The purpose of humanistic studies is to learn what it has meant to be human in other times and places, what it means now, and to speculate about what it ought to mean and what it might mean in the human future.

—Robert Scholes

Any attempt to provide a definition of philosophy which reduces it to an account of one great theme is bound to fail. If philosophy has been nothing else over the past two thousand years it has been resilient in its ability to avoid reductionistic accounts of its nature. One need not, however, attempt to reduce philosophy as a whole to the consideration of a single or limited set of topics in order to recognize that, historically speaking, there are a few persistent themes. One such theme has been human nature and the human condition. The reflection on who or what we as human beings are has been a central concern of Western philosophy. Surely it is partly for this reason that Western philosophy is thought to have begun with the Socratic dictum that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” For, as Ernst Cassirer argues, it is with Socrates that the problems of Greek natural philosophy and of Greek metaphysics are suddenly eclipsed by a new question that was to occupy philosophy. “In Socrates we no longer have an independent theory of nature or an independent logical theory. We do not even have a coherent and systematic ethical theory….Only one question remains: What is man?...The only universe he knows, and to which all his inquiries refer, is the universe of man. His philosophy...is strictly anthropological” (4). Despite this, and despite Scholes’ sentiment expressed in the opening comment, much contemporary philosophy either actively disdains the question of human nature and the human condition or simply ignores it. As Charles Taylor notes,
we've become very nervous and squeamish about “human nature.” “The very words ring bells. We fear that we may be setting up some reified image, in face of the changing forms of human life in history, that we may be prisoners of some insidious ethnocentrism” (vii).

This squeamishness is as much a characteristic of the professional practice of philosophy (the research, conferences, and publishing that defines the professional community of philosophers) as it is the teaching of philosophy. Today, while in the “public mind” philosophers are thought to broadly concern themselves with the issue of human nature, as a topic it has almost completely disappeared from the philosophy curriculum. This is to the misfortune of both philosophy departments and students of philosophy and in this essay I seek to address this forgotten part of philosophy. Specifically, I have two goals in this essay: (1) to stimulate discussion of the merit of teaching human nature in the philosophy curriculum, and (2) to discuss different approaches to the teaching of human nature and their respective strengths and weaknesses.

I will proceed in several sections. First I will attempt to take measure of the current scene exploring the lack of human nature in philosophical contexts and discussing some of the main reasons why it has disappeared. Then I will argue that its disappearance represents a fundamental lack of contemporary philosophy. There are very substantial reasons for why the issue of human nature ought to be a central component of the philosophy curriculum. In the third section I will discuss how to develop and teach a course devoted specifically to the philosophical exploration of this topic.

I

The squeamishness in speaking about human nature that Taylor notes is well attested to by consideration of some basic facts, most notably its absence from any of the major philosophical programs devoted to a discussion of the teaching of philosophy. In the two main journals devoted to the teaching of philosophy, Teaching Philosophy and the American Philosophical Associations’s Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy, the subject of human nature has not been addressed. Indeed, in more than twenty years of publishing, Teaching Philosophy has included articles on a very wide range of subjects (beyond the standard philosophical subjects are folk and rock
music, physics, Star Trek, nursing, and artificial intelligence) but not a single article on teaching human nature. One of the largest professional associations devoted to the teaching of philosophy, the American Association of Philosophy Teachers (AAPT), sponsors bi-annual teaching workshops. In its summary of the 9th Conference on Teaching Philosophy, the *AAPT News*, in its list of conference presenters, does not include any sessions devoted to this topic. In the AAPT's call for proposals for the 10th Conference it is not included in the usual core courses in philosophy or in the lengthy list of other areas of philosophy. In a search of over thirty university and college catalogs, only three schools offered a course that had a focus on human nature (Loyola College in Maryland, Vanderbilt University, and University of Michigan at Ann Arbor). Philosophers generally pride themselves on their wide-ranging nature and indeed there were courses on a variety of topics. Beyond the usual philosophic fare, there were courses on the philosophy of music, physics, art, space, time, the environment, and still others. Noticeably lacking though were courses on philosophy and human nature. The survey "Philosophy in America in 1994," conducted by the American Philosophical Association (APA), reports that 19% of the responding departments offer a course in philosophy of human nature once every two years and that 74% of the responding departments did not offer philosophy of human nature at all. As one might naturally assume given this situation, there is a scarcity of textbooks that either feature the philosophical exploration of human nature or would be appropriate for an upper-division course in philosophy and human nature. There are only two textbooks that I know of devoted explicitly this to this topic. Reviewing 25 introductory philosophy textbooks, many of which purport to focus on the human condition and, indeed, discuss issues central to a discussion of human nature (free will, mind/body, personal identity, computational psychology), only 2 feature any explicit discussion of human nature. Finally, in the APA’s *Philosophy: A Brief Guide for Undergraduates* 26 subfields of philosophy are mentioned. Not mentioned is philosophy of human nature.

This lack of interest in the teaching of this topic is not hard to understand given the various forces that have converged over the last several decades to push human nature out of the philosophical limelight. Briefly, among the issues that I believe have led to the sidelining of human nature in philosophy departments, permit me to mention three.
(1) Two factors associated with the organization of both graduate work and research and teaching at large universities, overspecialization and departmental insularity, have contributed to this situation. The growing specialization of professional philosophers narrowly trained in highly delimited areas has exacerbated this problem. Today’s graduate students are seldom encouraged to approach philosophy with broad interests. And yet the study of human nature presupposes a broad philosophical background. Furthermore, on many college and university campuses professors are seldom encouraged to talk to members of other departments that might share our concern for the teaching of common issues. Despite the avowed interest in interdisciplinary studies on many campuses, there are few opportunities to engage in meaningful collaborative efforts. The interdisciplinary nature of the study of human nature leads to difficulties with other departments which may feel that their territory is somehow being invaded by cloudy-minded philosophers. Later in this essay I will address some strategies for defusing these particular problems.

(2) Some of the deeper reasons for the disappearance of human nature as a legitimate philosophical subject have to do with the suspicion that this issue is greeted with in both Anglo-American philosophy and Continental philosophy. In the context of this essay, devoted primarily to curricular and pedagogical issues, I cannot hope to address these particular issues in any depth. I would like to point the reader to other essays I have published in which I argue for a renewal of philosophical anthropology, that movement in contemporary philosophy that devoted itself most to a discussion of human nature. Let me just briefly mention some of the factors that have led to Taylor’s squeamishness as I believe this will aid me in making my case for studying human nature in philosophy.

Within what is broadly construed as Anglo-American philosophy the influence of logical positivism and logical behaviorism, linguistic analysis, analytic philosophy, and the current interest in the cognitive science paradigm, has played a role in diminishing interest in the explicit study of human nature. Today, the closest that Anglo-American philosophers come to discussing human nature is discussing the nature of the mind or its relation to the body. As Richard Rorty notes, “The question as to the place of Mind in Nature is a reformulation of the question as to the place of human beings…Granted…that what we call ‘mind’ came into the world by
spatiotemporal mechanisms homogeneous with those which produced the rest of the world’s contents, what is it that we call ‘mind’?” (323).

Furthermore, our approach to the study of mind has itself become less philosophical and more scientific, to the point that in some cases philosophy has become nearly indistinguishable from psychology or neurobiology or neurophysiology, a mere handmaiden to the sciences. Indeed, Douglas Browning pointed out several decades ago, for the positivist, philosophical anthropology gives way to the science of man—physiology, psychology, and the social sciences (89). Furthermore, the growing influence of the social, behavioral, and human sciences throughout this century has led many philosophers to simply cede to the scientists any concern with human nature. Our philosophical interest in human nature has been supplanted by a scientific interest in human beings.

Relatedly, there is the growing belief that there is nothing unique about human nature and that the same principles at work in the sciences can fully explain human nature. No specialized account of human nature is needed because either human beings can be completely subsumed in the biological (sociobiology) or the mechanical (artificial intelligence). We can focus on the nature of rationality or other broad traits while abstracting it from any concern with its specific human qualities. Within philosophy of mind, for instance, we can discuss the nature of information processing or the rules of reason, regardless of whether we have a thermostat, lobster, or human being processing the information. The boundaries once thought to separate human beings, animals, and machines have or are in the process of disappearing it is asserted.

A similar shift in interest and elision of human nature can be seen in much contemporary Continental philosophy. This shift has been attendant with a growing critique of essentialism, begun under the influence of Freidians, Marxists, and existentialists, and critiques of ethnocentrism, humanism, and sexism associated with poststructuralist thought.

In much the same way that Anglo-American philosophers have replaced the study of human nature with the study of the mind, often under the guise of science, Continental philosophers have replaced a concern with human nature with a concern for structures or epistemes or power-knowledge regimes. As Levi-Strauss noted, the ultimate goal of the human sciences was not to constitute but to dissolve man. Foucault suggests that man is no more
than a rift in the order of things, a configuration whose outlines are
determined by the position taken up in the field of knowledge. The emphasis
on social constructionism led to a growing interest in social and cultural
issues (witness the growing fields of cultural theory and cultural studies)
which came to replace the emphasis on human nature, which simply becomes
a reflection of society. Recently, growing attention has been paid to the “post-
human.” In How We Became Posthuman, N. Katherine Hayles charts the
“transformation of the liberal subject, regarded as the model of the human
since the Enlightenment, into the posthuman” (xiv).

Both Continental Anglo-American philosophy, then, have drifted away
from a focus on human nature, though for different reasons and in different
ways. In the case of Anglo-American philosophy, acting under the influence
of the physical sciences, we have what Rorty refers to as the “de-divinizing”
of human nature, in which the human being is treated as just another thing in
the world. In the case of Continental philosophy, influenced more by the
human and social sciences, the human is subsumed in structures, cultures,
epistemes, or social forces. If, as it is often maintained, the human being is
really just a social construct then we should be studying society and culture
rather than human nature. In both cases the human being is objectified.

(3) Together with these more philosophical concerns, there have been a
number of social and cultural forces at work both inside and outside the
academy which have pulled the focus away from human nature. Many of
these forces have been associated with political and liberationist movements
growing out of the 1960s. The growing influence of feminist and women’s
studies has led to a general wariness of theories of a common human nature.
As feminist critiques have persuasively argued, often these theories of a
universal or common human nature are simply disguised versions of a
masculine nature. Feminist theories have also been at the forefront of theories
of difference, suggesting that theories of human nature obscure important sex,
gender, racial, and class differences, among others. The growing awareness
of multicultural issues in the academy has similarly led to an increased
emphasis on difference rather than a common human nature. Additionally,
undergirding many of these critiques, and a key factor in the ecological and
environmental rights movement has been a critique of the perceived
anthropocentrism of much philosophical anthropology. From Pete Singer’s
article and book Animal Liberation (1973, 1975), denying any qualitative
difference between human beings and animals and drawing an analogy between racism and sexism and speciesism, to the critique of anthropocentric moral theories in favor of biocentric theories and the extension of dignity and respect to cover all living beings, work in environmental ethics has witnessed a lessening of the gap between animals and human beings.

II

It should be clear then that there has been a growing estrangement between philosophy and philosophers, on the one hand, and the study of human nature on the other. This lack of interest in and discussion of the topic of human nature is surely a great loss to both philosophy and students of philosophy. Without necessarily diminishing the import of claims that philosophical discussions of human nature have tended to be ethnocentric, essentialist, sexist, and racist, courses in the philosophy of human nature should play an important role in the philosophy curriculum. There are many reasons justifying its inclusion. Allow me to briefly discuss some of them.

(1) An understanding of the issue of human nature is presupposed in many philosophical discussions, both historically and in contemporary philosophy, and an adequate understanding of contemporary critiques of theories of human nature depend upon an understanding of the history of the issue.

Clearly this issue is part of the history of philosophy. From Socrates to Sartre, the topic of human nature has been a central topic in philosophy. From Plato’s comparison of the state to the human soul and Aristotle’s discussion of the ends of man in his moral philosophy, to Kant’s discussion of human nature and on through Marx, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Sartre, theories of human nature have been a central component of the history of Western philosophy and no understanding of the history of western thought would be complete without some background in this important issue.

In contemporary philosophy, an understanding of the significance of human nature in philosophical thought can be seen in both the Continental rejection of humanism and human nature and the Anglo-American neglect of this issue for a focus on philosophy of psychology and its related disciplines. Both critiques about the very talk of human nature and claims that there is little that is distinctive about human nature in comparison to either animals or
machines, take place against the background of previous theorizing about human nature and presuppose a historical, philosophical, social, and cultural background that our students often don’t have but ought to. How can we understand Foucault’s claims about the death of man or Heidegger’s indictment of humanism or Derrida’s musings on the ends of man without understanding the philosophical history of these issues.

Furthermore, an understanding of theories of human nature is often a necessary background to a number of contemporary debates. Analyzing claims about gender, race, ethnicity and the critique of essentialist views of human nature implies some understanding of those views being critiqued. Relatedly, an understanding of theories of human nature is important to fully grasping the context of important debates over animal rights, environmental ethics, and a host of issues typically discussed in contemporary moral issues courses, such as abortion, euthanasia and suicide, and the death penalty. Additionally, the narrow focus in Anglo-American philosophy on the mind, the self, and the brain, raises questions as to whether this needs to be supplemented with a focus on the whole human being and whether an objective, scientific approach to human nature is the most appropriate.

(2) More than a few of my colleagues have reported that their students regularly complain that philosophy simply isn’t relevant. And while philosophers have not spent much time recently discussing human nature, the topic still elicits regular attention from the mass media where it is very relevant. It is easy to establish the relevance of philosophy to our current undergraduates by showing them that philosophy provides the tools necessary to think about a host of contemporary issues often reported in the leading newspapers, magazines, and news shows of the day. The topic of human nature is relevant to a number of contemporary concerns and newsworthy items. A course in philosophy and human nature might focus on the nature versus nurture debate as it comes up in discussions of gender, sexual orientation, or criminality or the debate over genetic determinism versus social conditioning or social constructionism. The impact of technologies on human nature are a regular feature of many news shows. We regularly here about how advances in artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, cloning, organ transplants, and other technological advances will reshape human nature in the twenty-first century. The development of machines that think and seem lifelike and the emergence of theories of animal consciousness,
animal thought, and animal morality are intimately related to an understanding of who we are and what our place in the cosmos is. These are the issues that often impel people towards philosophy in the first place. It would be a shame for philosophers to turn their back on the one issue that perhaps speaks both to the general public and to the interests of their students.

These topics also lend themselves well to assignments which further establish the relevance of philosophy and a philosophical study of human nature. Challenging students, in the context of an interdisciplinary course, to apply philosophical insights directly to material from their psychology course or their anthropology course or their biology course helps I think to bring out the relevance of philosophical analysis. One of the exercises I have students do throughout the semester is to keep a journal of all the things they hear or read about human nature and then analyze these statements for their philosophical import. Claims about human beings in relation to machines or animals, claims about particular races or ethnicities or sexes, claims about what is natural or unnatural in regard to human nature regularly occur in students’ lives and become the grist for philosophical analysis.

(3) Another strength of courses in philosophy and human nature is the interdisciplinary nature of such a course. There is a growing awareness that students tend to compartmentalize information they receive. Knowledge does not tend to cross disciplinary boundaries or blinders. And yet it is also known that information is retained to the extent that such connections can be made. Interdisciplinary courses help the student to draw connections between various disciplines and retain a greater amount of information. A focus on human nature is inherently interdisciplinary. In my own courses we cover issues in anthropology, evolutionary theory, sociology, psychology, biology, criminology, religious studies, and of course philosophy. Consider how many disciplines have proposed a “model of man.” Many of the most significant works of twentieth century philosophical anthropology, discussed below, were produced by philosophers who also had deep connections to other disciplines, such as biology, zoology, medicine, etc.

III

Recognizing the importance of this topic to the philosophy curriculum raises the question of how best to teach it and it is to that issue that I now
wish to turn. Before discussing some of the ways in which such a course might be structured, let me mention a few preliminary points.

(1) As I proposed this course at three separate institutions, I was always faced with the issue of what to call it. Nothing gets philosophers’ ire up so much as the issue of naming. I considered several possibilities but ultimately rejected them for “Philosophy and Human Nature.” Some of the alternatives included “Philosophical Anthropology” which I thought sounded too forbidding to a typical undergraduate; “Philosophy of Man” which was at one time a common denomination but now is clearly sexist; “Humans Machines, and Animals” which raises a central issue I usually focus on but does limit the course somewhat and fails to mention the philosophical side of the question; “Philosophy of Human Nature” which perhaps qualifies the approach to human nature a little too much. I finally decided on “Philosophy and Human Nature” as this seems to bring together the two topics nicely and leaves the course open to a number of approaches.

(2) It is wise to recognize that while the modern university may espouse an interest in interdisciplinary studies, professors can still be territorial in regard to their disciplines. As I proposed this course, I often heard from faculty in other departments who thought I was covering ground in their disciplines. You must be careful not to look as if you are stepping on other people’s turf. One strategy to head off any opposition to such courses from other departments is to think about employing professors from those departments as guest lecturers or even team teaching a course with a professor from another department, which might also help to increase enrollment figures. Minimally, you should spend a little time building bridges to faculty in other departments if you suspect they might take exception at your proposing such a course.

(3) My own course, and my discussion here, deals almost exclusively with Western conceptions of human nature. It is quite reasonable and possible to include non-Western conceptions but I do not, for several reasons. First, I am largely ignorant of the historical and philosophical context and significance of non-Western views. Too many textbooks do not provide the context in which to fully integrate these views with Western views. They toss in one or two short examples of non-Western philosophy as representative or as token non-Western philosophers, without sufficiently developing the context and background to these views and discussing their relationship to
Western views. While students generally exhibit an interest in non-Western views and despite a growing awareness of non-Western cultures, I have found that my students do not typically have the background to understand the cultural, religious, and philosophical views of these thinkers. These are not the views that students encounter culturally and socially. They will not have as great an impact on the students as Western views, such as Western religious views or views emanating from the Enlightenment and Romantic periods of Western philosophy.

There are several broad approaches that an upper division course in philosophy and human nature might take, what I will call an historical approach, a contemporary approach, and a problems-based approach. The choice of which approach to take will depend on several factors. Let me first discuss three approaches I have taken in the past and then their strengths and weaknesses. I have included several sample syllabi in the appendix to this article.

(1) An historically based approach would include a substantial dose of the history of philosophy, perhaps beginning with early Greek and Judeo-Christian views of human nature and their development through Medieval and Modern views (perhaps Augustine and Aquinas, Descartes, Hume, etc.), and might include some contemporary material (existentialism, behaviorism, sociobiology, materialism). Such an approach offers a firm foundation in the historical development of the topic and serves to connect the topic of human nature to other historical issues perhaps being discussed in history of philosophy courses. This approach works well with two of the leading textbooks available focusing on human nature. Leslie Stevenson’s *The Study of Human Nature: Readings* is divided into four sections. It opens with a section on beliefs about human nature in ancient religious traditions, both Western and Eastern and follows this with a section including selections from Greek and Medieval views. The third section discusses the search for a scientific theory of human nature and moves from Descartes to the sociobiologist E. O. Wilson, and includes Marx, Freud, Watson, Skinner and Lorenz, among others. The final section includes selections from twentieth century philosophical views: existentialism, materialism, neo-marxism. Stevenson has also published a related text called *Seven Theories of Human Nature*. This text is not a selection of readings but Stevenson’s discussion of seven theories (Christianity, Freud, Lorenz, Marx, Sartre, Skinner, and Plato).
This text might make a good accompaniment to another text but it is a bit thin to stand alone as a basic text in such a course.

Donald C. Abel’s *Theories of Human Nature: Classical and Contemporary Readings* follows an historical progression from Plato to Wilson, and includes selections from * theories of human nature.

There is quite a bit of overlap in the two books, as you could imagine, but also some interesting differences. Stevenson has somewhat more material from non-Western sources but Abel includes a feminist philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir, which Stevenson does not. He also includes a chapter on Nietzsche, which Stevenson does not. Stevenson devotes more time to the issue of whether a scientific theory of human nature is possible. This allows him to include more scientific writings: Lorenz, Watson, Chomsky, and he includes several selections from contemporary Anglo-American philosophers (Hampshire, Feigl, Davidson) while Abel does not. While both texts include an introduction to each selection, Abel’s are somewhat more extensive. Only Abel includes “Questions for Reflection and Discussion” at the end of each selection as well as a more extensive “Suggestions for Further Reading” than Stevenson supplies. I have used both texts in the past but lean more toward Abel’s text as it is a better fit to an historical approach and allows somewhat more flexibility as far as how you present the issues in the class.

In the past, when I have taken an historical approach to the course, I began with Willard Gaylin’s *Being and Becoming Human* as it nicely summed up the various points I wanted to talk about throughout the semester in a clear and popular, rather than philosophical, manner. Gaylin defends in very straightforward terms the radical discontinuity between human beings and animals and his book is an effort to explore and explicate those aspects of human nature, beyond autonomy, that dignify and elevate our species. So Gaylin posits a radical break between human beings and animals and his book defends that position, primarily through a focus on culture. He examines eight attributes that define the unique and extraordinary species Homo Sapiens: human imagination, freedom and choice, human feelings, the eccentric and romantic quality of human sexuality, human dependency, human work, morality and conscience, the meaning of love. Unfortunately, the Gaylin text is now out of print. Another option for beginning the course and focusing the student on the relevant debates to be discussed would be to gather a collection of newspaper, news magazine, and video stories that focus on the
topic of human nature and might stimulate the students to begin to think about some of the problems to be explored in the course. I have also began the course with Justin Leiber’s dialogue “Can Animals and Machines be Persons.” Leiber imagines a future scenario in which a subcommittee of the United Nations must make a determination regarding the rights of a chimpanzee that has learned to communicate through sign language and an artificially intelligent computer. The dialogue is an engaging introduction to many of the themes discussed in the course and never fails to provoke student debate, usually from a variety of perspectives.

Following this introduction to the problems and issues to be discussed in the course, an historical approach might then consider a number of relevant historical texts. These could include:

- Plato: the tripartite soul, justice for the human being, the human being as a social animal, Plato’s dualism;
- Aristotle: the various kinds of soul (nutritive, sensitive, rational), the end of the human being; the human being as a social animal;
- Descartes: the clash between religion and science, consciousness and dualism, language and rationality;
- Hume and Mill, the possibility of a science of human nature, the nature of the self, human freedom.

We next looked at several contemporary movements in the study of human nature: sociobiology and ethology, behaviorism and mechanistic materialism, and philosophical anthropology. Some of the individuals and themes I have discussed in the past include:

- Feminist critiques of biology: Bleier’s text *Science and Gender* was used to provide a critical discussion of sociobiology. I had students read the second chapter, “Sociobiology, Biological Determinism, and Human Behavior,” which includes a fine feminist perspective on these issues. Other possibilities might include the work of Evelyn Fox Keller, Donna Haraway, Sandra Harding, or Janet Sayers.
• Watson, Skinner, Dennett. I included two essays from Dennett. “True Believers” is included in *The Intentional Stance* and represents a clear statement of his basic philosophical approach to intentional systems. “Mechanism and Responsibility” is included in *Brainstorms* and explains how Dennett reconciles his mechanistic approach with an account of responsibility. The two essays together provide a good statement of contemporary mechanistic materialism.

A course for more advanced undergraduates or a graduate seminar might then turn to a consideration of philosophical anthropology. Philosophical anthropology was primarily a German school of philosophy that was prominent in the period between the two world wars and was responding to a number of social, political, scientific, and philosophical crises of the period. It represents the clearest and most extensive attempt to articulate an account of the nature of the whole human being while simultaneously overcoming the legacy of Cartesian dualism in Western philosophy. The movement is generally thought to have begun with the publication in 1928 of Max Scheler’s *Man’s Place in Nature* and includes the works of Ernst Cassirer, Arnold Gehlen, Helmut Plessner, Michael Landmann, and Martin Buber, among others. Typical of most philosophical anthropologies was an attempt to come to terms with the growing findings and influence of the sciences and their increasing specialization while maintaining some connection with the social and cultural legacy of Western interpretations of human nature. Though largely forgotten today, these figures produced some of the most perceptive and brilliant analyses of human nature in the history of philosophy. Their work, interdisciplinary in its nature, influential in its time, and rich in insight, touches on many facets, including the human being's spiritual, biological, and cultural nature; the boundaries separating human beings and animals and human beings and machines; the impact of technology on human nature; and the crisis in self-reflection facing modern human beings.

When I have included discussion of philosophical anthropology in the past, I chose to focus on Buber’s essay “What is Man?” which is a lengthy introduction to the field that follows its historical development from Aristotle to Kant, Hegel and Marx, Feuerbach and Marx, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Scheler, and then Buber’s own approach, through the dialogical principle.
The essay “Distance and Relation”, found in the collection *The Knowledge of Man*, offers a further explication of Buber’s views. We then focused on the role of culture in Cassirer’s philosophical anthropology, followed by a very similar statement by a contemporary anthropologist, the essay “The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man” by Clifford Geertz, included in his collection of essays *The Interpretation of Cultures*. I then drew parallels between this cultural view and the materialist socialist view of Alison Jaggar, found in her text *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. These texts could easily be paired with critiques of philosophical anthropology, such as Foucault’s *The Order of Things* or Derrida’s “The Ends of Man.”

(2) A second, less historically based approach, would devote much less time to historical issues and concentrate on more recent developments in sociobiology, ethology, anthropology, artificial intelligence, and materialism. Such an approach, while lacking a broad historical perspective, would benefit from its interdisciplinary nature and its connections to contemporary topics of discussion, including animal rights, feminist critiques of biology, gender issues, and questions concerning artificial persons (androids, cyborgs, artificial intelligences). When I have adopted this approach in the past, I chose to concentrate on three basic texts:

- As a basic text in sociobiology I chose E. O. Wilson’s *On Human Nature* because it is fairly comprehensive (it touches on several issues that we regularly returned to: religion, sex and sexual difference and homosexuality, morality, relationship of culture to biology, issue of freewill) and it is written for a popular audience and so is very accessible. I again returned to Bleier to consider a critique of sociobiology.

- Dennett and Hofstadter’s *The Mind’s I* was the basic text for mechanistic materialism and the view of the human being as a complex information processor. It has several advantages: it includes fiction, is fairly comprehensive, tries to help the readers through difficult passages with reflections and introductions, and includes many of the important statements in contemporary philosophy of mind, among them Nagel’s “What Is it Like To Be a Bat?”, Searle’s “The Chinese Room”, and Dennett’s entertaining “Where am I?”. 
Geertz’s collection of essays *The Interpretation of Cultures* provides an excellent account by an anthropologist of a philosophy of culture, focusing on his account of various symbolic forms or cultural systems. Part II of the collection of essays offers an account of evolutionary theory from the standpoint of a cultural anthropologist and focuses on the impact of culture on the evolution of human beings. He then touches on a number of basic cultural systems: religion, ideology, personal identity and the concept of person, and in a second collection *Local Knowledge* on art and common sense. I also included an essay from Mark Halperin’s collection *100 years of Homosexuality* on the social construction of homosexuality as it connects up nicely with Geertz’s own approach and contrasts with Wilson’s sociobiological account of homosexuality.

(3) Recently I attempted to integrate these two approaches by taking a problems-based approach to the topic. I chose Donald Barash’s reader *Ideas of Human Nature* which is organized according to key questions about human nature: body and soul, the mind/brain problem, people as inherently good or inherently evil, the role of culture, sex and gender, etc. While not historically organized, Barash’s text does include a large dose of historically significant philosophical texts and mixes these with fiction, non-philosophical theories of human nature, and a substantial number of contemporary perspectives. Barash’s text is more comprehensive in terms of the issues it raises than either Abel or Stevenson but that breadth comes at the cost of considerable depth. Too many of Barash’s selections are overly brief and fail to provide any significant context to the issues debated. Barash also fails to include many selections on contemporary mechanistic materialism and artificial intelligence, though it includes a greater recognition of feminist issues than either Abel or Stevenson.

Clearly there is going to be some overlap in these approaches. Similar issues come up in both issues, including the boundaries between human being and animals and machines, human freedom and determinism, the nature of the mind and its relation to the body, nature versus nurture and culture versus biology, the proper study of human nature. As you consider each approach, there are some factors you might like to keep in mind.
(1) One factor to take into consideration in deciding which approach to adopt is whether your department is historically minded. Does your department have a historical bent, such that it wants its students to be familiar with the history of philosophy? Do the students in fact have a background in the history of philosophy? Some of the brief selections included in the Stevenson and Abel readers can be very puzzling without the historical and philosophical context in which to appreciate them. Is there little or no interest in historical issues? As part of a humanities department, I find that my students don’t have the background in the history of philosophy to fully appreciate brief historical selections. And I, too, have less interest in the history of philosophy and prefer the more contemporary approach.

(2) An historical approach allows you to chart some of the historical developments that led to changing conceptions of human nature and so put these theories in their historical context. The other two approaches, on the other hand, lend themselves more easily to talking about some contemporary issues that students seem to have more interest in: gender and sex difference, homosexuality, the role of religion. In the second approach, I usually devote more time to a discussion of the impact of new technologies on human nature. Less time is devoted to some basic philosophical issues, though. We don’t talk too much about dualism, we don’t develop biblical or religious views of the human being, though these views inevitably do come up.

(3) The second approach clearly allows you the time to consider a smaller number of views in greater depth. This can either be good or bad, to a large extent depending on your students. I have found that students don’t often have the patience to delve in depth into one approach and consider it from many different facets. If you are dealing with a lower level course, the more comprehensive historical approach in which you consider a larger number of theories of human nature or a problems-based approach which focuses on shorter and more numerous reading selections might work better.

(4) The second and third approaches are more interdisciplinary, which might be a consideration. The contemporary approach allowed me to focus on more contemporary debates: gender and sexual difference, homosexuality, criminal anthropology. This also helps to attract students from other disciplines to philosophy courses, always a consideration. But from this second approach students gain less insight into the import of traditional views still very much alive in our own cultures: religious view especially. I also
think that the second approach is less philosophically demanding and so might be more appropriate to a mixed group of students. If you are teaching predominantly philosophy majors with a good foundation in the history of philosophy or attempting a more advanced class the first approach might be more appropriate. On the other hand, if your student population includes predominantly non-majors, the second more contemporary approach or a problems-based approach might work better.

**Bibliography**

Abel, Donald.
Barash, Donald.
Bleier, Ruth. *Science and Gender*.
Gaylin, Willard. *On Being and Becoming Human*.
---. *Local Knowledge*.
Halperin, Mark. “100 Years of Homosexuality.”


Heidegger, Martin. “Letter on Humanism.”


Keller, Evelyn Fox.


Leiber, Justin. *Can Animals and Machines Be Persons?*


Sayers, Janet. *Biological Politics*.


Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation*.

---.

Stevenson, Leslie.

---.


Weiss, Dennis.

Wilson, E. O. *On Human Nature*. 