

"If I have seen further it is by standing on ye shoulders of Giants."

- Isaac Newton, 1675

# ISF 198: BEING HUMAN

Fall 2018: Wednesdays, 6-7:59 p.m., Evans 2

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Undergraduate Course Facilitators:

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## Description

This course seeks to understand what it means to "be human." That is, we seek to identify what a human is, what a human is capable of, and what a human is limited by. Through weekly discussions, we will explore what a human can feel and know, how it can feel and know things, and what the meaning or purpose of a human feeling and knowing things is. We will investigate how and why humans come together to form governments and societies, how humans fight perceived injustices, and how humans choose to identify themselves. We will ponder how and why humans choose to use science, religion, and psychology to discern meaning in existence, what a "perfect" human might look like, and what death ultimately is. We will ask what the very future of humanity will look like. We will think about social structures, artistic-cultural productions, identity, and values as we proceed on this journey. And we will do all this in about ten weeks.

The instrument we will use in this ambitious adventure will be a selection of some of the most profound and magnificent writings from the intellectual giants of humanity. The reading list includes works of philosophy, literature, poetry, drama, and even political treatises. By standing on the shoulders of these giants, we will be able to see further than we ever could on our own.

## Method of Instruction

Discussion-based, collaborative-learning between peers on seminal texts of human thought.

## Key Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

1. Compare and contrast themes and ideas in the texts.
2. Draw relevance from the texts to the present day.
3. Critically analyze, evaluate, and critique the texts.
4. Articulate the core arguments and purposes of each text.
5. Communicate effectively their views using evidence found in the texts.

Texts):

1. Epic of Gilgamesh
2. Confucius, *Analects*
3. Sophocles, *Antigone*
4. *The Quran*
5. Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*
6. Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*
7. Freud, *Civilization and Discontents*
8. Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems*
9. Murakami, *Men without Women*

Assignments and Grade Distribution

Weekly independent close reading of assigned text – Mandatory

Insightful weekly thought papers of 1 page answering a prompt pertaining to the reading for the week – 25%

Intelligent participation and discussion of reading material in class – 25%

A well-thought-out final paper (prompt and length will be determined in class) – 50%

P – 70% and higher

NP – 69% and lower

*Schedule of Weekly Readings and Assignments*

*Note: Assignments and readings are to be completed before class for the week listed. You will be informed of whether you will be reading an excerpt or the entirety of the work well in advance.*

*(Subject to change throughout the semester)*

**Week One**

September 5 Course logistics; Introductory Lecture (Justin)

- No reading or thought paper due.

**Week Two**

September 19 Discussion: *Epic of Gilgamesh*

- Complete assigned reading before class.
- Thought Paper 1 due before class.

**Week Three**

September 26 Discussion: Confucius, *Analects*

- Complete assigned reading before class.

- Thought Paper 2 due before class.

#### **Week Four**

October 3 Discussion: Sophocles, *Antigone* (Special Activity: Will perform selected scenes in class.)

- Complete assigned reading before class.
- Thought Paper 3 due before class.

#### **Week Five**

October 10 Discussion: *The Quran*

- Complete assigned reading before class.
- Thought Paper 4 due before class.

#### **Week Six**

October 17 Discussion: Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*

- Complete assigned reading before class.
- Thought Paper 5 due before class.

#### **Week Seven**

October 24 Discussion: Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*

- Complete assigned reading before class.
- Thought Paper 6 due before class.

#### **Week Eight**

October 31 Discussion: Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

- Complete assigned reading before class.
- Thought Paper 7 due before class.

#### **Week Nine**

November 7 Discussion: Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems*

- Complete assigned reading before class.
- Thought Paper 8 due before class.

#### **Week Ten**

November 14 Discussion: Murakami, *Men without Women*; Capstone Lecture (Charlotte)

- Complete assigned reading before class.
- Thought Paper 9 due before class.
- Final Paper Due at beginning of class.