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.

Winter 2020

Course Code: RS/SDS 420R
Course Title: Critical Encounters with Human Nature

Class Times/Location: 10:00-11:20 am (Mon/Wed); REN 2104

Instructor: Douglas E. Cowan
Office: REN 315
Office Phone: (519) 884-4404 x28607
Office Hours: 11:30-12:45 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 and community, questions of morality and evil, free will and purpose in human life, the human process of Othering, 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 pertaining to the concept of human nature, functioning and flourishing. 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

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<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Date of Evaluation</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions for Discussion</td>
<td>January 13</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Position Paper</td>
<td>January 31</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book Responses (x2)</td>
<td>February 14 / March 27</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subsequent Position Paper</td>
<td>April 5</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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Class Participation (15%): ongoing
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 to excuse an absence. 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%): Monday, January 13

Each student will submit, in bullet-point form, *three questions* that you want to see addressed or discussed during the course. You should think carefully about these, since they will be used to inform both significant aspects of our class discussion, as well as both your Initial and Subsequent Position Papers.

Initial Position Paper (15%): Friday, January 31
Minimum length: 1000 words. Maximum length: 1500 words.

Each student will prepare an initial position paper addressing three 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, although it is not simply an opinion piece. It is not expected that you will need to do any outside research.

Book Responses (2x 20%): Friday, February 14 / March 27
Minimum length: 1000 words. Maximum length: 1500 words.

Each student will write response papers to two books chosen from the Suggested Readings list provided in class, the first response chose from List A (non-fiction), the second from List B (fiction). You must clear your choices with me before beginning work. This assignment will be explained in more detail in class. Core constituents of the assignment include:

1. 1000-1500 words (typed and double-spaced, 12-pt font, with 1-in margins);
2. Meaningful engagement with the text itself, but which does not simply regurgitate what the text says;
3. Note that these are not “reviews” of these books, but critical responses to the ideas and arguments presented in them. Think of
yourself as entering into an intellectual conversation with the author(s).
4. Note well: Summary material such as Sparknotes, E-Notes, Cliff’s Notes, Cole’s Notes, and the like, as well as material drawn from any essay-for-purchase sites are NOT considered appropriate sources. Any use of these will significantly affect one’s grade. Oh, and do I really need to say anything about Wikipedia? Really?

Subsequent Position Paper (25%): Friday, April 5
Revisiting (a) your initial position paper, and (b) the questions you submitted the second week of class, each student will write a “subsequent position paper” which, essentially, answers your own questions, though through the lens of the learnings that have taken place over the course of the semester. Bear in mind these important notes:

- 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 this paper is not only the ability to articulate and support your own position, but to describe potentially opposing or alternate perspectives and say why you adopt the views you do.
- This must not be a restatement of your initial position paper; you may quote from that paper only very briefly (i.e., no more than one or two lines at a time), and in all cases these quotes must be used as a platform to advance the argument you are making in this paper.
- As much as anything, both papers bookend an educational process that asks you to think about what you believe and why, and to reflect critically on how your views have changed.
- Hint: You may find it helpful (a) to consider these questions through the lens of one of the key topics in the course, or (b) to contest a position with which you disagree.

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jan. 6-8</td>
<td>Introduction to the course</td>
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<td>What is “human nature” and how do we know?</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Jan. 13-15</td>
<td>“Properly Human Questions”</td>
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<td>Storytracking and Storytelling Human Nature</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion Questions due: Monday, January 13</strong></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Jan. 20-22</td>
<td>Beginning at the Beginning:</td>
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<td>Religion and the Human Story</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Jan. 27-29</td>
<td>Religious Stories and Human Being</td>
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<td><strong>Initial Position Paper due Friday, January 31</strong></td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Feb. 3-5</td>
<td>Questions of Meaning and Purpose: What does “being human” actually mean?</td>
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<td>Initial Position Paper discussion</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Feb. 10-12</td>
<td>“Properly Human Questions” Redux</td>
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<td><strong>Book Response #1 due: Friday, February 14</strong></td>
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<td>Feb. 17</td>
<td>Family Day (Holiday)</td>
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<td>Feb. 18-21</td>
<td>Reading week (no classes)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Feb. 24-26</td>
<td>How do we live together?</td>
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<td>Human Nature and the Question of Moral Functioning</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Mar. 2-4</td>
<td>When bad things happen...</td>
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<td>Human Nature and the Question of Evil</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Mar. 9-11</td>
<td>Living our lives...</td>
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<td>Human Flourishing and the Nature of Happiness</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Mar. 16-18</td>
<td>Sharing the planet with Others...</td>
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<td>Human Being and the Ethic of Responsibility</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Mar. 23-25</td>
<td>Subsequent Position Paper discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>What happens when human nature changes?</td>
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<td><strong>Book Response #2 due: Friday, March 27</strong></td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Mar. 30 – Apr. 1</td>
<td>The Future of Humanity?</td>
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<td><strong>Subsequent Position Paper due: Friday, April 5</strong></td>
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General Notes and Tips on doing well:

- All assignments will be submitted through a Dropbox on LEARN. They must be submitted in Word, not pdf. This allows me to comment in depth on your work. Any papers submitted in .pdf will be returned unread.
• 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 synopsize 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.

• Summary materials such as Sparknotes, E-Notes, Cliff’s Notes, Cole’s Notes, and the like, as well as material drawn from any essay-for-purchase sites are NOT considered appropriate sources. Any use of these will significantly affect one’s grade.

• 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 Friday and you turn it in Sunday, that is a 20% penalty. Unless I specify otherwise, I expect you to turn assignments in through the Learn Dropbox, 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. Cellphones are not permitted, and must be off the desk and placed in your bookbag.

**Attendance Policy**

See above under Class Participation.

**Final Examination Policy**

For Winter 2020, the established examination period is April 8-25, 2020. The schedule will be available at the end of January. 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. There is NO SCHEDULED FINAL EXAM for this course.

**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/) and the [Arts Academic Integrity webpage](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/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](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](https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat-general-counsel/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70), Section 4. 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.