
SYLLABUS

This course looks at some of the ideas of a range of writers who have engaged in various ways with the concept of being “human.” The focus is on contemporary perspectives, and topics and texts will depend in part on the direction of class discussion, but will include perspectives on: language, belief systems, biology and psychology, neuroscience and artificial intelligence.

TEXTS: —Selections from various sources, provided in installments—e.g. Plato, *Republic*; Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lie”; Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*; Pinker, *The Language Instinct*; Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World*; Shermer, *The Believing Brain*; Grayling, *The God Question*; Dennett, *From Bacteria to Bach and Back*; Darwin, *The Origin of Species*; Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*; Sapolsky, *Behave*; Harari, *Sapiens*.

—Additional material will include films, online videos and clips, as well as short articles discussing related ideas from thinkers such as Bertrand Russell, Stanley Milgram, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Alan Turing, Isaac Asimov, V.S. Ramachandran, Craig Venter, and Ray Kurzweil.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. **Reading Assignments:** Readings will generally be assigned one week before they are to be discussed in class. Students are expected to have read the assigned material before class, and to bring it with them to class for discussion. It is expected that all reading will be done with the aid of a dictionary, and that students will ask for help if they have difficulty in understanding the material.
 2. **Exams:** The mid-term and final exams will cover all assigned readings and all material covered in class. They may include identifications, short answers, multiple choice, definitions, and essays.
 3. **Attendance and Punctuality:** Attendance of all classes is required; three hours will be excused. All students are expected to attend on time, and not to disturb the class once it has started; the use of mobile phones and other electronic devices is not permitted.
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| <u>GRADING:</u> | Mid-Term Exam: | 45% |
| | Final Exam: | 45% |
| | Attendance/Participation: | 10% |
