

LECTURE / DISCUSSION / DEBATE  
THE STUDY OF POLITICS AND HUMAN NATURE

**Terms and concepts to know:**

Democratic system	Authoritarian system
Totalitarian system	Empirical orientation
Normative orientation	Institutional v. behavioral perspective
Case studies	Agent-Structure debate
Ethnographic research	Survey research
Modeling	Historical Descriptive approach
Quantitative perspective	Rational Choice perspective
Pluralism	Elitism
Ideological perspectives	Comparative perspectives

**Study and discussion questions:**

1. Describe the differences between democratic, authoritarian and totalitarian systems of government. Give examples of each and a critical evaluation of each system's pros and cons.
2. What preference do you have when examining or writing about political concepts: normative or empirical? Why are you more comfortable with one or the other?
3. Discuss and evaluate the various perspectives on politics: the quantitative, rational choice, elitist, pluralist, ideological, and comparative perspectives. Which ones appear to be the most useful for studying politics? Why / why not?
4. Beginning our discussion of human nature: Is there anything "innate" or "true" about human nature? If so, what? Do these differences transcend gender or are they gender specific? Is there anything that is "essential" about human nature or are we merely products of our social environment?
5. Should Stevenson have included a separate chapter examining "female" nature? Why / why not?
6. Discuss the primary criticisms of Christianity and Marxism. How would proponents from both schools of thought respond to such criticisms?
7. Adrian Ward thinks our nature is pretty good...not perfect, but not bad. What do you think? Give an example from your everyday life of when he might be right and another of when he might be wrong.

**Readings:**

Heineman. *Political Science*, Chapter 1.  
Stevenson. *Twelve Theories of Human Nature*, Introduction.

**Video:** *Understanding Human Nature with Steven Pinker.*