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GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF CONTINUING STUDIES  
SUMMER 2012  
TIME AND LOCATION: THURSDAYS, TBA

## **THE HUMAN CONDITION**

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### **Overview**

What makes us human? How much of this is a part of our “nature” (e.g., biological hardware, chemistry, and physiological changes) and how much of it is due to how we are nurtured (our socialization, culture, and social interactions)? This course explores some of the most central aspects of the human condition and asks, “What makes us tick?” The class explores competing paradigms derived from a combination of studies and research from biology, medicine, psychology, sociology, economics, anthropology, archaeology, and historical observation. The structure of the course is inspired by the concept of a “hierarchy of needs”—beginning with the essential “lower order” aspects of the human condition moving up toward the problems and issues that are more often the focus of life once the essentials of life have been obtained. The course challenges the notion that 21<sup>st</sup> century human beings are all that different from those that existed in 100, 1,000, or even 10,000 years ago. It also seeks to understand how human behavior can vary so much across cultures now. Reading material for the course is a diverse combination of original source excerpts from the world’s religious and legal texts, and philosophers and scientists such as John Locke, René Descartes, B.F. Skinner, John Watson, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Adam Smith, Sun Tzu, Niccolò Machiavelli, Edward O. Wilson, and more. Lecture and the course readings are supplemented with suggested journal articles including current research as well as video excerpts on each week’s topics.

### **Faculty**

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### **Learning Objectives**

1. Identify and understand major theories of human decision making and behavior
2. Understand how humans have understood the concept of “human nature” over time and across cultures and what impact these understandings had on their lives
3. Demonstrate application of major theories of human decision making and behavior to a particular scenario or problem
4. Understand the biological and physiological contributions to human decision making and behavior
5. Understand the psychological and sociological contributions to human decision making and behavior
6. Demonstrate the ability to identify and deconstruct human thought(s) and action(s) for a specific historical event
7. Make predictions about human behavior using theories of human decision making and behavior for a specific scenario
8. Identify differences and similarities in human decision making and behavior over time and across cultures

9. Synthesize their own argument(s) for the “most important” influences on human decision making and behavior
10. Specialize in the application of one or more theories of human decision making and behavior in a final paper.

### **Course Books**

*Ideas of Human Nature: From the Bhagavad Gita to Sociobiology [Paperback]*

David P. Barash

Prentice Hall; 1 edition (February 7, 1998)

ISBN-10: 0136475876

ISBN-13: 978-0136475873

*Encounters in World History: Sources and Themes from the Global Past, Volume I and II*

Thomas Sanders, Samuel Nelson, Stephen Morillo and Nancy Ellenberger

McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages; 1 edition (April 21, 2005 and May 10, 2005)

Vol. 1

ISBN-10: 0072451017

ISBN-13: 978-0072451016

Vol 2.

ISBN-10: 0072451033

ISBN-13: 978-0072451030

*Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge [Paperback]*

Edward Osborne Wilson

Publisher: Vintage (March 30, 1999)

ISBN-10: 067976867X

ISBN-13: 978-0679768678

### **Grading**

The final grade will be determined as follows:

- 93% to 100% = A, 90% to 92% = A-
- 87% to 89% = B+, 83% to 86% = B, 80% to 82% = B-
- 77% to 79% = C+, 73% to 76% = C, 70% to 72% = C-
- 67% to 69% = D+, 60% to 66% = D, Below 60% = F

Grades will be based on participation in class, two exams, and a final project:

Active participation in class is worth **10%** of your final grade. Two written exams gauging your grasp of the course material and your ability to synthesize this will be given at mid-term and at the last meeting (see schedule below). Each of these is worth 30% of your grade (collectively **60%**)

The final **30%** of your grade will be based on a final paper that should consist of approximately 2,400 words.<sup>1</sup> This paper will focus on one of the human nature paradigms explored in the course and will include an application of that paradigm to specific examples or events of human decision making and behavior of interest to the student.

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<sup>1</sup> The paper should use a 12-point Times New Roman font and be double spaced with standard margins (1” top and bottom and 1.25” left and right). With these parameters a 2,400 word paper will be approximately 8 pages in length

### ***Plagiarism & the Georgetown Honor System***

The sources for all information and ideas in your papers must be documented using the style followed by the American Psychological Association (APA). In addition, all quotations must be identified as quotations, using quotation marks and documentation of the source of the quotation. Anything less than these standards is plagiarism and will be treated as such. Plagiarized work will be reported to Georgetown's Honor Council (see below). If the council finds that the work has been plagiarized, the work will receive an F for a first offense; a second plagiarism will earn an F for the course.

All students are expected to follow Georgetown's honor code unconditionally. We assume you have read the honor code material located at [www.georgetown.edu/honor](http://www.georgetown.edu/honor), and in particular have read the following documents: Honor Council Pamphlet, "What is Plagiarism?", "Sanctioning Guidelines", and "Expedited Sanctioning Process." Papers in this course will be electronically checked for plagiarism. Submitting material in fulfillment of the requirements of this course means that you have abided by the Georgetown honor pledge:

*In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.*

### ***Disabilities***

If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations or if you think you may have a disability and want to inquire about accommodations, please contact the Academic Resource Center at 202-687-8354 or [arc@georgetown.edu](mailto:arc@georgetown.edu).

### ***Attendance, snow, emergencies***

During inclement weather or other emergencies, check <http://preparedness.georgetown.edu> or call (202) 687-7669 for information on whether the university is open.

We have only 12 meetings together. Attendance is very important. If you are going to be missing a class please let the instructor know ahead of time. You are responsible for obtaining course material missed during any absence. Consistent with the policies of the Liberal Studies program, any student with two absences may be dropped from the class.

### **Schedule**

May 24

#### ***1) Dawn of human life, civilization, and the evolution of human nature***

**Big questions... Origins, the "state of nature," and why are we here?:** Comparative creation and origin (ancient and modern), Religious salvation and punishment (dealing with tragedy, plagues, disasters.), Civilization starts with food: From hunter gathers to agriculture, to fast food.

#### **Reading**

*Encounters*, Vol. 1, Ch. 2, 8, 9, 14

*Ideas of Human Nature*, Ch. 1-2

#### **Video**

*The Incredible Human Journey*, Episode 1 & 3

*History's Turning Points - 1347 AD The Black Death*

May 31

#### ***2) Communications, mediated realities***

**Language and the arts:** Emergence and evolution of language, visual communications from cave wall to cyberspace, is mass media a major force, minimal effect, or both?

Reading

*Encounters*, Vol. 1, Ch. 10

*Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge Ch. 1-3*

Journal Articles

Chomsky Noam (1959). *A Review of B. F. Skinner's Verbal Behavior Language*, 35: 26-58

Saffran, Jenny; R.N.Aslin, E.L. Newport (1996). "Statistical learning by 8-month-old infants." *Science* 274 (5294): 1926–192

Postman, Neil (1967). *Linguistics and the Pursuit of Relevance. The English Journal*, 56:1160-1165

Postman, Neil (1979). *The First Curriculum: Comparing School and Television. The Phi Delta Kappan*, 61:163-168

Video

*Excerpts of "Citizen Kane" and "Lost in Translation"*

June 7

**3) Love, sex, marriage, and socio-biology**

**What is love?:** The makings and development of human attraction, bonding, and modern conceptions of "romance," the roles of sex, gender, and sexuality in understandings of "human nature."

Reading

*Ideas of Human Nature*, Ch. 7, 15, 17, 18

*Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge Ch. 4-6*

Journal Articles

Bullough, Vern L. (1998). *Alfred Kinsey and the Kinsey Report: Historical Overview and Lasting Contributions. The Journal of Sex Research*, 35:27-131

Reece, Michael, Debbie Herbenick, et. al. (2010). *Findings from the NSSHB. The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 7: 243-373

Video

*Excerpts of "Love Actually"*

*Excerpts of History of Sex*

June 14

**4) Security and order**

**Who is in charge?:** How we choose our leaders from tribal leaders, to feudal monarchy, to democracy to the next "thing" (or the "End of History")? What is a citizen and how the "outsider" and notions of "less than" have dominated in-group/out-group conflict (prejudice and discrimination).

Reading

*Encounters*, Vol. 1, Ch. 3, 5, 11, 12

*Encounters*, Vol. 2, Ch. 6

*Ideas of Human Nature*, Ch. 13

Journal Articles

Cheibub, Jose Antonio, Adam Przeworski, Fernando Papaterra Limongi Neto, and, Michael M. Alvarez. (1996). *What Makes Democracies Endure? Journal of Democracy*, 7:39-55

Video

*The Hidden History of Rome*

June 21

**5) Economics and the ir(rational) human**

**Money, property and exchange:** From agrarian feudalism, to free markets, to state-planned economies. The "rules of the economic game" and how these effect human decision making. Human rationality in economics.

### Reading

*Encounters*, Vol. 2, Ch.7, 11

*Ideas of Human Nature*, Ch. 4

### Journal Articles

David, Paul A. (1985). *Clio and the Economics of QWERTY*. *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 75:332-337

Tsebelis, George. (1988). *Nested Games: The Cohesion of French Electoral Coalitions*. *British Journal of Political Science*, 18:145-170

### Video

Excerpts of “The Corporation”

June 28

### **6) Midterm and final paper topic selection**

July 5

### **7) Movements toward Equality**

**Expansion of rights, liberties, and status:** The voice of the peasant and laborer, critical theory perspectives, social movements, civil rights, labor rights, women’s movements.

### Reading

*Encounters*, Vol. 1, Ch. 6

*Encounters*, Vol. 2, Ch. 3, 14

### Journal Articles

Stewart, Abigail J., Isis H. Settles, Nicholas J. G. Winter. (1998). *Women and the Social Movements of the 1960s: Activists, Engaged Observers, and Nonparticipants*. *Political Psychology*, 19:63-94

Carty, Victoria. (2006). *Labor Struggles, New Social Movements, and America's Favorite Pastime: New York Workers Take on New Era Cap Company*. *Sociological Perspectives*, 49:239-259

### Video

Excerpts of “Reds”

July 12

### **8) Advancement and Invention**

**Technology and science:** enlightenment, the industrial age, and the digital age, what drives entrepreneurship and invention? Technological leaps in response to human problems, the emergence of modern medicine, logic, and science.

### Reading

*Encounters*, Vol. 2, Ch. 4

*Ideas of Human Nature*, Ch. 6

### Journal Articles

Bhaduri, Sumit. (2003). *Science, Society, and Technology: Three Cultures and Multiple Visions*. *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, 12:303-308

Glismann, Hans H., Ernst-Jürgen Horn (1988). *Comparative Invention Performance of Major Industrial Countries: Patterns and Explanations*. *Management Science*, 34:1169-1187

Demerath III, N. J. (2002). *A Sinner among the Saints: Confessions of a Sociologist of Culture and Religion*. *Sociological Forum*, 17:1-19

### Video

Excerpts of “Mindwalk”

Excerpts of “The Elegant Universe”

July 19

### **9) Good and Evil**

**Religion and relativism:** Sinners and saints through the ages. What is morality? Post-modern problems. Social science and identifying the “good person” who does “bad things.” Development of law, challenges and problems of the justice system.

Reading

*Encounters*, Vol. 2, Ch. 12

*Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* Ch. 7

Journal Articles

Alford, C. Fred (1990). *The Organization of Evil*. *Political Psychology*, 11:5-27

Dallmayr, Fred. (2006). *An End to Evil? Philosophical and Political Reflections*. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 60:169-186

Carter, Alan. (2005). *Evolution and the Problem of Altruism*. *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 123:213-230

Video

*BBC Replication of the Milgram Experiment*

*Ted Lecture: Phillip Zimbardo on “how people become monsters ... or heroes”*

*Murder on a Sunday Morning*

July 26

**10) Leisure**

**Entertainment, childhood, amusing ourselves to death:** The “late coming of leisure,” childhood, and mass amusements. Is pop culture an even better “opiate of the masses?”

Reading

*Ideas of Human Nature*, Ch. 8-11

Journal Articles

Villarica, Hans. (2011). *Maslow 2.0: A New and Improved Recipe for Happiness*. *The Atlantic*: Aug 17 2011

Video

*Excerpts of “An anthropological introduction to YouTube” and “Generation YouTube: Pranks to Profits”*

August 2

**11) The Big History Question: Do people matter?**

**Marxism and history: Do revolutions need leaders?** Social forces and human events, big questions about free will and social determinism.

Journal Articles

Skocpol, Theda. (1976). *France, Russia, China: A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions* *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 18:175-210

Other

Final review, final paper workshop

August 9

**12) Final exam, final papers due**