Views of Human Nature

PHRE-370-3 / Fall 2017

Phillips Academy



**Instructor:** Mr. Prescott

**Location:** Chapel 015

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Course Description

A critical examination of selected traditional and contemporary views of human nature with the following questions in mind: Do we have a characteristic nature? What are our basic needs, purposes, rights, obligations, and values? To what extent are our actions determined by heredity and instinct? Are we free? Are we responsible for our actions? Do the answers to any of these questions differ for males and females? Given an understanding of human nature, how should we structure society to satisfy our needs and take advantage of our potential?

Course Requirements, Evaluation, and Policies

**I. Required Texts:**

1. Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015).
2. Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).
3. Additional readings will be made available as handouts in class and posted on Canvas

**II. Evaluation**

**i. Classroom Participation (30%) –** Much of this class will proceed as a seminar, which means careful reading of assigned work, regular attendance, and participation in class are all essential in order to succeed in the course. A separate handout/rubric will be distributed regarding expectations for classroom participation/discussion.

**ii. Essays (60%) –** Three different analytical/argumentative essays will be assigned throughout the term. Please note, however, that these papers are not wholly independent of one another. In order to emphasize the writing process, both the second essay will take the form of a revised and expanded version of the first essays. More specific information about the expectations for these assignments will be provided in a separate handout.

1. **Essay 1 (10%)** – Due Monday, September 25
2. **Essay 2 (20%)** – Due Tuesday, October 17
3. **Essay 3 (30%)** – Due Wednesday, November 15

**iii. Reflection Papers (10%)** – Students are expected to complete one reflection paper per week on an assignment of the their choosing (no more than one page in length) and are graded on a complete/incomplete/missing basis. These should be uploaded to the appropriate assignment on Canvas.

**III. Extensions –** Generally speaking, I do not grant extensions. In addition to allocating class time for papers, prompts are also handed out at least one week in advance of the due date, so the expectation is that students will plan ahead and manage their time appropriately. The only exception to this policy is when a student has three or more **major** assignments due on the same day, in which case students are expected to follow the protocols outlined on p. 51 of the Blue Book under “Workload & Assignments” (which includes 24-hours advance notice).

**IV. Late Work Policy –** All written assignments are due by the beginning of class. Any work handed in after this point will be counted as late. Please note that technological difficulties are **not** an excuse for lateness. Anticipate that the printer will break, that files will be lost, or that your computer will die! **Any work handed in after the due date will receive a grade no higher than a 3+.** Work that is handed in more than one week past the due late will not receive credit.

**V. Revision Policy** – As noted above, revisions are built into the fabric of this course (both the second and fourth essays are both revised and expanded versions of the first and third essays, respectively). With that in mind, I generally do not allow for additional revisions on papers unless they receive a grade of 3- or lower, in which case I do require them to be rewritten.

**VI. Absences** - As noted above under Classroom Preparation/Participation, regular attendance is essential if one is to succeed in this course! However, I realize that this course is not your only commitment this term, just as I realize that circumstances inevitably arise that our outside of your control. First and foremost, I ask that you communicate with me (the earlier the better). Please note that students are responsible for all announcements or changes made in class. Regarding **Personal Time**, I ask that students follow the procedures outlined on pp. 54-55 of the Blue Book (note that personal time is not available to lowers during the fall term). Finally, in the event that an assignment is due on the day a student is sick (with an excused absence from the Health Center), said assignment will be due at the beginning of the next class meeting.

**VII. E-mail** – I will respond to all e-mail within 24 hours. However, please note that any e-mail sent after 8:00 PM will not receive a response until the following morning, so please plan ahead!

**VIII. Religious Observances –** Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that fall during the term. Should you have a religious observance that conflicts with participation in the course, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations.

**IX. Disabilities –** Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities who may require disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to see me as soon as possible to discuss your particular needs. All discussions will remain confidential, though I may consult Student Health Services to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested.

**X. Technology** – Although we live in an increasingly digitized world, please note that I do not allow the use of computers/tablet/phones during class unless otherwise specified.

**Schedule of Assignments**

(Subject to Change)

**Unit 1: What is Reality?**

**Friday, September 8 – Introduction & Overview**

* No assigned readings

**Week 1 – The Allegory of the Cave**

**Monday, September 11 – Reading in Philosophy/Religious Studies**

* No assigned readings

**Tuesday, September 12 – The Allegory of the Cave**

* Read: Plato, *The Republic*, VII.514A-521B.
* Due: Drawing of Plato’s Cave

**Thursday, September 14 – A Different Cave?**

* Read: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, pp. 5-20.

**Friday, September 15 – Preserving the Dream**

* Read: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, pp. 20-39.

**Week 2 – What is “The Other”?**

**Monday, September 18 – Constructing the Other**

* Read: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, pp. 39-57.

**Tuesday, September 19 – Intersecting Identities**

* Read: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, pp. 57-71.

**Thursday, September 21 – Writing Workshop**

* Due: Rough Draft

**Friday, September 22 – Release Time**

* Note: Class does not meet

**Unit 2: Morality and Human Behavior**

**Week 3 – The Ring of Gyges and Moral Hypocrisy**

**Monday, September 25 – A Moral Dilemma**

* Due: Essay #1

**Tuesday, September 26 – The Ring of Gyges**

* Read: Plato, *Republic*, Book II, 357b-368c

**Thursday, September 28 – Batson and Moral Motivation**

* No assigned readings

**Friday, September 29 – Friday Free**

* Note: Class does not meet

**Week 4 – Stimulating Moral Integrity**

**Monday, October 2 – The Death of Prince Jones**

* Read: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, pp. 75-99.

**Tuesday, October 3 – The Dream and Moral Hypocrisy**

* Read: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, pp. 99-111.

**Thursday, October 5 – A Fish Out of Water**

* Read: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, pp. 111-132

**Friday, October 6 – No Class**

**Week 5 – Waking Up From the Dream**

**Monday, October 9 – No Class**

**Tuesday, October 10 – Wednesday Schedule**

* Note: Class does not meet

**Thursday, October 12 – Waking Up From the Dream**

* Read: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, pp. 135-152.

**Friday, October 13 – Writing Workshop**

* Work on essays

**Unit 3: Human Nature and the Pursuit of Happiness**

**Week 6 – Neuroscience and the Human Mind**

**Monday, October 16 – No Class**

**Tuesday, October 17 – The Meaning of Life**

* Due: Essay #2

**Thursday, October 19 – The Self In Conflict**

* Read: Jonathan Haidt, "The Divided Self," in *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), pp. 1-22.
* Note: Reflection paper due this week

**Friday, October 20 – Swimming Upstream: Fighting the Evolutionary Currents**

* Read: Jonathan Haidt, "Changing Your Mind," in *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), pp. 23-34.
* Note: Reflection paper due this week

**Week 7 – The Psychology of Human Behavior**

**Monday, October 23 – Parents’ Weekend**

* Note: Class does not meet

**Tuesday, October 24 – The Culture Inside**

* Listen: “The Culture Inside,” *Invisibilia*, NPR (June 15, 2017).
* Note: Link to podcast on Canvas
* Note: Reflection paper due this week

**Thursday, October 26 – The Prisoner’s Dilemma**

* Read: Jonathan Haidt, "Reciprocity with a Vengeance," in *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), pp. 45-58.
* Note: Reflection paper due this week

**Friday, October 27 – The Myth of Sisyphus**

* Read: Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus," in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, pp. 119-123.
* Note: Reflection paper due this week

**Week 8 – Human Nature and the Search for Meaning**

**Monday, October 30 – The Pursuit of Happiness**

* Read: Jonathan Haidt, "The Pursuit of Happiness," in *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), pp. 81-106.
* Note: Reflection paper due this week

**Tuesday, October 31 – The State of Shock**

* Read: Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), pp. 3-20.
* Note: Reflection paper due this week

**Thursday, November 2 – The State of Apathy**

* Read: Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), pp. 20-41.
* Note: Reflection paper due this week

**Friday, November 3 – Release Time (No Class)**

* Note: Class does not meet

**Week 9 – The Struggle**

**Monday, November 6 – The Art of Living**

* Read: Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), pp. 41-69
* Note: No reflection paper due this week

**Tuesday, November 7 – Man’s Search for Meaning**

* Read: Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), pp. 69-87.
* Note: No reflection paper due this week

**Thursday, November 9 – Writing Workshop**

* Read: Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), pp. 87-93.
* Note: No reflection paper due this week

**Friday, November 10 – Release Time**

* Note: Class does not meet; work on papers

**Week 10 – Finals Week**

**Monday, November 13 – Preparation Day**

* Work on final paper

**Wednesday, November 15 – Final Paper Due**

* Due: Essay #3