

Human Nature & Human Diversity

Philosophy 253 (01:730:253)
&
Cognitive Science 253 (01:185:253)

Spring Term 2021

Syllabus – Part I: Information About the Course

This syllabus has two Parts. This part, Part I, contains a lot of information about the course, including information about the goals of the course, the Canvas website, the grading system, the attendance policy, and the policy on cheating and plagiarism. You should read Part I carefully at the beginning of the term, and consult it again whenever you have questions about the course. If you can't find the answer to your questions, the course Instructors will be happy to help. Part II: Topics and Readings is a detailed list of the lecture topics and assigned readings, arranged by date. Part II may be revised and updated from time to time. You will be notified by e-mail whenever a revised version of "Topics and Readings" is posted on the course Sakai site.

How the Philosophy Course and the Cognitive Science Course are Related

Officially, Human Nature & Human Diversity is two courses, Philosophy 253 and Cognitive Science 253. However, the asynchronous recorded lectures and videos are identical. The synchronous discussion sections meet at the same time in the same Zoom meeting. There are Philosophy and Cognitive Science students in each discussion section. The courses have the same instructors and the requirements are identical. Students will get the same credit toward Core Curriculum requirements, Cognitive Science major & minor requirements, and Philosophy major and minor requirements regardless of whether they are enrolled in Philosophy 253 or Cognitive Science 253. So for all practical purposes, Philosophy 253 and Cognitive Science 253 are a single course. The course is organized in this way because one of the primary goals of the course is to explore the ways in which philosophy can contribute to theory building and research in cognitive science, and cognitive science can contribute to debates in philosophy.

Instructors

Prof. Stephen Stich
E-mail: stich@philosophy.rutgers.edu
Office Hours: TBA, and by appointment

Ms. Na'ama Av-Shalom
E-mail: naama.avshalom@gse.rutgers.edu
Office Hours: TBA, and by appointment

Dr. Max Bialek
E-mail: mbialek@rutgers.edu
Office Hours: TBA, and by appointment

Mr. David Sorensen
E-mail: dss170@english.rutgers.edu
Office Hours: TBA, and by appointment

Mr. Isaac Wilhelm
E-Mail: isaac.wilhelm@rutgers.edu
Office Hours: TBA, and by appointment

Lectures & Discussion Sections

The **asynchronous recorded lectures** will all be available in weekly modules on Canvas. Most of the lectures will be by Prof. Stich, but there will also be a number of guest lecturers from Rutgers and from other universities.

There are 10 **synchronous discussion sections**. The times and instructors for the discussion sections are as follows:

01	Monday	1:25 – 2:20	Ms. Av-Shalom
02	Monday	3:05 – 4:00	Ms. Av-Shalom
03	Wednesday	10:05 – 11:00	Dr. Bialek
04	Wednesday	1:25 – 2:20	Dr. Bialek
05	Thursday	4:45 – 5:40	Mr. Wilhelm
06	Thursday	6:25 – 7:20	Mr. Wilhelm
07	Tuesday	11:45 – 12:40	Dr. Bialek
08	Tuesday	1:25 – 2:20	Dr. Bialek
09	Friday	10:05 – 11:00	Mr. Sorensen
10	Friday	11:45 – 12:40	Mr. Sorensen

Core Curriculum Information

Both Philosophy 253 and Cognitive Science 253 count as 4 credits toward the 21st Century Challenges requirement of the Core Curriculum. More specifically they meet Goal a. “Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person's experiences of and perspectives on the world” and Goal b. “Analyze a contemporary global issue from a multidisciplinary perspective.”

Both courses also count as 4 credits meeting the Arts and Humanities Goal o Core Requirement: “Examine Critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.”

Assessment will be by an SAS generic rubric embedded in the evaluation criteria laid out in this syllabus.

The Goals of the Course

The course has four goals.

1) To acquaint students with some philosophical concepts and theories that have played an important role in the development of cognitive science, and to explore some of the ways in which findings and theories in cognitive science can contribute to debates in philosophy.

2) To acquaint students with some of the descriptive facts about human diversity in a variety of domains including:

- i) mating (sex, love and marriage)
- ii) morality
- iii) religion
- iv) race

Students will also learn about some of the features of human psychology and human culture that are universal and thus, perhaps, a reflection of an innate human nature.

3) To examine and critically assess some of the theories that have been proposed to explain why various sorts of human diversity exist. The theories considered will include:

- i) evolutionary psychology
- ii) environmental variability and cultural materialism
- iii) gene-culture co-evolution and the tribal instincts hypothesis
- iv) social constructionism

4) To explore some of the philosophical issues that are linked to various aspects of human nature and various sorts of human diversity. Issues that will be considered include:

- (i) The role of reason, emotion and intuition in moral judgment
- (ii) Moral objectivity vs. cultural relativism vs. moral skepticism
- (iii) How should we deal with the diversity of moral, religious and political views in our culture and around the world?
- (iv) The nature of human races: Are they social constructions, biological phenomena, or illusions that don't really exist at all?
- (v) Moral controversies about homosexuality, polygamy, female genital mutilation, the legitimacy of appeals to disgust or repugnance in the law, and the advisability of retaining racial categories

Important Note About E-mail

You will be getting lots of e-mails about the course. These e-mails can only be sent to your official Rutgers e-mail address. So you should monitor that e-mail account frequently. If you usually use a non-Rutgers e-mail account (e.g. Gmail or Hotmail) you should arrange to have your Rutgers e-mail forwarded to the account you usually use.

Canvas Site

Much of the material needed for the course will be available on Rutgers Canvas, the preferred learning management system at Rutgers. You will need a Rutgers NetID to enter Canvas. To access the course material, go to

<https://canvas.rutgers.edu/>

and click on Courses. You should then see a link to HUMAN NATURE AND HUMAN DIVERSITY.

When you get to the “HUMAN NATURE & HUMAN DIVERSITY” page, there will be a column on the left with a number of options. The reading and recorded material for each week will be found in Modules. Additional readings that maybe useful in preparing term papers and discussion section presentations are available in Files.

Required Textbooks

Though many of the course readings will be available on Canvas, there are two books that you will need to rent, buy or borrow:

1. Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided By Politics and Religion*. Random House/Vintage Books. ISBN for the paperback edition: 9780307455772.

The list price for this book is \$16.95. However, you may be able to get it for less from an online bookseller. In mid-December, 2020, Amazon was offering the book for \$11.39. Less expensive used copies are widely available.

2. Joseph Henrich, *The Secret of Our Success: How Culture Is Driving Human Evolution, Domesticating our Species, and Making Us Smarter*. Princeton University Press. ISBN for the paperback edition: 9780691178431

The list price of this book is \$19.95. However, you may be able to get it for less from an online bookseller. In mid-December, 2020, Amazon was offering the book for \$16.39. Less expensive used copies are widely available.

Grading

Your grade for the course will be determined by your grade on the following five components of the course:

1) Mid-term exam

Date to be announced. This will be an open-book essay exam taken on Canvas. You are expected to take the exam on your own, without consulting with others. We will use Turn-It-In to compare exam answers. If Turn-It-In indicates that another student has submitted substantially similar exam answers, you may fail the exam.

2) Final exam

Date to be announced. This will be an open-book essay exam taken on Canvas. You are expected to take the exam on your own, without consulting with others. We will use Turn-It-In to compare exam answers. If Turn-It-In indicates that another student has submitted substantially similar exam answers, you may fail the exam. The Final exam is NOT cumulative. It will cover the material from the Mid-term onward.

3) Weekly quizzes

Every week, starting in Week 3 (Feb. 1–7), students will be required to take a short answer & multiple choice quiz covering the material in that week’s reading, lectures, and assigned videos. The “curve” mapping cumulative quiz scores to the 40 point grading scale¹ used in this course will be posted on Canvas and updated periodically. In computing your final quiz score, the 2 lowest weeks will be dropped.

4) Discussion section presentation

Each student will participate in the preparation of a presentation on some aspect of human nature or human diversity. A list of possible topics will be posted in the Files folder on Canvas. Students are welcome to propose additional topics.

The presentations will be prepared by groups of 2 to 5 students. The presentation will be graded “collectively” – all the students in the group will receive the same grade. Students can volunteer to participate in more than one presentation. If you participate in several presentations, only your highest grade will count in computing your course grade. Students doing presentations on or before March 1 will get an extra 2 points added to their presentation grade. Students doing presentations between March 2 & March 12 will get 1 extra point added to their grade.

5) Research paper / video

Each student will write a paper of roughly 2500-4000 words on some aspect of human nature or human diversity. A list of possible topics will be posted in the Files folder on Canvas. Students are welcome to suggest additional topics. With the consent of the discussion section instructor, students may create a video instead of writing a paper. The due date for papers and videos is April 16. Late papers & videos will lose 2 points (on the 40 point scale) for every day the paper or video is late. Students who submit their papers or videos before April 3 will get an extra 2 points added to their paper or video grade. Students who submit their papers or videos between April 4 and April 9 will get 1 extra point added to their paper or video grade.

¹ There is a copy of the Grading Scale in the Canvas Files folder.

In computing your grade for the course, each of the 5 items above will be counted equally:

Mid-term exam	20%
Final exam	20%
Weekly quizzes	20%
Discussion section presentation	20%
Research paper	20%

Extra Credit for Discussion Section Participation: After your final grade has been computed, as outlined above, your discussion section instructor may add up to 3 points (on the 40 point scale) for constructive participation in section.

Attendance Policy

Attendance statement required by Rutgers: “Students are expected to attend all classes; if you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me.”

OK. Now that you have read the statement required by Rutgers, here is an explanation of how attendance will be handled in this course.

Attendance in discussion sections is required. Students are expected to join each discussion section meeting at the scheduled starting time and to stay until the end of the class. Students are expected to have their Zoom cameras on during class. If you have a problem attending discussion sections or keeping your Zoom camera on, you should discuss this with your instructor.

Policy on Cheating and Plagiarism

The policy on cheating and plagiarism in this course is very simple. **If you cheat or plagiarize you will fail the course.** You will also be reported to the Office of Student Conduct. There are no exceptions to this policy.

Early in the term, the discussion section instructors will explain how plagiarism rules are interpreted at Rutgers. It is important to keep in mind that if you use material from an on-line source, you *must* acknowledge this and provide a reference to the source. Changing a few words in the material that you have borrowed does *not* exempt you from this requirement. For additional information on the Rutgers University policies on academic integrity, go to <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>.