Course Description:

All human beings are alike. People native to Asia eat, cry, love and fight each other. If you’re a native from the continent of Africa you’ve eaten or known someone who’s eaten rice, had a cold, and voted for a politician. People from Australasia have cars, some of them have affairs, and some of them punish their children physically. North Americans and Caribbean peoples variously worship God(s), dance at the sound of music, and engage in sexual relations. Human beings don’t behave in novel ways.

This rough picture of the similarities between people might suggest that they all possess human nature, which fixes the sorts of behaviors they exhibit. But consider this question: “what is human nature?” Is it a thing, a process, or something else? If there is such a thing as human nature, where does it come from? Is it essential to humans? Is it biological? And what exactly is evolution and how might it shed light on human nature?

The central theme of this course is human nature as viewed from the bio-social sciences and humanities. We will discuss such issues as gender differences, racial differences, mating preferences (some people believe that women have an “innate” preference for getting stuff from men, and that men have an “innate” preference for women with a certain waist-to-hip ratio). These issues present us with abundant philosophical questions. We will examine the conceptual, methodological, and other commitments that are at stake.