

**This is a draft syllabus and subject to change**

**Course Title:**

**Humans, Animals, and Environment: Debates about Technology and Nature**

**Course Instructor:**

Gregory E. Kaebnick, PhD

**Course Description:**

Technology, a modification of nature for the purpose of facilitating further modification of nature, is celebrated as one of the hallmarks of *human* nature. At the same time, many people are increasingly concerned about the depth and extent to which humans can now modify nature: they are concerned, for example, about the human-caused extinction of plants and animals, about the introduction of genetically engineered crops and livestock, and the biotechnological enhancement of human beings. This seminar will explore several philosophical, moral, and political issues that are connected to concerns about changing nature: How can we identify a “natural” state of affairs in a world that is already heavily altered? Why should leaving nature alone be considered morally valuable? Can moral concerns about nature be taken up into public discourse and public policy-making—or should government strive to be neutral on such matters? The seminar will explore these issues in the context of debates about environmental preservation, agricultural biotechnology, synthetic biology, and human enhancement.

**Required Pre-Course Reading:**

James Hughes, *Citizen Cyborg: Why Democratic Societies Must Respond to the Redesigned Human of the Future* (Westview, 2004).

Michael Pollan, *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education* (New York: Grove Press, 1991).

President's Council on Bioethics, *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness* (Harper Collins, 2003).

Gregory Kaebnick, ed., *The Ideal of Nature: Debates about Biotechnology and the Environment* (John Hopkins University Press, 2011), chapters 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11

Jeremy Rifkin, “From Alchemy to Algeny: A New Metaphor for the Coming Age,” in *Algeny* (Viking Press, 1983), Part I, pp. 1-24.

John Harris, “Enhancement Is a Moral Duty,” in *Enhancing Evolution: The Ethical Case for Making Better People* (Princeton University Press, 2007), chapter 2, pp. 19-35.

Leon R. Kass, “The Wisdom of Repugnance,” *The New Republic* (1997): 17-26.

## Reading Required During the Course:

Bruce Jennings, "Biotechnology as Cultural Meaning: Reflections on the Moral Reception of Synthetic Biology," unpublished manuscript, prepared from a presentation delivered at "The Ethics of Synthetic Biology," a Hastings Center research project.

Lawrence H. Diller, "The Run on Ritalin: Attention Deficit Disorder and Stimulant Treatment in the 1990s," *Hastings Center Report* 26, no. 2 (1996): 12-18.

Christian Perring, "Medicating Children: The Case of Ritalin," *Bioethics* 11 (July 1997): 228-40.

Erik Parens, "Authenticity and Ambivalence: Toward Understanding the Enhancement Debate," *Hastings Center Report* 35, no. 3 (2005): 34-41, at 37.

Joachim Boldt and Oliver Müller, "Newtons of the Leaves of Grass," *Nature Biotechnology* 26 (2008): 387-89, at 388.

Gregory Kaebnick, ed., *The Ideal of Nature: Debates about Biotechnology and the Environment* (John Hopkins University Press, 2011), chapters 9, 10

## Expectations:

1. Each student will have read all four of the "pre-course" books *before* the first morning of class.
2. Each student will be prepared to make a 10-15 minute class presentation, based either on the "pre-course" readings or on one of the brief, "during-the course" readings.
3. Each student will play an active role in class discussion.

## Day 1; Monday

10:00-12:00 General discussion: **Introduction to the Debates about Nature**

1:00-3:00 Time to prepare for late afternoon presentation and discussion

3:00-5:00 Student presentations and discussion: **Contrasting Views about Nature: Jeremy Rifkin, John Harris, and William Galston**

One student will take 10 minutes to introduce Jeremy Rifkin's discussion of biotechnology, a second student will take 10 minutes to introduce John Harris's position (in "Enhancement Is a Moral Duty"), and a third student will take 10

minutes to introduce William Galston's position (in his chapter in *The Ideal of Nature*) on biotechnological enhancement. Questions for all to consider in preparing for the discussion:

- What claims do they make about nature and biotechnology?
- How do they hope to win the reader's agreement with those claims?

## **Day 2; Tuesday**

9:00-10:30 Lecture and discussion: **The Environment and the Nature of Morality**

10:45-12:00 Student presentations and discussion: **Contrasting Views about the Nature of Morality: Leon Kass, Bonnie Steinbock, and Paul Lauritzen**

One student will take 10 minutes to introduce Leon Kass's primary points (in "The Wisdom of Repugnance"), a second student will take 10 minutes to introduce Bonnie Steinbock's primary points (in her chapter in *The Ideal of Nature*), and a third will take 10 minutes to introduce Paul Lauritzen's primary points (in his chapter in *The Ideal of Nature*). For all to consider:

- How does each person believe moral judgments are reached and justified?

1:00-3:00 Time to prepare for late afternoon session

3:00-5:00 Student presentations and discussion: **Interpreting *Citizen Cyborg***

One student (or pair of students) will take 15 minutes to introduce James Hughes's primary points in *Citizen Cyborg* and a second student (or pair of students) will take 15 minutes to introduce fundamental questions or critiques of *Citizen Cyborg*. Questions for all to bear in mind:

- What does Hughes think human nature is?
- Why reasons does Hughes give for changing human nature?

## **Day 3; Wednesday**

9:00-10:30 Lecture and discussion: **Science on the Farm: Ideals versus Oughts**

10:45-12:00 Student presentations and discussion: **Nature and Second Nature**

One student will take 10 minutes to introduce Michael Pollan's primary points (in *Second Nature*) and a second student will take 10 minutes to introduce Bruce Jennings's primary points (in "Biotechnology as Cultural Meaning: Reflections on the Moral Reception of Synthetic Biology").

1:00-3:00 Time to prepare for late afternoon session

3:00-5:00 Student presentations and discussion: **Interpreting the President's Council**

One student (or pair of students) will take 15 minutes to introduce the President Council on Bioethics' primary points in *Beyond Therapy* and a second student (or pair) will take 15 minutes to introduce fundamental questions or critiques of *Beyond Therapy*. Questions for all to bear in mind:

- What does the Council think human nature is?
- What reasons does the Council give for being cautious about changing human nature?

#### **Day 4; Thursday**

9:00-10:30 Lecture and Discussion: **Living Machines and Public Policy**

10:45-12:00 Student presentations and discussion: **Ritalin, Mental Disorder, and Student Enhancement**

One student will take 10 minutes to introduce Lawrence Diller's primary points (in "The Run on Ritalin") and a second student will take 10 minutes to introduce Christian Perring's primary points (in "Medicating Children: The Case for Ritalin").

1:00-2:00 Time to prepare for late afternoon presentation and discussion

2:00-4:00 Student presentations and discussion: **Doping and Authenticity**

One student will take 10 minutes to introduce David Wasserman's primary points (in his chapter in *The Ideal of Nature*) and a second student will take 10 minutes to introduce Nicholas Agar's primary points (in his chapter in *The Ideal of Nature*). A third student will present Erik Parens' primary point in "Authenticity and Ambivalence."

4:00-5:00 Break

5:00-6:00 Public Lecture:

#### **Synthetic Biology: The Industrialization of Life?**

#### **Day 5; Friday**

9:00-10:30 Lecture and discussion: **Nature and Human Nature**

11:00-11:30 Wrap-up Discussion