The Human Event

HON 272  Spring 20XX  Thomas.W.Martin@asu.edu

Office Hours: CNTR 70  MW 11:30-12 and 2-3

Course Description:

The Human Event is an intensive, interdisciplinary seminar focusing on key social and intellectual currents in the development of humanity in its diversity. Students examine human thought and imagination from various perspectives, including philosophy, history, literature, religion, science, and art. Coursework emphasizes critical thinking, discussion, and argumentative writing. Exploring texts from approximately 1600 to the present, HON 272 is the second half of a two-semester sequence that starts with HON 171.

Course Objectives:

1. To improve the student’s ability to reason critically and communicate clearly.
2. To cultivate the student’s ability to engage in intellectual discourse through reading, writing, and discussion.
3. To broaden the student’s historical and cultural awareness and understanding.
4. To deepen awareness of the diversity of human societies and cultures.
5. To instill intellectual breadth and academic discipline in preparation for more advanced study.

I teach this as a “science emphasis” version of the Human Event. A fundamental theme that runs through this survey is the development – and occasional breakdown – of the modern distinction between subjectivity vs. objectivity. This so-called subject/object dualism has been a recurrent source of paradox for the last few centuries: moreover, 20th-century discoveries into the workings of the physical and mental realms appear to have only magnified the problem, rather than solve it.

This duality, however, is of more than simply philosophical interest. It bears directly on fundamental questions such as scientific methodology, the nature of evidence, and even how a “sane” individual should behave in society. We will therefore always consider these issues in a larger historical context, culminating in a contemporary question that blurs classical distinctions still further: i.e., the capacity of humans to act as both genetic engineers, and, eventually, the genetically engineered.
Course Materials:

Required physical text: *The Double Helix* by James Watson (MUST be the Norton Critical Edition)

All other readings are provided as electronic documents (PDF format) posted in Blackboard. Students MUST come to class with the reading either on their laptop or in hardcopy form. Laptops or other devices are permitted SOLELY to use the relevant PDF. *Abuse of the laptop policy will result in grade deduction equivalent to class absence.*

Grading:

*Argumentative Papers (55% of course grade).* You will write three (3) six-page papers for this course (+/- one page). Your lowest-grade paper will count for 15% of your final grade, while the other two papers will count for 20% each. The three papers will each be based on the primary works, with general guidelines provided separately. In these papers, you will hone your ability to analyze texts critically, as well as integrate concepts across texts. A range of prompts will be provided for each assignment.

*Class Participation (30% of course grade).* This means far more than simply showing up to class. Consistent attendance is assumed: you can miss no more than two class sessions without damaging your class participation grade. You are expected to have done the reading, and come to class – text in hand – prepared to discuss it. Successful discussions depend entirely on preparation. (In-class quizzes may occur at any time.)

*Reading Reactions (15% of course grade).* These will be brief essays deposited in Blackboard the midnight before each class. A standard sheet and instructions will be provided. Failure to submit more than two Reading Reflections will begin to impact your *Class Participation* grade as well. (You cannot substantively participate if you have not reflected on the readings.)

Format for naming files: (First Name)_(Last Initial)_RR#
e.g.; “John_D_RR3” for the third reading reaction

Policies and Procedures:

*Email Communication:* All class announcements and event updates will be sent out through ASU email. *It is your responsibility to ensure your account is working.*

*Attendance:* If you miss more than two classes, your Class Participation grade will be lowered by a letter grade for each additional absence. Five total absences will automatically result in a failure for Class Participation. You MUST bring the assigned text to class, or you will be marked absent. Arriving late to class more than twice will result in deductions from your class participation grade.
**Due Dates and Late Assignments:** Papers are due by the time stated in the syllabus. If you have a documented, valid excuse to turn in an assignment after a deadline (serious illness, death in immediate family, etc.) inform me as soon as possible PRIOR to the due date. Otherwise, NO late assignments will be accepted.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is defined as deliberately passing off someone else’s words or ideas as your own: it is theft of intellectual property. In the “real” world, such theft can result in severe penalties. In the world of the Human Event, it will result in failure of the course, as well as referral to the Student Conduct Committee of the University and possible expulsion from the University. The Barrett Honors College utilizes a plagiarism service that checks a database of over 70,000 student essays and text notes. Besides not being worth the risk, plagiarism completely undermines everything we are trying to accomplish. **Violators will receive no sympathy.**

**Student Conduct:** Students must conduct themselves according to the ASU policies posted online at [https://eoss.asu.edu/dos/srr](https://eoss.asu.edu/dos/srr). These include the ASU Student Code of Conduct and the Student Academic Integrity Policy. For information on policies for grievances and grade complaints, follow the following links at [http://honors.asu.edu](http://honors.asu.edu): (1) Advising and Curriculum, (2) Course Policies and Procedures, and (3) Student Academic Grievance Procedures.

**Writing Center**

The Barrett Writing Center at Polytechnic is relatively small (consisting of a single tutor) but the student/tutor ratio is still higher than it is at the Tempe campus. You will be provided with a grade deal of support in your papers both in and out of class. Nevertheless, you should make use of all resources available to you, and this includes the Writing Center. More information about scheduling will be provided around the time of the first paper assignment.
Class Schedule

Daily Schedule Subject to Change
PDF files available on Blackboard

M Jan X  Course Introduction
W Jan X  Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy [RR#1]
M Jan X  Martin Luther King Day (No Class)
W Jan X  Copernicus, On the Revolutions [RR#2]
          Galileo: The Starry Messenger
M Jan X  Galileo in Rome [RR#3]
W Jan X  Galileo, Two Chief World Systems [RR#4]
M Feb X  Newton, Excerpts from Principia, Optics [RR#5]
W Feb X  Tribunal I (prep)
M Feb X  Tribunal I  Galileo
W Feb X  Faculty Retreat (No Class)
          Paper Plan due Sat. Feb X
M Feb X  Peer Review
W Feb X  Vermeer: Paintings and a Puzzle [RR#6]
S Feb X  Paper #1 due by 11:59 PM
M Feb X  **Smith:** *Self-deceit* [RR#7]  
*NY Times on Narcissism*

W Feb X  **Darwin,** *On the Origin of Species* [RR#8]

M Mar X  **Darwin,** *Descent of Man* [RR#9]

W Mar X  **Galton,** *Eugenics* [RR#10]  
*(Buck vs. Bell Ruling)*

**Spring Break (March X – X)**

M Mar X  **Abbott,** *Flatland* [RR#11]

W Mar X  **Freud,** *Psychoanalysis* [RR#12]  
*(Dali’s Paintings)*

M Mar X  **Einstein:** *Atomic War and Peace* [RR#13]  
*Letter to Roosevelt*

W Mar X  **Arendt,** *Eichmann in Jerusalem* [RR#14]

M Mar X  **T. Nagel,** *What is It Like To Be a Bat?* [RR#15]

W Apr X  **Turing,** *Machine Computing and Intelligence* [RR#16]  
*(Conway’s Game of Life)*

**Paper Plan due Sat Apr X**

M Apr X  Peer Review

W Apr X  **Dawkins,** *Selfish Genes and Selfish Memes* [RR#17]

S Apr X  **Paper #2 due by 11:59 PM**
M Apr X  Watson, *The Double Helix* [RR#18]

W Apr X  Watson, *The Double Helix* [RR#19]

M Apr X  Bostrom, *Transhumanism* [RR#20]

*Film: Memento* (6-9 PM; Honors Office)

W Apr X  Gelsinger, *Jesse's Intent* [RR#21]

M Apr X  In-Class Tribunal: *Engineering Humans*

W Apr X  Course Summation

**Th May X**  Inter-Class Tribunal: *Engineering Humans*

(6-8 PM; Blackbox Theatre)

**S May X**  Paper #3 due by 11:59 PM