



AFFILIATED WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

Renison University College
Affiliated with the University of Waterloo
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Renison University College Land Acknowledgement

With gratitude, we acknowledge that Renison University College is located on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (also known as Neutral), Anishinaabe, and Haudenosaunee peoples, which is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes ten kilometres on each side of the Grand River.

Fall 2018

Course Code: RS/SDS 420R

Course Title: Critical Encounters with Human Nature

Class Times/Location: 1:00-2:20 am (Mon/Wed); REN 2924

Instructor: Douglas E. Cowan

Office: REN 0217

Office Phone: (519) 884-4404 x28607

Office Hours: 11:30-1:00 pm (Mon/Wed), or by appointment

Email: decowan@uwaterloo.ca (preferred way to reach me)

Course Description

This course explores the puzzling concept of "human nature," and asks the question: What does it mean to be "human"? While the answer may seem obvious, is it? This course considers issues fundamental to human life and our relationship to the world around us, including various theories that have developed to explain these issues. It discusses different ways by which we have defined what it means to be "human," both positively and negatively, and how these definitions have shaped our social and cultural relationships. The approach is interdisciplinary and intercultural/interreligious, with emphasis on such themes as self knowledge, community, loneliness and anxiety, free will and purpose in human life, and the nature of human flourishing and happiness.

Cross-listed Course

Please note that this is a cross-listed course, and will count in all respective averages no matter under which rubric it has been taken.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- A. Demonstrate a critical knowledge of a variety of theories and concepts (e.g., scientific, philosophical, religious) pertaining to human nature and functioning. This includes the ability to compare the merits and limitations of different approaches to human nature and functioning.
- B. Critically apply the course theories and concepts to human nature and functioning.
- C. Reflexively begin developing one's own perspective on human nature, happiness and suffering, and the purpose of human existence.

Required Text

There is no required textbook for this class.

Readings Available on LEARN

As necessary, required readings or viewings will be posted on LEARN. When readings are posted, it is the student's responsibility to access them.

Course Requirements and Assessment

Assessment	Date of Evaluation	Weighting
Class Participation	Ongoing	15%
Questions for Discussion	September 17	5%
Initial Position Paper	September 24	15%
Comparative Review Paper	October 29	20%
Subsequent Position Paper	November 28	25%
Take-Home Examination	December 21	20%
Total		100%

Class Participation (15%)

Class participation is crucial to success in this course. I know all professors say this, but I actually mean it. Learning happens most effectively when we are actively engaged with the material. Beginning in Week 2, each student will be permitted two unexcused absences; any others require proper documentation, and lack of attendance will affect your grade. Simply "letting you know I won't be there today" is not

sufficient. Note well that class participation is not the same as class attendance; by definition, though, if you're not there, you can't participate. If, throughout the course, you are concerned about your participation, don't hesitate to come and see me.

Questions for Discussion (5%): September 17

Each student will submit, in bullet-point form, what *three questions* you want to see addressed or discussed during the course. These will be used to inform significant aspects of class discussion.

Initial Position Paper (15%): September 24

Minimum length: 900 words. Maximum length: 1500 words.

Each student will prepare an initial position paper addressing four principal questions: (a) What do you think "human nature" means? What does it mean to be "human"? (b) How do you know this, or how do you *think* you know it? (c) What do you think it means to "critically encounter" human nature? This is intended as a thought experiment on your part; it is not expected that you will need to do any outside research.

Comparative Review Paper (20%): October 29

Minimum length: 1500 words. Maximum length: 2500 words.

Within one week of (and perhaps based on) your Initial Position Paper, each student will negotiate with me *two readings* that will form the basis of a Comparative Review Paper. These readings can take a variety of forms, including two books, one book and a series of articles (8-10), or two sets of articles (8-10 each). *No video material*. One reading should discuss the issue from a religious perspective, the other from a secular (i.e., non-religious) perspective. The basics of the assignment include:

- Readings must deal with a single issue related in some way to the subject matter of the course; the more focused and refined your choice of topic, the better your paper will be. The more contentious the issue, the easier it will be to find contrasting resources.
- By looking at a religious perspective and a secular perspective, you are comparing the two dominant ways of understanding human nature as they pertain to one particular issue.

- Your paper will do three things: (a) Compare and contrast the positions articulated in the readings; (b) make a case for which position is most useful or reasonable in terms of the issue under discussion; and, most importantly, (c) explain in detail *why* you think this is the case.
- Put differently, do not simply tell me that X=X, explain why you think this is so, and why I should believe you. A good way to do this is to pretend you are trying to convince someone who doesn't agree with you. How would you do it?

Subsequent Position Paper (25%): November 28

Minimum Length: 2500 words. Maximum Length: 4000 words.

Each student will choose an issue related to some aspect of "human nature," as it relates either to his or her SDS specialization, or, in the absence of a specialization, a particular interest or future professional goals. Rather than a traditional academic paper, this is a position paper that is intended to do a number of things: (a) describe the complexities of the issue under discussion, presenting the main points made by major stakeholders, the different "sides" of the issue; (b) describes in detail your position relative to the issue, explaining both (i) why you hold this position, and, if necessary, (ii) why opposing positions are incorrect or inadequate; (c) most significantly, support your position with evidence and argument. Several points are important to remember:

- This is not an opinion piece. All claims must be supported with evidence and argument. "I think..." is not an answer, unless it is followed by some form of "because...."
- The importance of the position paper is not only to be able to articulate and support one's own position, but to describe opposing or alternate perspectives in such a way that those who hold them would feel themselves fairly represented, whether you agree with them or not.
- The Subsequent Position Paper may *not* focus on the same issue you surveyed for your Comparative Review Paper.

Take-home Examination (20%): due no later than December 21

There will be a take-home examination at the end of the course. This will be an essay-style exam in which students are expected to bring the tools, concepts, and learnings from the course to bear on particular issues

related to critical encounters with human nature. More information about this will be provided during the course.

Course Outline

As noted, this course is guided in part by the questions raised by each particular class, and the outline should be treated as a general framework, not a hard-and-fast schedule. Broadly speaking, I take a Socratic approach to learning, one that begins with questions and seeks deeper understanding of important issues through cooperative dialogue, both within the class and in engagement with thinkers in the larger world.

Week	Date	Topic
1	Sept 10-12	Introduction to the course What is "human nature" and how do we know?
2	Sept 17-19	"Properly human questions": Storytracking and storytelling "human nature"
3	Sept 24-26	Religion and the Human Story
4	Oct 1-3	Religious Stories and Human Being
	Oct 8	Thanksgiving Day – University closed
	Oct 9-10	Fall mid-term study break
5	Oct 12	Religion and Questions of Meaning and Purpose Initial Position Paper discussion
6	Oct 15-17	"Properly Human Questions" Redux
7	Oct 22-24	Human Nature and the Question of Moral Functioning
8	Oct 29-31	Human Nature and the Question of Evil
9	Nov 5-7	Human Flourishing and the Nature of Happiness
10	Nov 12-14	Human Being and the Ethic of Responsibility
11	Nov 19-21	Subsequent Position Paper discussion What happens when human nature changes?
12	Nov 26-28	The future of humanity...
13	Dec 3	Capstone discussion and take-home exam prep

General Notes and Tips on doing well:

- All assignments will be submitted through a Dropbox on LEARN.
- For any of these assignments, do not write only what you think I want to hear. The intention of all assignments is to encourage you to think critically about the course content, the primary examples we consider, and the course readings.

- All assignments will be graded on the depth of thought presented and how well those thoughts are articulated. That is, having good ideas is important, but being able to express them clearly and convincingly is equally important. For further guidance, you should consult the grading rubric handout.
- Think and write in terms of asking questions and solving problems. Do not simply synopsise the material. If you want to critique it, that's fine, but you have to make an argument for your critique. You can't simply say whether you liked something or not.
- Use concrete examples to support the argument you are making or your solution to the problem you present.
- Start early and rewrite or rework your project often. The single most common reason for students doing poorly on any assignments—bar none—is leaving them until the last moment. Speaking of that...

Late Work

Assignments turned in past the due date will be assessed a penalty of 10% per business day late, including the day on which you turn it in. If a paper is due on Wednesday and you turn it in Friday, that is a 20% penalty. Unless I specify otherwise, I expect you to turn assignments in, not simply email them to me. I do not grant extensions except for reasons of medical and family emergency, and documentation is required in both instances. Please note that I submit my grades as soon as I have finished marking those assignments turned in on the due date. Unless you have made arrangements with me prior to the due date, once grades are submitted, they are final. Extensions beyond the end-of-semester require that students complete a Request for Incomplete form, available at the Renison University College registrar's office, and provide medical (or other) documentation supporting their request.

Classroom Etiquette

Respect the opinions of others. During class discussions, it is very likely that contradictory opinions will emerge, especially when we are dealing with highly emotional topics. There is no requirement in our class that students agree with each other, or with the instructor, but there is the mandate that opinions expressed be respected.

Please be on time. We will begin each class promptly, and I expect students to be in the room and ready to proceed. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class and if you are late, it will count as an absence.

Electronic Device Policy

Electronic devices are allowed in class, provided they do not disturb teaching or learning in any way. Any use of these devices which disrupts either teaching or learning WILL negatively affect a student's participation grade.

Attendance Policy

See above under Class Participation.

Final Examination Policy

For **Fall 2018**, the established examination period is **December 6-21, 2018**. The schedule will be available after mid-semester. Students should be aware that student travel plans are not acceptable grounds for granting an alternative final examination time (see: <https://uwaterloo.ca/registrar/final-examinations>)

Accommodation for Illness or Unforeseen Circumstances:

The instructor follows the practices of the University of Waterloo in accommodating students who have documented reasons for missing quizzes or exams. See

http://www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/students/accom_illness.html

Academic Integrity:

In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. See the [UWaterloo Academic Integrity webpage \(https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/\)](https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/) and the [Arts Academic Integrity webpage \(https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/current-undergraduates/student-support/ethical-behaviour\)](https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/current-undergraduates/student-support/ethical-behaviour) for more information.

Discipline: Every student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their own actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration, should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or Academic Dean. When misconduct has been found

to have occurred, disciplinary penalties are imposed under the University of Waterloo Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71 - Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties \(https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/guidelines/guidelines-assessment-penalties\)](https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/guidelines/guidelines-assessment-penalties).

Students should also be aware that copyright laws in Canada prohibit reproducing more than 10% of any work without permission from its author, publisher, or other copyright holder. Waterloo’s policy on Fair Dealing is available here: <https://uwaterloo.ca/copyright-guidelines/fair-dealing-advisory> Violation of Canada’s Copyright Act is a punishable academic offence under Policy 71 – Student Discipline.

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances](#), Section 4 (<https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70>). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant, who will provide further assistance.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71, Student Discipline may be appealed if there are grounds. Students who believe they have grounds for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72, Student Appeals \(https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-72\)](#).

Academic Integrity website (Arts):
http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html

Academic Integrity Office (uWaterloo):
<http://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/>

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:

Note for Students with Disabilities: The [AccessAbility Services](#) office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (NH 1401), collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities, without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic

accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AAS office at the beginning of each academic term.

Intellectual Property. Students should be aware that this course contains the intellectual property of the instructor, which can include:

- lecture handouts and presentations (e.g., PowerPoint slides)
- lecture content, both spoken and written (and any audio or video recording thereof)
- questions from various types of assessments (e.g., assignments, quizzes, tests, final exams)
- work protected by copyright (i.e., any work authored by the instructor)

Making available the intellectual property of instructors without their express written consent (e.g., uploading lecture notes or assignments to an online repository) is considered theft of intellectual property and subject to disciplinary sanctions as described in Policy 71 – Student Discipline. Students who become aware of the availability of what may be their instructor’s intellectual property in online repositories are encouraged to alert the instructor.

Mental Health Support

All of us need a support system. The faculty and staff in Arts encourage students to seek out mental health supports if they are needed.

On Campus

- Counselling Services: counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca / 519-888-4567 xt 32655
- **MATES**: one-to-one peer support program offered by Federation of Students (FEDS) and Counselling Services
- Health Services Emergency service: located across the creek from Student Life Centre

Off campus, 24/7

- **Good2Talk**: Free confidential help line for post-secondary students. Phone: 1-866-925-5454
- Grand River Hospital: Emergency care for mental health crisis. Phone: 519-749-433 ext. 6880
- **Here 24/7**: Mental Health and Crisis Service Team. Phone: 1-844-437-3247

- [OK2BME](#): set of support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning teens in Waterloo. Phone: 519-884-0000 extension 213

Full details can be found online at the Faculty of ARTS [website](#)

Download [UWaterloo and regional mental health resources \(PDF\)](#)

Download the [WatSafe app](#) to your phone to quickly access mental health support information

A respectful living and learning environment for all

1. It is expected that everyone living, learning or working on the premises of Renison University College will contribute to an environment of tolerance and respect by treating others with sensitivity and civility.
2. Harassment is unwanted attention in the form of jokes, insults, gestures, gossip, or other behaviours that are meant to intimidate. Some instances of harassment are against the law in addition to Renison University College policy.
3. Discrimination is treating people differently because of their race, disability, sex, sexual orientation, ancestry, colour, age, creed, marital status, or other personal characteristics. The Ontario Human Rights Code considers actions and behaviours rather than intentions.