HI281-30 Being Human: Human Nature from the Renaissance to Freud

22/23

Department
> History

Level
> Undergraduate Level 2

Module leader
> Claudia Stein

Credit value
> 30

Module duration
> 23 weeks

Assessment
> 100% coursework

Study location
> University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This 30 CATS undergraduate second-year module introduces students to the different ways in which humans have thought about themselves from the Renaissance to the early 20th century, both as individuals and as collectives. It forwards the idea that 'human nature' is not a universal, trans-historical concept constant over time, but rather, is socio-culturally constructed. At different moments in time, 'being human' has been constructed and interpreted differently according to dominant values, norms, and systems of knowledge governing a society at a particular moment in time. This module investigates those differences over time in Western culture and how they link to wider social, cultural and economic contexts.

This module also documents how, especially during the 17th and 18th centuries, the idea of 'human nature' came increasingly to be articulated and worried over, and how a new age of 'humanity' was envisioned. Rationality and reason became key attributes of the Enlightenment self; sociability, free speech, natural laws and universal rights came to be seen as structuring 'civilised' society. Also important was the linking of individuals and populations to economics and the territorial politics of emergent nation states. In the 19th century this process continued, but 'being human' was increasingly defined in terms of natural laws with ever-greater trust being placed in the natural sciences and, ultimately, the science of psychology.

Module aims

Students will learn about crucial moments in the history of conceptualising and defining 'human nature,' from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment to Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious at the end of the 19th century. Among other things, the module explores how 15th-century humanists felt that all that was worthwhile about being human was to be found in God, the scriptures, and classical texts. During the so-called Scientific Revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries, however, it began to be believed that humans possessed the creative power to 'discover' new things about themselves and their vastly-expanded world (the 'new world' of the Americas). Overall, the module asks how a new age of humanity and new ways of knowing one-self came into being, and discusses what these new ways of understanding the self closed off or overlaid. Underlying the module is the question of the extent to which we are still within the Enlightenment project, or not.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Term 1

1. In Search of Human Nature: Why History is So Vital for Our Understanding of What It Means to Be Human
2. Famous Stories We Tell Ourselves (I): The 'Discovery' of the Individual or the 'Self-Fashioning' of Renaissance Man? Jacob Burckhardt and Stephen Greenblatt
3. Famous Stories We Tell Ourselves (II): The 'Scientific Revolution'
4. Discovering Human Nature? The Case of Sixteenth–Century Anatomy
5. Man Possessed: How to Become Holy or Demoniac in the Early Modern World
6. Reading Week
7. Of Monsters and Cannibals: Europeans Encounter the New World 'Other'
8. Challenging God's Power? The 'Invention' of a 'Curious' Human Nature in the Seventeenth Century
9. Body and Soul Re-Thought: Man as Machine and the Changing Animal/Human Relationship in the 17th Century
10. Who is 'Man'? The Quest for Human Nature and the 'Science of Man' in the Enlightenment

Term 2

1. Is the Savage Noble: Exploration, Cross-Cultural Encounter and the Question of Human Races in the 18th Century
2. 'All Men are Equal': But Women and Slaves are not!
3. Human Nature, Commerce and Corruption: The Invention of a 'Homo Economicus' in the Eighteenth Century
4. The 'Invention' of Pornography: Exploring Man's Sexual Fantasies
5. Bringing the Psyche into Focus (I) – An Introduction
6. Reading Week

7. Bringing the Psyche into Focus (II): The Problem of the Individual Self and Its Relationship to Society
8. The Theory of Evolution and Its Problems
9. 'Penis Envy', 'Castration Anxiety', 'Oedipus Complex' and 'Perversion': the Invention of an Unconscious Human Nature in 19th-Century Vienna
10. Outlook: How Freud Got Under Our Skin

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a detailed knowledge of historical and theoretical interpretations of human nature.
- Communicate ideas and findings, adapting to a range of situations, audiences and degrees of complexity.
- Generate ideas through the analysis of a broad range of primary source material for the study of human nature, including electronic resources.
- Analyse and evaluate the contributions made by existing scholarship.
- Act with limited supervision and direction within defined guidelines, accepting responsibility for achieving deadlines.

Indicative reading list

- Alexander, Denis R., Numbers, Ronald L., Biology and Ideology from Descartes to Darking (2010).
- Burke, Joanna, What it Means to be Human: Reflections from 1791 to the Present (London, 2011).
- Biehl, Joao, Good, Byron and Kleinman, Arthur (eds), Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations (Berkeley, 2007)
- Cassirer, Ernst, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment (1932), transl. (Boston 1966).
- Ibid., The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy (New York, 1963).
- Dawkins, Richard, The Selfish Gene (1989) (London, 2006).
- Dear, Peter, Revolutionizing the Sciences: European Knowledge and its Ambition, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke, 2009) (electronic resources library).
- Dupre, John, Human Nature and the Limits of Science (Oxford, 2001).
- Elliott, Anthony, Concepts of the Self, 3rd. ed (Oxford, 2014).
- Hall, James, The Self-Portrait: A Cultural History (London, 2014).
- Harris, James, The Ascent of Man: A Philosophy of Human Nature (New York, 2012).
- Heller, Thomas C., Sosna, Morton, Wellbery, David E. (eds), Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought (Stanford, 1986).
- Laqueur, Thomas, Making Sex: Body and Gender From the Greeks to Freud (Cambridge, 1990).
- Harvey, David, A Brief History of Neoliberalism (Oxford, 2005).
- Kenan, Malik, Man, Beast and Zombie: What Science Can and Cannot Tell us about Human Nature (London, 2002)
- Martin, Raymond, Barresi, John, The Rise and Fall of the Soul and Self: An Intellectual

History of Personal Identity (New York, 2006).

- Outram, Dorinda, The Enlightenment, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, 2013).
- Petrysazk, Chris, 'Sociological Theory and Human Nature', The Pacific Sociological Review 23,2 (1980): 131-150.
- Porter, Roy (ed.), Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present (London, 1997).
- Rose, Nicolas, Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood (New York, 1996)
- Sayers, Sean, Reality and Reason: Dialectic and the Theory of Knowledge (London, 1985).
- Seigel, Jerrold E., The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century (New York, 2005).
- Sorabji, Richard, Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death (Oxford, 2006).
- Taylor, Charles, Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity (Cambridge, 1971).
- Todorov, Tzetan, On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought (Cambridge, 1993).
- Sayers, Saen, Marxism and Human Nature (London, 1998).
- Smith, Roger, Between Mind and Nature: The History of Psychology (London, 2013).
- Ibid., Roger Smith, Being Human: Historical Knowledge and the Creation of Human Nature (Manchester, 2007).
- Wilson, Edward O., On Human Nature (1995).

[View reading list on Talis Aspire](#)

Subject specific skills

See learning outcomes.

Transferable skills

See learning outcomes.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	18 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Seminars	18 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Tutorials	2 sessions of 1 hour (1%)
Other activity	2 hours (1%)
Private study	260 hours (87%)
Total	300 hours

Private study description

History modules require students to undertake extensive independent research and reading to prepare for seminars and assessments. As a rough guide, students will be expected to read and prepare to comment on three substantial texts (articles or book chapters) for each seminar taking approximately 3 hours. Each assessment requires independent research, reading around 6-10 texts and writing and presenting the outcomes of this preparation in an essay, review, presentation or other related task.

Other activity description

Revision seminar.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time
Seminar contribution	10%	
1500 word essay	10%	
3000 word essay	40%	
7 day take-home essay with citations and a bibliography	40%	

Feedback on assessment

written feedback on essay and exam cover sheets; student/tutor dialogues in one-to-one tutorials.

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- Year 2 of UENA-VQ32 Undergraduate English and History

- UHIA-V100 Undergraduate History
  - Year 2 of V100 History
  - Year 2 of V100 History
- Year 2 of UHIA-V102 Undergraduate History (Renaissance and Modern History Stream)
- Year 2 of UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
- UHIA-VM11 Undergraduate History and Politics
  - Year 2 of VM11 History and Politics
  - Year 2 of VM11 History and Politics
  - Year 2 of VM11 History and Politics
- Year 2 of UHIA-VM13 Undergraduate History and Politics (with a term in Venice)
- Year 2 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology
- Year 2 of UHIA-VL15 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with a term in Venice)

This module is Option list A for:

- UHIA-V100 Undergraduate History
  - Year 2 of V100 History
  - Year 2 of V100 History
- Year 2 of UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
- UHIA-VM11 Undergraduate History and Politics
  - Year 2 of VM11 History and Politics
  - Year 2 of VM11 History and Politics
  - Year 2 of VM11 History and Politics
- Year 2 of UHIA-VM13 Undergraduate History and Politics (with a term in Venice)
- Year 2 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology
- Year 2 of UHIA-VL15 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with a term in Venice)

This module is Option list B for:

- UHIA-V100 Undergraduate History
  - Year 2 of V100 History
  - Year 2 of V100 History
- Year 2 of UHIA-V102 Undergraduate History (Renaissance and Modern History Stream)
- Year 3 of UITA-R3V2 Undergraduate History and Italian
- UHIA-VM11 Undergraduate History and Politics
  - Year 2 of VM11 History and Politics
  - Year 2 of VM11 History and Politics
  - Year 2 of VM11 History and Politics

This module is Option list C for:

- Year 2 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology

This module is Option list G for:

- USX2-Y202 Undergraduate Social Studies [2 + 2]
  - Year 3 of Y202 Social Studies [2 + 2]
  - Year 3 of Y202 Social Studies [2 + 2]