INTRODUCTION: PHILOSOPHY AND HUMAN NATURE

PROF. ANNE SIEBELS PETERSON
MWF 10:45-11:35 (IVC: ZOOM MEETINGS)

Course Description
This course aims to introduce students to some of the central questions which have provoked the wonder and curiosity of philosophers since ancient times, to the methods which they have employed in pursuing answers to these questions, and to the ways of understanding human nature to which their quests for answers have led them. We will progress through the following three main units:

1) Knowledge and Human Nature
   • What role does sensation play in the human quest for knowledge? How is philosophy related to what we know as science, and how are philosophical questions related to scientific questions? How have conceptions of the relationship between science and philosophy changed since ancient times?

2) Morality, the Good Life, and Human Nature
   • What different ethical theories have been developed to explain what it is to live a good human life?
   • What are some differing conceptions of the human good throughout the history of philosophy?

3) Human Nature and the Person
   • What are human beings, and how are they related (or not related) to other things in the natural world (such as the lower-level things that compose them and the societies which they in turn compose)? How does the dynamic nature of human existence affect (or not affect) the identity of a human being over time?
   • How can we use our theorizing about human nature to inform our judgments about contemporary issues (such as the concepts of the mental and the physical in medicine and the growing power of technology’s role in human life), and how can we use our judgments about contemporary issues to inform our theorizing about human nature?

Course Objectives
By the end of the course, students will be able to:
• Read and understand, with a critical and creative eye, works by historical figures in philosophy (especially Plato and Aristotle) and contemporary philosophers.
• Understand and critically assess different views within each of the three topics listed in the course description in exams and paper assignments.
• Develop our skills in reasoning and argumentation as we evaluate various arguments and formulate good arguments ourselves in class discussions and paper assignments.