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As we learn that humans are multifaceted, the plethora of authors and their publications (which will be discussed later throughout this essay) have found multiple ways to explore the humanistic endeavors that have defined us. Emotions, cognition, history, identity, violence, the past, traditions, and other humanistic traits/state of being have all contributed to human nature. The difficulty to define who we truly are arises if one trait in particular is absent due to the fact each one complements one another. However, by placing all aspects alongside to each other will allow us to find a way to universalize human actions and attempt to break the paradoxical assumption that all individuals cannot be defined.

Steven Pinker’s academic prose on human nature ignited the conflict that rests in the heart of this course. In the selection, *The Blank Slate: the Modern Denial of Human Nature,* Pinker introduces human nature, which is, “…embedded in the very way we think about people” (1). Throughout history, philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jacque Rousseau credited the metaphorical dogmas for human behavior: the Blank Slate, Noble Savage, and Ghost in the Machine. “…empiricism, romanticism, and dualism—are logically independent, but in practice they are often found together” (10). However, Pinker negates this accreditation. With a scientific approach, Pinker develops a theory that defines humans via our very own human biology. Pinker believes that all humans undergo a similar biological process that has no correlation with experiences, which was the foundation of *tabula rasa*—free will. Moreover, with the disapproval of these “flawed” myths, he then attacks current issues such as prejudice, determinism, imperfectability, and other cognitive aspects as a way to universalize all individuals. A way to reinforce this universal attempt, Pinker suggests that human rights, longings, and desires contribute to the homogeny of respect that all individuals want (145). To the extent, this is true. In the article “The Brain on Trial,” author David Eagleman states that human decision-making and overall desire changes as the biology transforms (114). With this biological alteration, it does not matter what society an individual belongs to, all humans desire rights that are morally acceptable to them. For example, Americans find the treatment of women in Saudi Arabia unscrupulous; however, in Saudi Arabia, a theocratic nation, the people must abide the Five Pillars of Islam. With that, their way of treating women is acceptable because it suits their culture. Because of this schism of what humans define “ethical,” the dichotomy of interference prevails. Although it may seem like cultures may bunk heads due to topics like this, it does not mean humans altogether are dissimilar. It just shows that there is a variation on what humans define morally acceptable. With this in mind, our emotions have played a mammoth role in our transformation as well.

Aristotle stated that a virtuous and excellent life derived from being happy (Parker 23). However, in today’s society, people have forgotten about that. In the article, “The Pursuit of Happiness,” author Clifton Parker credits Professor Michael AgerH sdkjfsljfsljkdfa;sljf;aslkfj

Hagerty, who claims the blame on human negativity stems from the press. News reporters and anchormen only discuss the calamity in modern culture, such as murder, conflicts, and abuse (25). This lack of positive attitude relates to Pinker’s human biological assumption because the correlation between our actions and the environment does define human’s state of being. For example, consider the article “Tragic Choices: Autism, Measles, and the MMR Vaccine.” Carly, the heart-broken mother discussed in this article, blames the MMR vaccination for causing her child Ian to develop Autism. This melancholic mother cannot realize her child has an untreatable disease. The lack of happiness is what causes her to act the way she is; it proves how emotion plays a fundamental role into how an individual perceives his or her world. Carly is in denial because without accepting her child naturally has Autism, she immediately points the finger to something else (the MMR vaccine) as a way to alleviate her somberness. erHlsjkdflkdjsflAs a paradigm, it shows that humans act the way they are due to their current emotional state. Going along with the transformation aspect, there are some authors who felt the antithesis.

Rather than human behavior deriving from biological processes, José Ortega y Gasset suggests the origin in a more novelistic way. He states, “It is too often forgotten that man is impossible without imagination, without the capacity to invent for himself a conception of life, to ‘ideate’ the character he is going to be. Whether he be original or a plagiarist, man is the novelist of himself” (155-156). Comparing humans to novelists, Ortega is trying to point out that we define our own lives through experiences. We are the ones who write our story; we are not incautiously aware of our “destiny,” as Pinker points out. Furthermore, Ortega suggests that humans are pro-choice, meaning we do in fact have free will; this is where Ortega and Pinker’s views don’t intertwine. However, author Susan Griffin would mutually agree with both Ortega and Pinker.

The reader can immediately notice the nuance between Griffin and Pinker by Griffin’s prose. Rather academic, her chapter “Our Secret,” is a narrative that attacks human nature in a more historical way. Rather straightforwardly pointing out where our human nature derives from, like Pinker, Susan implicates our transformation by means of a nucleus and a German-manufactured missile. The commonality between Pinker and Griffin is evident when she describes the nucleus, an organelle that many perceives so miniscule, actually plays a vital role in the biological process, as stated: “…destined for the construction of a substance needed to compensate for the continual wear away of the cell” (117). However, the way Griffin further interprets the nucleus is where the authors become distant. The nucleus represents how the little things in life contribute to the individual’s way of living. Without the little things a person experiences, the puzzle cannot be completed; the piece that is missing plays an important part of the individual’s life. The missile, however, has a deeper meaning. The way Griffin analyzed the functionality of the German missile seemed analogous to human actions. By stating, “Eight out of ten of the guided missiles will land within eight miles of their targets,” (117) it seemed like an individual is willing to attempt a task all throughout their life. At first, he or she will not be able to complete the task to its fullest capacity; however, the more the person will repeat this task, the closer he or she will be towards full completeness. The missile also represents how an individual will not allow anything to stop him or her from giving up until reaching full satisfactory, as stated: “Once it fired it cannot stop” (115). This correlates with Ortega more than Pinker because the volition to not give up—as metaphorically described as the missile—suits more appropriately with our transformation through experience than a “natural” process as Pinker devotes. Griffin also attempts to universalize human behavior through fictionalizing historical figures and their childhood past.

Griffin theorizes that an individual becomes who he or she is due to his or her childhood—using Heinrich Himmler as an example. During his childhood, Himmler had no unique characteristics due to the expectation his father had on him. in order to universalize human behavior, Griffin fictionalized Himmler via comparison of their childhood journals; however, during her attempt, there was one specific nuance: she stated that his journals had, “…not even a breath of self” (118-119). Humans are not raised to become mimicry or even a duplication of another individual. We need that sense of identity so that we can stand apart from the rest. It is like having an army of automatons that are programmed to function in a similar, certain way; there would not be any sense of originality or variance amongst the group. With this outlook, Griffin suggests we should not be viewed as mechanistic. If we were to be considered so, then the whole assumption of experiences influencing the individual is null and void. Because of Griffin’s fictionalization of Himmler’s childhood (as well as experiences from the past), her “storytelling” help define who we are. Griffin stated that the “…human being [is] as a kind of machine, or as a cog in the greater mechanism of society, operating within another machine” (123). To me, this seemed directly similar to the Ghost in the Machine doctrine. By alluding that the spirit is “imprisoned,” Pinker would most definitely negate Griffin’s theory. Since there cannot be any tangible proof that there is in fact another entity within the body, Pinker would have to rely back on his biological reasoning. While Griffin reflect more on childhood as a way to characterize humans altogether, Leslie Silko uses storytelling.

As the reader attempts to fully interpret the Laguna culture, the diction of the words that are portrayed by the storyteller shows these people display different core values and morals than those who belong in Western society. They do this so their folk traditions can continue being passed down, as stated, “with these stories of ours/ we can escape almost anything/ with these stories we will survive” (247). The Laguna tribe takes their storytelling very serious. As our culture uses it as indulgence, they do it as a collective task. To them, it is the only way to maintain their unique way of living. With these stories in particular being passed down, Silko would agree with both Ortega and Griffin because they all agree past experiences help defines us. Because the Laguna tribe interprets storytelling as a fundamental necessity, it shows that an alteration of “importance” towards human behavior is evident. This tribe uses these stories as a way to unite each other in order to remain existent. Another way Silko displays the human condition is through a sense of identity. Although the Laguna tribe was conquered by Christians, their stories did not change in addition to their way of living. Yes, although some members of the tribe decided to go to a Christian-oriented school and many did not want to return back to their folk culture, the moral principles remained unchanged. Furthermore, by taking a glimpse through the pictures in *Storyteller*, one could notice the Christian’s subjugation had little effect to the Laguna tribe’s morale, even when some of the tribe members follow what the Christians ordered he or she to do, as stated: “the dormitory matron pulled down her underpants and whipped her with a leather belt because she refused to speak English” (19). This shows under any circumstances, whether one is a minority or just inferior to someone else, a sense of identity is important. One should not have to change who they are in order to satisfy another person’s wants and/or needs. Similar to Silko is Patricia Limerick, who attacks the Indian’s condition more particularly through history.

Limerick attempts to discover the true meaning of human nature through broad historical events. During the “Haunted America” chapter, her Modoc Stories and patterns of war have contributed to her overall meaning of human nature. Throughout the course of American history, one would find the conjecture true that the Native Americans were treated poorly due to westward expansion and ideas such as Manifest Destiny (41). With events such as the Trail of Tears as mere compendium, the white man’s method of exploration devastated the Native American’s culture and morale. As discussed in Silko’s *Storyteller*, most Indians were not willing to follow the Christian tradition because they felt their customs would diminish as result. It is akin to Limerick’s case; by stating, “…Indians had visions of maintaining their sovereignty and traditional economies” (40), their volition to remain a folk culture is evident. Because of their unwillingness to adapt into the new culture, the consequences resulted in war. When humans are destined to do something—in this case the explorers attempting to fulfill Manifest Destiny—nothing should hold him/her back. It does not matter what the predicament is, the determination to finish the task is very important. A sense of achievement above all is what the explorers were looking for, and an Indian tribe was not going to hold them back from their ultimate goal: conquering all the land from sea to shining sea. This desire is a suggestion to how possibly violence via conquest is a deep trait that all humans share. Through anger, suffering, and vex, it is evident that people do become violent. As agreed on Pinker’s publication, “…ordinary people’s compassion can evaporate and they find it easy to treat him like an animal or object” (274), Limerick is hinting the reader all humans possesses some form of animalism. Moreover, this view shows that humans are both good and bad, not entirely innately good (as Pinker denounces the Noble Savage). But, where Limerick and Pinker disagree is when Limerick believes the animalistic side of a human being is pro-choice, meaning all individuals have the same contributors that trigger the animalistic self. Attempting to tie fictionalization, history, and emotions into human nature, author Toni Morrison finds a way through solitude, suffering, and past events to the overall universal of human beings.

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* isa historical, fictional ghost story that explores human nature narratively and symbolically—examining the way in which fear, solitude, and past events shape human experiences. Beloved—the supernatural entity that haunts Sethe and her family—plays a vital role in bringing to light what basic necessities (beyond food, shelter, and clothing) all humans must have to live. Throughout the text, the reader soon figures out that the past is haunting the protagonists. With the scar resembling a chokecherry tree on Sethe’s back, the reader notices a parallelism between her slavery past: the abuse she had to endure, and how incomplete her family tree is. Because of slavery, families were destroyed due to separation and ultimately death; for example, Baby Suggs had eight children with six separate men, and one would presume the family is very branched out and incomplete due to the absence of one mother, and one father prototype. The chokecherry tree also reveals a state of being that we do not necessarily reflect or focus on: mortality and suffering. Not only does Morrison take a stab at suffering, she also examines the consequences of suffering in order to see if there is homogeny amongst all individuals. Consider Sethe’s predicament: A single mother nurturing all of her children, trying to find hope and freedom not only for herself, but also for her children. Sethe had to sacrifice one of her children, Beloved, so that her family’s freedom would be granted; however, even after being enslaved and going through adversity, Sethe still has guilt and remorse over Beloved’s death. Suffering and other melancholic conditions contribute to how the past can deteriorate an individual’s self-esteem. With this essence of suffering, Sethe felt she lost her motherhood, especially when her milk was stolen. The realization she may have made a mistake by sacrificing her Beloved is one of many things Sethe feels she is going to regret all her life. Suffering causes us to retrospect our past so that we can learn from it. By learning from our mistakes—as Sethe struggles through—we will have a brighter future. This aspect would differ to Silko because with the Laguna’s storytelling being the mechanism to keep their folk past, one society is trying to escape their past whereas the other finds it meaningful. Although their way of storytelling is used differently, the universal of characterizing human behavior is still visible.

Another way Morrison universalizes humans is directly similar to Susan Griffin: fictionalizing historical figures. In the preamble of this novel, Morrison stated: “…I would invert her [Margaret Garner—Morrison’s motivation towards the publication of *Beloved*] thoughts, plumb them for a subtext that was historically true in essence, but not strictly factual in order to relate her history to contemporary issues about freedom, responsibility, and women’s ‘place’” (XVII). With this in mind, it shows that the merging of the author’s imagination and a historical figure can be a suitable method to universalize all individuals. One could argue that imagination is just a fantastical attribute that purposely makes the target apparent to the rest. But, with Griffin, Silko, and Morrison’s driven symbolism, storytelling, and background, their fictionalization helps us find related characteristics all humans share. Another way both Toni Morrison and author Gretel Ehrlich attempt to universalize humans is through their solace.

Through hard times without a father, protagonist Denver becomes envious and exclusive with herself due to the disapproval of Paul D (23). With this exclusion, she then finds solace: the “emerald closet.” This comfort zone is not only her escape from current enslavement in 124 but also a way to recuperate the morale she lost as a little girl during slavery. This is analogous to Gretel Ehrlich’s transformation from originally living in an urban, technological thirsty environment, to settling down into a rural society. *The Solace of Open Spaces* portrays a stage of open independence from society we see nowadays. Ehrlich’s primary way to get the reader to comprehend the abstractness of her stories is through symbolism. Her symbolism over solace not only defines her but also finds her inner tranquility. One would argue that Ehrlich’s solace is unacceptable due to the eras we live in; Ehrlich narrated this over thirty years ago, meaning Wyoming could have changed since then. But that is not the point. Ehrlich points out through solace, all humans possess a stage of serenity, an escape from any hardship, tribulation, isolation, and other negative feelings that person had—the death of Ehrlich’s husband as her motif. Another piece of work that is similar to Ehrlich’s novel is Wendell Berry’s essay, more specifically “The Long-Legged House” chapter. Although this chapter is more down to earth than *The Solace of Open Spaces,* Berry interprets nature by stating for example, “…to have a house in the woods and to return now and again to live in it” (110). With a transcendental view on life, Berry’s interpretation of nature I perceived from this selection made me think of Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden,* which is coincidental because Berry discusses *Walden* in this text*.* As mere compendium to his work, this pond was a way for Thoreau to discover himself inside and out as a result of abandoning the outside world. Through Clifton Parker’s view on happiness, it is true that this house was the reason for Curran Mathew’s extended life. Berry continuously states all throughout Mathew’s life that he experienced both physical and emotional hardships. With this as an example, I believe that all humans share the commonality that once he or she finds their “comfort zone,” the individual will reach their nirvana; due to how multifaceted humans truly are, everyone has his or her own way of comforting themselves, whether it is via music, exercising, or other therapeutic activities. Relating back to Denver’s “emerald chest,” this “long-legged house” is truly his haven where he can find inner tranquility.

Although most of these authors would disagree on other’s justification of human nature, in a wider context, they all contribute towards the bigger meaning behind what it means to be human. Retrospecting these publications, I understood the majority of the authors’ view on human nature; however, some were very difficult to interpret. The hardest of all was possibly either Steven Pinker, or Susan Griffin. Their prose on the issue was very clandestine from the rest. I have never had the opportunity to read a true academically styled argument, so getting used to his language was a hassle. Also, with Susan Griffin’s “Our Secret,” I was not able to catch her symbolism off the bat. It took several attempts to be on the same page as her. In conclusion, the human mind is very complex. So many arguments stir up because people’s perceptions on the topic differ from others, and the struggle to find one, specific meaning becomes difficult. Can there really be one set definition of human nature? Knowing that humans are capable to perform multiple tasks and adapt to their natural environment, I believe it is okay to have multiple interpretations. The human condition is a mystery that will probably remain unsolved for years to come, but I do agree that philosophers, biologists, psychologists, and other fields of inquiry are making great progress. But the mystery continues: what does it take to be human?