' views and Social Constructionism.**

- a. Margaret Mead and Samoa.

*Readings:* Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (selec.)

**11. Evolutionary Psychology and Ekman's Affect Programs.**

*Readings:* Griffiths, P. 'The Psychoevolutionary Approach to Emotion' (*What Emotions Really Are*, ch. 3)

## **Debate on the Existence of Character**

### **12. Aristotle on Character.**

- a. Notion of habituation: the good upbringing and the acquisition of 'second nature'.
- b. Character virtues.

*Readings:* Aristotle, *NE* 2.1-6.

### **13. Experiments in Social Psychology.**

- c. Fundamental attribution error.
- d. Milgram's Experiments about authority.
- e. Good Samaritan Experiment.

*Readings:* Harman, G. 'Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology' (1<sup>st</sup> part).

### **14. The Challenge against the Existence of Character.**

*Readings:* Harman, G. 'Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology' (2nd part), Doris, 'Persons, Situations and Virtue Ethics'.

### **15. . Responses to Situationism.**

*Readings:* Sreenivasan, G. 'Errors about Errors: Virtue Theory and Trait Attribution'; Kamtekar, R. 'Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character.'

### **16. . Final remarks.**