

HNRS 2020 Section Themes Spring 2020

Section 1001, MWF 9:30am-10:20am; Diehl and

Section 1002, MWF 10:30am-11:20am; Diehl

This section of HNRS 2020 will use Dennis Ford's *The Search for Meaning* as a jumping off point to explore the questions: Where and how do human beings find meaning in their existence *as human beings*? Each of the eight worldviews discussed in Ford's book (i.e., myth, philosophy, science, postmodernism, pragmatism, archetypal psychology, metaphysics, and naturalism) will be paired with a work of literature, which will not only offer illustrations of the different worldviews (or, ways of making meaning), but also provide some possible answers to the questions at the heart of this course. The literary texts that we will study include: Christa Wolf's *Cassandra* (a re-telling of *The Illiad* from the perspective of the ill-fated prophetess); Margaret Atwood's *Power Politics* (a collection of poetry that places failed relationships in the context of second-wave feminism); Sarah Treem's *The How and the Why* (a play about mothers, daughters, and the biological ties that bind them); the artwork of African-American artist Kara Walker; Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (a "how-to" novel, but not really); Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (a novel about love, betrayal, and the Prague Spring); and Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* (a novel about four women from different historical moments whose lives intersect in fascinating ways).

Section 1003, MWF 9:30am-10:20am; Thompson

This section of HNRS 2020 seeks to continue developing critical thinking skills introduced in HNRS 2010, exploring a broad worldview through the lens of '3 Pillars of the Human Experience: Rationalism, Faith and Empiricism'. We will read books by Jim Cramer, Eugene Herrigel and Stephen Hawking, along with excerpts of works by influential writers/thinkers including Machiavelli, Plato, Sophocles, Descartes, Carlyle, Nietzsche, Sun Tzu, Cogan, and Tolstoy. These works will serve as a framework to explore political, economic, social, cultural and intellectual ideas and perspectives and how they influence the lives of individuals and shape our communities and the world.

Section 1004, TR 1:00pm-2:15pm; Browne

This section of "Critical Thinking about Great Ideas" relies on 2 major texts: Louis Pojman, *Who Are We? : Theories of Human Nature* and A.C. Grayling, *Ideas That Matter: The Concepts That Shape the 21st Century*. While the class will experience a broad array of ideas that provide the basis for various religious and political perspectives, the focus of the course will be on a few ideas that have in turn generated dozens of related ideas. Each of the 6 major ideas will be studied by (a) reading from the basic documents on which the idea relies, (b) studying criticisms of each idea, and (c) reading a play capturing the ethical dilemmas implicit in each idea (the professor will buy any plays that are not available online. Each of the 6 major ideas will be discussed in terms of its primary epistemology (how it decides to believe something), whether the idea is supportive of or rebellious against existing power structures in the society within which it emerged, and the value assumptions

implicit in the thinking of those who embrace the idea. The 6 major ideas encountered in the course are the following, listed with a hint at what we will read for each idea:

1. Religious Faith----sacred texts from assorted religions---Lucas Hnath, *The Christians*
2. Greek Humanism---Plato's Dialogues---Sophocles, *Antigone*
3. Scientific Revolution---Letters from Galileo's Trial and his *Letter to the Grand Duchess*-----Bertolt Brecht, *Galileo*
4. Democracy---Bill of Rights and Federalist papers---Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People*
5. Markets---Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* and Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*----Greg Kotis, *Urinetown*
6. Feminism---Amartya Sen, "100 Million Missing Women" and Juliet Mitchell, *Women: the Longest Revolution*----Caryl Churchill, *Vinegar Tom*

All writing assignments will focus on the skill of integration or synthesis or what some would call creative thinking. The final project will be to persuade us that we should have included a "7th major idea. In other words, you are invited to become a co-creator of this course. To do so you will need to demonstrate your understanding of the process we have used to examine each of the other 6.

Section 1005, TR 11:30am-12:45pm; Morgan-Russell

This section of HNRS 2020 uses Leslie Stevenson, et al.'s *Twelve Theories of Human Nature* to explore some influential ideas in Western and Eastern thought (from among Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Plato, Aristotle, the Bible, Islam, Kant, Marx, Freud, Existentialism, Darwin, and Secular Humanism) on the question of what it means to be human. In addition to Stevenson's book, we'll read several novels (including Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*) and view a film (Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*) to see how they attempt to answer the same questions about human and post-human nature through literature and film. Students should be prepared to read a lot and face some challenging existential issues, and will write a total of 25-30 pages in essays and exams over the course of the semester.

Section 1006, MW 4:30pm-5:45pm; Jones

Section 1010, MW 6:00pm-7:15pm; Jones

This section of Critical Thinking About Great Ideas will explore selected systems of thought that humans have used to organize their lives and communities. Why have ideas like Greek humanism, Buddhism, evolution, feminism, socialism, and Islam, for instance, endured? What do they have to say about the Big Questions: Why are we here? Where did we come from? How should we act? We will use Leslie Stevenson's *Thirteen Theories of Human Nature* as an introductory guidebook through some of these theories and supplement that with assorted primary texts from within the idea systems themselves. In past semesters we have used texts such as *I Am Malala*, *Antigone*, *The Communist*

Manifesto, and *The Handmaid's Tale*, among others. This semester we will add Yuval Harari's *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* as a historical integration of many of these ideas. Emphasis will be on critical analysis of the ideas and on synthesizing what they have to say.

Section 1007: TR 2:30pm-3:45pm; Emery

This section of HNRS 2020 focuses on the following “great ideas”: Judeo-Christianity, Humanism, Science, Democracy, Marxism, Existentialism, and Psychoanalysis. The readings are too numerous to list here, but include selections from the Bible, Plato, Franklin, Emerson, Galileo, Darwin, Rousseau, Hamilton and Madison, Hitler, Marx, Sartre, Freud, and Wollstonecraft, as well as plays, novels, and stories by Ibsen, Hawthorne, Melville, Hemingway, Camus, and Upton Sinclair.

Section 1008, TR 11:30am-12:45pm; Landgraf

This section of HNRS 2020 will examine major contributions to as well as critiques of humanist thought from Plato to today. We will use Leslie Stevenson's *Twelve Theories of Human Nature* as an introductory guidebook and supplement it with assorted primary texts that expand on or challenge the ideas discussed in the book. We will trace changes in philosophical, religious, political, and scientific thinking and examine some of the unintended political and social implications of several of humanism's most cherished assumptions (e.g. the dualisms between spirit and body, mind and matter, freedom and nature, civilized and uncivilized). The course thus aims to introduce students not only to major canonical texts and ideas that make up the humanist tradition of thought, but also reflect on some of the limits and contradictions in this canon. Major questions we will pursue in this course include (but are not limited to): how does Platonic and neo-platonic thought help us value and devalue our earthly existence? What are central aspects of religious thought and how did religious thinking change during the Reformation, during the Enlightenment, and again today? What are the limits of human knowledge? How is truth defined and defined differently in the sciences and in different philosophical traditions? How do universalist assumptions about “the human” affect definitions of race and gender? How does art, literature, and music expand our lives and our thinking? How do technologies—from plowing to writing, from the use of simple tools to complex machinery, from computers, to the internet and smart phones—help define and change humanity? What might the future hold for humanity?

Section 1011, MWF 11:30am-12:20pm; Schumann

This section of HNRS 2020 will explore the Great Idea of science in the traditions of the European Enlightenment. We will start with Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* and René Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, emphasizing the rejection of older Aristotelian views and rebuilding Western science on, among other foundations, a healthy degree of skepticism. Moving from theory to practice, we will look through a variety of eighteenth century works, not least the *Philosophical Transactions* of England's Royal Society, and

query whether the science of the Enlightenment was really all about Baconian empiricism and/or Cartesian rationalism. Moving closer to the present, we will consider critiques from Michael Polanyi, Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend, culminating with Ian Hacking's *Social Construction of What?* We will end on a comparatively lighter note, viewing and discussing Brian Greene's four-part Nova series, "The Fabric of the Cosmos".

Section 1012, TR 9:30am-10:45am; Murnen

Critical Thinking about Great Ideas is the second of two courses required of all Honors students in their first year. The course continues to apply the skills learned in HNRS 2010, but this semester we will consider some of the ideas that have shaped the world in which we live. This section of HNRS 2020: *Critical Thinking About Great Ideas* explores core theoretical frames across a broad worldview to engage key questions: What does it mean to be human?, How do we construct meaning of the world around us?, and How do these core ideas shape how we choose to act in our contemporary world? Starting with Leslie Stevenson's *Thirteen Theories of Human Nature*, we will engage several texts—fiction, nonfiction, film, etc.—on topics of ethics, education, human rights, etc. We will work on becoming stronger critical readers and analytic writers. Potential texts include: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (Wollstonecraft, 1782), Sophocles' *Oedipus* or *Antigone*, short stories by Flannery O'Connor or Grace Lin or others, Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* or Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Coates' *Between the World and Me* or other. Films and documentaries may include: Duvernay's *13th* or Blackmon's *Slavery By Another Name*, Star War's *Rogue One*, among other possibilities.

Section 1020, TR 4:00pm-5:15pm; Ghaffari

Section 1021, MW 4:30pm-5:45pm; Ghaffari

How can an idea change the world? How have various "Great Ideas" shaped who we are and our relation to the world around us? How can we come to have great ideas of our own? In this section of HNRS2020, we will answer these questions as we discuss the roles that crisis, uncertainty, and responsibility play in the revolution of thought, the development of faith, and the creation of new worlds. In addition to a primary text that will guide us through the history of ideas, we will read Jonathan Lear's *Radical Hope* (which tells the story of Plenty Coups, the last Chief of the Crow Nation) as well as Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (which covers the trial of Adolf Eichmann). What do the stories of Plenty Coups and Eichmann—two men facing uncertainty in a rapidly changing world—have to teach us? Hopefully, at the very least, we will discover what is essential about the critical and creative thinking practiced and developed in this course.

Required Texts: *Thirteen Theories of Human Nature*
Eichmann in Jerusalem
Radical Hope

Recommended Texts:

The Structure of Scientific Revolutions

Section 1022, MWF 12:30pm-1:20pm; Young

This course will focus on the idea of justice. This has been one of the most inspiring and controversial ideas in human history. It could be argued that having a conception of justice is crucial to any human being's ability to lead a good life and also to the foundations of any society. The notion of justice comes up in many contexts and in this course, we will examine a number of them through reading different philosophical perspectives on the topic over the millennia. We will also look at an application of the notion to a number of areas, including criminal justice, distributive justice, environmental justice, and issues such as affirmative action, same sex marriage, reparations for past wrongs, and duties to future generations. The main text for the course will be "Justice: A Reader" edited by Michael Sandel (Oxford University Press, 2007). There will also be additional readings on Canvas.