

Views of Human Nature

PHRE-370-3 / Spring 2018
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. Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).
2. Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959).
3. Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015).
4. Additional readings will be made available as handouts in class and posted on Canvas

II. Evaluation

i. Classroom Participation (25%) – 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. More specific information about the expectations for these assignments will be provided in a separate handout.

- a. **Essay 1 (10%)** – Due Tuesday, April 10
- b. **Essay 2 (20%)** – Due Tuesday, May 1
- c. **Essay 3 (30%)** – Due Tuesday, May 29

iii. Reading Quizzes/Prompts (15%) – Short reading quizzes and writing prompts will be given in-class throughout the term. These are not meant to be comprehensive, but rather help students establish a foundation for larger writing assignments.

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 at the beginning of class (please upload to Canvas). Any work handed in after this point will be counted as late. Please note that problems with technology 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+.**

V. Revision Policy – Students may rewrite any essay in the course (except for the final), though note that revisions must be substantial; it is not sufficient simply to plug in the instructor's feedback. To that end, I strongly encourage students to meet with me if they are electing to complete a revision. The grade for the rewrite will be averaged with the first grade to determine the final grade for the assignment. All rewrites are due one week after the initial essay is returned. Please note that I do not accept rewrites for unauthorized late essays.

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 are 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. 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 7:00 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: The Neuroscience of Human Nature

WEEK 1 – THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE

TUESDAY, MARCH 20 – INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

- No assigned readings

THURSDAY, MARCH 22 – THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE

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

FRIDAY, MARCH 23 – RELEASE TIME

- Note: Class does not meet

WEEK 2 – THE HUMAN MIND

TUESDAY, MARCH 27 – THE DIVIDED SELF

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

THURSDAY, MARCH 29 – 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.

FRIDAY, MARCH 30 – THE CULTURE INSIDE

- Listen: "The Culture Inside," *Invisibilia*, NPR (June 15, 2017).
- Note: Link to podcast on Canvas

WEEK 3 – THE NEUROSCIENCE OF HUMAN NATURE

TUESDAY, APRIL 3 – THE SOCIAL NATURE OF HUMANS

- 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.

THURSDAY, APRIL 5 – WRITING WORKSHOP

- Due: TBD

FRIDAY, APRIL 6 – WRITING WORKSHOP

- Due: TBD

Unit 2: Human Nature and the Holocaust

WEEK 4 – THE HOLOCAUST AND HUMAN NATURE

TUESDAY, APRIL 10 – THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS

- Due: Essay #1

THURSDAY, APRIL 12 – THE FIRST PHASE: SHOCK

- Read: Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), pp. 3-20.

FRIDAY, APRIL 13 – FRIDAY FREE

- Note: Class does not meet

WEEK 5 – APATHY VS. INTEREST

TUESDAY, APRIL 17 – THE SECOND PHASE: APATHY

- Read: Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), pp. 20-52.

THURSDAY, APRIL 19 – THE ART OF LIVING

- Read: Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), pp. 52-72

FRIDAY, APRIL 20 – NON-SIBI DAY

- Note: Class does not meet

WEEK 6 – MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING

TUESDAY, APRIL 24 – MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING

- Read: Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), pp. 72-93.

THURSDAY, APRIL 26 – WRITING WORKSHOP

- Due: TBD

FRIDAY, APRIL 27 – WRITING WORKSHOP

- Due: TBD

Unit 3: Human Nature and Social Systems

WEEK 7 – WHAT IS “THE OTHER”?

TUESDAY, MAY 1 – TBD

- Due: Essay #2

THURSDAY, MAY 3 – A DIFFERENT CAVE?

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

FRIDAY, MAY 4 – PRESERVING THE DREAM

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

WEEK 8 – CONSTRUCTING THE OTHER

TUESDAY, MAY 8 – RELEASE TIME

- Note: Class does not meet

THURSDAY, MAY 10 – CONSTRUCTING THE OTHER

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

FRIDAY, MAY 11 – INTERSECTING IDENTITIES

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

WEEK 9 – STIMULATING MORAL INTEGRITY

TUESDAY, MAY 15 – THE DEATH OF PRINCE JONES

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

THURSDAY, MAY 17 – THE DREAM AND MORAL HYPOCRISY

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

FRIDAY, MAY 18 – A FISH OUT OF WATER

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

WEEK 10 – WAKING UP FROM THE DREAM

TUESDAY, MAY 22 - WAKING UP FROM THE DREAM

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

THURSDAY, MAY 24 – WRITING WORKSHOP

- Due: TBD

FRIDAY, MAY 25 – WRITING WORKSHOP

- Due: TBD

WEEK 11 – FINALS WEEK

MONDAY, MAY 28 – PREPARATION DAY

- Work on final paper

TUESDAY, MAY 29 – DUE: ESSAY #3

- Due: Essay #3