Views of Human Nature

PHRE-370 / Fall 2016

Phillips Academy

Instructor: Mr. Prescott

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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. Bstan-‘dzin-ryga-mtsho, Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999).

**II. Evaluation**

**i. Classroom Participation/Reflection Papers (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. It is not enough to merely run our eyes over the pages: we must be active in our effort to understand what we are reading. In order aid this process, students will be asked to complete **1-page reflection papers** in conjunction their readings (generally speaking, one per week on a night of the student's choosing). A separate handout on reflection papers will be provided. Additional prompts will also be assigned in-class throughout the term, which will also be factored into the participation grade.

**ii. Essays (75%) –** Three different analytical/argumentative essays (appx. 4-5 pages in length) will be assigned at the conclusion of each unit. More specific information about the nature of these essays will be provided closer to their corresponding due dates. There will also be class time set aside for working on each paper on the meeting prior to its due date.

**a. Essay 1** – Between the World and Me (20%) – Due Thursday, October 6

**b. Essay 2** – The Road (25%) – Due Tuesday, November 1

**c. Essay 3** – Dalai Lama (30%) – Due Thursday, November 17

**III. Late Work Policy –** The baseline expectation is that all written assignments will be handed in at the beginning of class on the date they are due (not 15 minutes after class has started). If a student has a scheduling conflict or multiple major assignments due on the same date, **it is the student’s responsibility to speak to me beforehand** about appropriate accommodations (the earlier the better). An e-mail the night before is not sufficient. Also, 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 4.**

**IV. Rewrite Policy** – All essays that receive a grade of 3- or lower must be rewritten. In addition, all students may choose to rewrite one essay per term. Revisions must be substantial; it is not sufficient simply to plug in the instructor’s feedback. 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.

**V. 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 (the earlier the better). Please note that students are responsible for all announcements or changes made in class. Last, 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.

**VI. 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!

**VII. 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.

**VIII. 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.

**Unit 1: Introduction to Religion**

**Friday, September 9 – Introduction & Overview**

* No assigned readings

**Week 1 – Understanding Human Experience**

**Tuesday, September 13 – Allegory of the Cave**

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

**Unit 2: Between the World and Me**

**Thursday, September 15 – Understanding Race**

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

**Friday, September 16 – The Streets and the Schools**

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

**Week 2**

**Monday, September 19 – The Mecca**

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

**Thursday, September 22 – Intersecting Identities**

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

**Friday, September 23 – The Death of Prince Jones**

* Read: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, pp. 75-92

**Week 3**

**Monday, September 26 – New York**

* Read: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, pp. 92-111

**Thursday, September 29 – France**

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

**Friday, September 30 – The Price of Freedom**

* Read: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, pp. 132-152.

**Week 4**

**Monday, October 3 – Writing Workshop**

* No assigned readings

**Thursday, October 6 –**

* Due: Paper

**Unit 3: The Road**

**Friday, October 7 – The Road: A Scorched Earth**

* Read: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, pp. 3-33.

**Week 5**

**Monday, October 10 – Responding to Suffering**

* Read: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, pp. 33-58.

**Thursday, October 13 – The Limits of Empathy**

* Read: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, pp. 59-92.

**Friday, October 14 – Apocalyptic Morality**

* Read: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, pp. 93-130.

**Note: Midterm Grades due October 16**

**Week 6**

**Monday, October 17 – The Danger of Dreams**

* Read: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, pp. 130-156.

**Thursday, October 20 – A Sisyphean Task**

* Read: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, pp. 156-187.

**Friday, October 21 – Infanticide (28)**

* Read: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, pp. 188-215.

**Week 7**

**Monday, October 24 – The Ocean**

* Read: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, pp. 215-252.

**Thursday, October 27 – Death of the Man**

* Read: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, pp. 252-287.

**Friday, October 28 – Writing Workshop**

* No assigned readings

**Unit 4: Ethics for the New Millennium**

**Week 8**

**Tuesday, November 1 – Writing Workshop**

* Due: Essay

**Thursday, November 3 – TBD**

* Read: Dalai Lama, “Preface” and “Chapter 1,” *Ethics for the New Millennium*, pp. xiv-xvii and 3-17.

**Friday, November 4 – TBD**

* Read: Dalai Lama, “Chapter 2,” *Ethics for the New Millennium*, pp.

**Week 9**

**Monday, November 7 – TBD**

* Read: Dalai Lama, “Chapter 3,” *Ethics for the New Millennium*, pp.

**Thursday, November 10 – TBD**

* Read: Dalai Lama, “Chapter 4,” *Ethics for the New Millennium*, pp.

**Friday, November 11 – TBD**

* Read: Dalai Lama, “Chapter 5,” *Ethics for the New Millennium*, pp.

Finals Week

**Monday, November 14 – Prep Day**

* Work on final paper

**Tuesday, November 15 – TBD**

* Work on final paper

**Thursday, November 17 – TBD**

* Due: Final Paper