

Animal, Human, Divine

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Office hours: Tuesday, 2-3; Wednesday, 11-12;
and by appointment

*Given that we are both products and creators of the world,
how then shall we live?*

There is no question but that, on some level, we human beings are “products”: of our genes (“nature”), of our upbringing (“nurture”), and of the particular culture(s) we inhabit. Indeed, this is so indisputably the case that some thinkers have concluded that we are *nothing but* a product and that, as such, we do would do well to shed our narcissistic illusions about how much we can control our lives and destinies. And yet: There is also no question but that we are “creators” too – of the very culture that shapes us, of works of art and music and literature (that is, products of human “creativity”), and, not least, of our very selves. But how can both be true? *Are both true?*

In the wake of Darwin, in particular (but also thinkers like Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud), there have emerged profound and (for some) disturbing questions about the uniqueness and “specialness” of the animal we call “human”: In what ways are we like, and unlike, other animals? To what extent are we determinate products of nature and nurture and to what extent free? How responsible are we for our own behavior? How can the view of the human being found in much of modern science, evolutionary and otherwise, be reconciled with religious and spiritual life? Finally, how does our view of who and what we are affect the way we think about how we ought to conduct our lives? In short: *Who are we? How then shall we live?*

We cannot, and will not, gain closure on these questions. We cannot get completely outside ourselves (we’re humans looking at humans); and even if we could there would more than likely be much about the human condition that would remain mysterious. But we will try, hard, to gain some understanding of these issues and of ourselves. *It is possible. . .*

REQUIRED TEXTS

Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

Keller, *The Story of My Life*

Plato. *The Republic*

Ridley, *The Darwin Reader*

Shattuck. *The Forbidden Experiment*

St. Augustine. *Confessions*

Tobin et al. *Preschool in Three Cultures*

OUTLINE OF COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS

Thursday, 8/30: Animal, Human, Divine – Fundamental Questions

To Become Human, Part I: Out of the Darkness

Tuesday, 9/4: Keller, *The Story of My Life*

Thursday, 9/6: *Story*, continued

FYP SYMPOSIUM:

HELEN KELLER AND THE RIDDLE OF SELFHOOD

Thursday, September 6, 7:00 pm, Hanselman Hall

To Become Human, Part II: Language, Reality, Selfhood

Tuesday, 9/11: Keller, selections from *The World I Live In* (ERes)

Screening of *The Miracle Worker*

Thursday, 9/13: Freeman, “In the Name of the Self” (ERes)

Ozick, “What Helen Keller Saw” (ERes)

Human Nature and the Problem of Justice

Tuesday, 9/18: Plato, *The Republic*, Part I (pp. 3-52)

Thursday, 9/20: *Republic*, Part V (pp. 130-156)

Beauty, Truth, Goodness

Tuesday, 9/25: *Republic*, Part VII (pp. 189-248)

FYP SYMPOSIUM ON THE REPUBLIC
Tuesday, September 25, 7:00, Hanselman Hall

Thursday, 9/27: *Republic*, Part IX (pp. 308-334)

Wildness and Civilization

Tuesday, 10/2: Shattuck, *The Forbidden Experiment*

Thursday, 10/4: *Forbidden*, continued

Screening of *The Wild Child*

Education and Socialization

Tuesday, 10/9: No class (Columbus Day holiday)

Thursday, 10/11: Tobin et al., *Preschool in Three Cultures*, Chapters 1 & 2

Culture and Development

Tuesday, 10/16: *Preschool*, Chapters 3 & 4

Thursday, 10/18: *Preschool*, Chapter 5

The World Beyond Culture?

Tuesday, 10/23: St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Books I-III

Thursday, 10/25: *Confessions*, Books IV-VI

Transcendence and the “Divine”

Tuesday, 10/30: St. Augustine, Books VII-IX

Thursday, 11/1: James, selections from *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (ERes)

The Evolutionary Challenge

Tuesday, 11/6: Ridley, *The Darwin Reader*, Chapters 1-3

Thursday, 11/8: *Darwin*, Chapter 4

Animality and Humanity

Tuesday, 11/13: *Darwin*, Chapter 6

Thursday, 11/15: *Darwin*, Chapter 7

Eating and Being

Tuesday, 11/20: Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Chapters 15-20

Thursday, 11/22: Thanksgiving!

The Challenge of Humanity

Tuesday, 11/27: Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

Thursday, 11/29: *Search*, continued

Who are we?

Tuesday, 12/4: Reading to be determined

Course Requirements

Requirements for the course consist of:

- 1) Three 5-7 page essays (typed, double-spaced)
- 2) An in-class final examination (on Wednesday, December 12, at 2:30)
- 3) A reflective journal, consisting of at least ten single-page entries (typed, single-spaced). Entries are to be complete and brought to class each Thursday.
- 4) Active engagement in class and participation in class discussion
- 5) Preparation of one real, significant question for each class session

The three essays, taken together, will count for approximately 50% of your grade. The final exam will count 25%. The remaining 25% of your grade will be comprised of your work on the reflective journal as well as your engagement and involvement in class.

The reflective journal is an opportunity for you precisely to reflect, to *think*, on paper, about what you are reading and how it relates to the life you live. This does not mean that it's merely an opportunity to offer opinions about the reading. Nor does it need to be explicitly autobiographical. Rather, and again, it's an opportunity for you to really "take on" the ideas at hand, to

interrogate them – and to have them interrogate you. Some weeks I will collect your journal entries, some not. As for how they will be evaluated, I will simply be giving you a grade of “check,” “check plus,” or “check minus” (along, of course, with some more substantial feedback).

In regard to involvement and engagement in class (and class discussion), my main message to you is that I am much more interested in quality than quantity. You needn't, therefore, volunteer an idea every time I ask a question. And please don't worry if you see yourself as a more “reserved” student when it comes to offering your own perspective on things (though that might change!); there's room in this class for everybody. More than anything, I need you to *be there* – not just physically but mentally and, at times, spiritually. (I will explain what I mean by this in class.)

A Few Words on Academic Integrity

Here is what I want to say, in the simplest of terms: ***the work you do for this course must be your own***. This doesn't mean that you can't draw on others' work or be influenced by it; no one expects “one's own” work to be utterly devoid of external influence. What it does mean is that the product you create must reflect *your* efforts, *your* efforts, *your* imagination. This will involve proper citation and so on. As importantly, though, it will also involve a moral promise on your part – a promise that you must uphold and enact as you go about your work. **Please familiarize yourself with the Academic Honesty Policy outlined in the College Catalog. You are responsible for knowing the Policy and abiding by it.**

Academic integrity is not only about honesty, however. It is about preparedness for class, intellectual commitment, openness to new ideas, the capacity to listen to others, the ability to engage in sustained dialogue and debate about important issues, and much more. Let's work together to create the best possible learning environment.

As concerns outside-of-class (i.e., co-curricular) events and activities, some will be required of the entire FYP, others will be required of particular sections, and others still will be considered optional (which is not to say unimportant!). Indeed, my main message here is that the co-curricular events and activities are an integral part of the FYP. They are what link together learning and living and are vitally important to our work together.