

STSC313 Human nature at the origin  
Thursdays, 9 – 12

Spring 2008

NOTE THAT THIS SYLLABUS IS STILL BEING DESIGNED AND IS LIKELY TO CHANGE BEFORE CLASS BEGINS THIS SPRING. IT DOES CONVEY MY BASIC IDEA OF THE COURSE'S CONTENT, STRUCTURE AND EXPECTATIONS.

**Instructor** Llyd Wells, 6-5945, [llyd@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:llyd@sas.upenn.edu)  
302 Penn Humanities Forum (3619 Locust Walk)

**Office hours** TBD

*Please feel free to discuss class-related issues with me **as needed**; if I am busy, I will always be glad to schedule an appointment at the earliest mutually convenient time.*

**Format** This course is designed as a seminar: active student participation is absolutely necessary. It is therefore very important to prepare assigned readings in advance of class. If you don't, it is unlikely that you'll be able to participate meaningfully in – or get much out of – our classes. Those who do the reading several days in advance (which is a good idea!) should review it again before class to keep it fresh in their minds.

**Texts** Coetzee, Elizabeth Costello  
Darwin, The Voyage of the Beagle & Origin of Species (excerpts)  
Defoe, Robinson Crusoe  
Diderot, Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville  
Rousseau, Emile  
Swift, Gulliver's Travels  
Wells, "An account of a female of the white race of mankind..."  
(others likely as well; nor is the above yet written in stone)

Texts will be available either at the Penn Book Center on 34<sup>th</sup> Street off of Walnut, or via the class Blackboard site. To access Blackboard, go to <https://courseweb.library.upenn.edu/>.

**Course content** The Galapagos Islands are famous due to their bizarre, "antediluvian" fauna and flora that in part inspired Darwin to propose his theory of evolution by natural selection. Since Darwin's visit in 1835, however, many of these "original" plants and animals have gone extinct, often to the benefit of thousands of alien species introduced by human beings. In an attempt to protect the remaining "native" organisms, conservation biologists have pursued a violent policy of extermination. Human beings apparently thus serve both to corrupt and to restore "true" nature. For example, tens of thousands of human-introduced goats have been killed on several of the islands, to restore those islands to their "original," goat-less state. Is this the right thing to do? We will address the ecological, evolutionary and ethical assumptions underlying this and similar policies. What is the human role in nature? Does this role differ from that of other organisms? What do we mean when we identify specific organisms as native or original? In pursuit of these questions, we will use class discussions and selected readings of philosophical,

literary and scientific texts to explore how similar questions have been posed and answered from the Enlightenment to the present-day. How natural is nature? Who decides?

**Evaluation** You will be evaluated on the basis of class participation, short writing assignments, and a longer term paper.

Attendance and participation	10%
Leadership of class discussions	10%
Reaction papers (1-2 pages each)	10%
In-class writing assignments	5%
Term paper proposal (4-5 pages)	15%
Annotated bibliography # 1 (2-3 pages)	10%
Annotated bibliography # 2 (4-6 pages)	15%
Term paper (12-15 pages)	25%

**Grades...** should not be the focal point of your college experience, and I would prefer if they weren't the focal point of mine. If you think I have been manifestly unjust, wait 24 hours, then make an appointment with me to discuss it. Please know in advance that I am extremely unlikely to change the grade.

**Policy on late work:** I will accept late work only if you have first spoken with me, explaining why the work has to be late, at least two days in advance of the deadline. If I agree with you that it is best to postpone the assignment, we will mutually decide on a definitive due-date for the work, after which there will be no further postponement, barring exceptional circumstances. We will also discuss how much the work will be penalized for being late: typically at least 10%. Failure to attend class on the due-date for a specific project does not constitute an acceptable excuse for lateness.

**Foreseeable absences:** If for reasonable and foreseeable reasons (e.g., a religious holiday, a family wedding, etc.) you must miss class, please inform me in advance.

**Plagiarism** will not be tolerated; it will result in a failing grade for the assignment in question, as well as possible further disciplinary action by the university. Be aware that plagiarism includes not only using citations from other texts without acknowledgement, but also close paraphrasing. For further details, read Booth et al., *The Craft of Research*, pp. 166-174 (which I will also hand out in class). If you are worried about inadvertently plagiarizing, come talk to me – I know it can get pretty confusing.

#### **Useful academic resources**

- If you have a learning style or disability that requires special accommodation, register with the Student Disabilities Services, Weingarten Learning Resources Center, Stouffer College House, 3715 Woodland Walk (<http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/index.html>). The Weingarten Learning Resources Center also is available to help you work on skills for studying, reading, test-taking, etc.

- Writing is an incredibly important skill both in academia and beyond it. If you can write well, many doors will be opened for you. For that reason, I will stress writing in this class. If you need help with your writing, check out the Penn Writing Center ([http://www.writing.upenn.edu/critical/help\\_wc.html](http://www.writing.upenn.edu/critical/help_wc.html)).
- To work on skills relevant to public presentations, take advantage of the Communication Within the Curriculum (CWIC) program (<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/cwic>).