

# Preface

The study of human nature has always been of central importance to philosophy. Indeed, some understanding of what it is to be human has been central to the work of some of the greatest philosophical thinkers including Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Hobbes, Descartes, Locke, Hume, Rousseau, Mill, Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx. In more recent years writers as diverse as Steven Pinker, Ian McEwan, Philip Pullman, Simon Baron-Cohen, Mary Midgley, Jesse Prinz, and Edward O. Wilson have all expounded their views on related issues with much passion. Questions such as ‘what is human nature?’, ‘is there such a thing as an exclusively human nature?’, ‘through what methods might we best discover more about our nature?’, and ‘to what extent are our actions and beliefs constrained by it?’ are of central importance not only to philosophy and science, but also to our general understanding of ourselves as people who belong to the human species.

The essays collected in this volume collectively address key issues and taboos surrounding the theme of human nature by bringing together philosophers working in a multitude of areas including the philosophy of cognitive science, evolutionary psychology, the philosophy of biology, psychoanalysis, ethics and moral psychology, developmental psychology, the philosophy of mind and action, the philosophy of psychology, the philosophy of religion, and the history of philosophy. Most of the work included in this volume was presented at the 32nd Royal Institute of Philosophy conference, which took place at Oxford Brookes University on June 15–17, 2010, with Human Nature as its theme. The two exceptions are the papers by Rosalind Hursthouse and Sarah Patterson, both of whom were unable to be present. The conference also included talks by John Dupré and Kim Sterelny that had already been committed to other publications.

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