**Being Human**

**01:195:140**

Fall 2015

**Course description**

Definitions in literature and film of what it means to be human. Ancient conceptions of the ideal human being; early modern and modern definitions of the human in relation to ethnic others, animals, and machines.

**Course rationale**

What does it mean to be human? The course will attempt to answer this question by analyzing the representation of the human being over time in mainly European and American literary and filmic texts. The course begins with Greek and Judaeo-Christian philosophical and religious definitions: Plato’s description of Socrates; and the Book of Job and the Book of Matthew. The course follows then three groups of texts that explore changing definitions of the human: the ethnic Other as it emerges in Early Modern Europe and as it is defined today; the relationship of human beings to animals and alien beings; and the relationship of human beings to machines. Some non-Western texts will be introduced to provide a comparison/contrast. All readings are in translation.

The course will meet once a week for a lecture and once a week for a discussion section. Lectures will situate the texts in a historical background and sections will provide an opportunity to delve into issues raised in the texts and lectures in greater detail.

**The course meets the following goals of the SAS Core Curriculum:**

C. Arts and Humanities. AHo and AHp. In the course students will be asked to

o. Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.

p. Analyze arts and/or literatures in themselves and in relation to specific histories, values, languages, cultures, and technologies.

Assessment of SAS Core Curriculum goals: as their final written work for the course, students will be required to write a 5-7-page comparative essay that demonstrates their fulfillment of the above two goals.

**Syllabus**

Introduction. Placing the human being in context

Unit One: Three early conceptions of the ideal human being

Week One. The Greek model: Socrates. Readings: excerpts from four Platonic dialogues

Week Two. Judaeo-Christian models: The Book of Job; The Book of Matthew

Unit Two: The Ethnic Other

Week Three. The Human Being in Strange New Forms. Montaigne: *Essays*. “On Cannibalism “; Bartolomé de Las Casas: *History of the Indies (excerpts)*

Week Four. European Prospero and New World Caliban. Shakespeare: *The Tempest*

Week Five. A contemporary African writer reinterprets Prospero and Caliban. Ousmane Sembene: *Xala*

Week Six. Being human between cultures now. Gloria Anzaldúa: *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

**Midterm essay due**

Unit Three: Human Beings, Animals, and Aliens

Week Seven. A contemporary reflection on human beings’ early relations with animals: paintings from the Chauvet Cave in Southern France from up to 40,000 years ago: Werner Herzog’s *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (film)

Week Eight: Contrasting Chinese and Japanese Views : Animals in the Form of a Human Being. “Ren’s Story” and “The Lust of the Serpent”

Week Nine: The Animal/Human. Kafka: “The Burrow”

Week Ten: Humans and Aliens. *Aliens* (film)

Unit Four: Human Beings and Machines

Week Eleven. Creating an alternate form of being. Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein*

Week Twelve. Stanisław Lem: *Cyberiad.* (excerpts)Polish 1965

Week Thirteen. Jean-Luc Godard: *Alphaville: A Strange Adventure of Lemmy Caution* (film)

Week Fourteen. Conclusion

**Final Exam date: Final comparative essay due**

Note: All three films will be viewed individually, either online or in the Douglass Media Center.

**Course Requirements**

1. class discussion: 10%
2. near-weekly response papers: 30% (for due dates see section syllabi)
3. a 3-5-page midterm essay: 25% (due at lecture, Week Six)
4. a 5-7-page final comparative essay: 35% (due on the scheduled date for the final exam)

Total: 100%

**Grading rubric**

A=90-100; B+=87-89; B=80-86; C+=77-79; C=70-76; D=60-69; F=59 and below

**Policy on Plagiarism**

Plagiarism can include using information from published materials (including the internet) without acknowledging the source, teaming up with a classmate to write a paper, and having someone else write some or all of a paper for you. If I should discover evidence of plagiarism, I will pursue it following the university regulations on academic integrity, which can be found at this web site:

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity/shtml>.

Here is a plagiarism tutorial that students might wish to consult for clarification of what plagiarism is:

<http://sccweb.scc-net.rutgers.edu/douglass/sal/plagiarism/Intro.html>