

PSY 492-01
THE PSYCHOLOGY CAPSTONE
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:00 – 3:20 p.m.
Online

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Office Hours: by appointment

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Course Description

The purpose of this capstone course is to explore different theories of human nature, the relationships among these theories, and their implications for personal insight and growth, for contemporary culture and its institutions, and for the future of our species. Throughout this course, we will also consider the proper scope, role, and conduct of psychological science. Our various explorations will revolve around the central theme of ***self and society***, and we will adopt a seminar format (guided student discussions as opposed to formal lectures) for most of our class meetings. This course is worth three credits.

Learning Objectives

Upon successfully completing this course, students should be able to (a) identify concepts associated with major theoretical perspectives in psychology, (b) describe the strengths and weaknesses of competing psychological perspectives, (c) determine whether and how competing perspectives can be integrated, (d) apply theories and basic research findings to real-world situations, (e) recognize sources of bias in psychological research, (f) appreciate interdisciplinary approaches to psychological questions, and (g) write in a professional style.

Blackboard

Our Blackboard website is an integral component of this course. You will be using Blackboard to access required articles and films, as well as to submit all our writing assignments. And I will be using Blackboard to post important announcements and to send messages to members of this class.

Virtual Class Meetings

With just a couple of exceptions this semester, we will have synchronous class meetings every Tuesday and Thursday starting at noon. Ideally, you should have reliable access to high-speed internet and a device with both a webcam and a microphone to fully participate in these meetings. If you have concerns about any of these technological requirements, contact me so that we can discuss your options.

To attend a class meeting, go to Blackboard, enter the Virtual Meeting Space on the Content page, and then follow the Zoom link named Class Sessions. Look for our scheduled meeting, click Join, and wait for me to admit you to the session. And please be ready to turn on your camera and microphone – I would like to see and hear all of you during class!

Course Materials

Throughout the semester, we will be grappling with several provocative books, a few films, and a variety of articles drawn from both academic and nonacademic publications. These materials are described below to help you prepare for our intellectual journey. The dates of all reading and film assignments are given in our course schedule.

Books. There are six required books for this course, which are listed here in the order we will be reading them:

- Sigmund Freud (1930) – *Civilization and Its Discontents*
- B. F. Skinner (1948) – *Walden Two*
- Viktor E. Frankl (1962) – *Man's Search for Meaning*
- David Sloan Wilson (2019) – *This View of Life*
- Patricia S. Churchland (2019) – *Conscience*
- Francis Fukuyama (2022) – *Liberalism and Its Discontents*

Understanding the relationship between individual and collective processes ideally involves an interdisciplinary approach, and some of the above books come from outside of the field of psychology. Nevertheless, nearly all of them closely align with specific psychological perspectives on self and society.

Our discussions and assignments will refer extensively to these books and, as you read each one, you should keep the following questions in mind:

- How does the author conceptualize human nature?
- How are the dynamics between the self and one's society (or civilization or culture) viewed from this psychological perspective?
- What are the potential moral, civic, and/or political implications of this perspective?
- Do you agree with the author's claims, and why or why not?
- How does this psychological perspective relate to previous perspectives we have explored?

In order to get the most out of these books, I encourage all of you to (a) **pace your reading of each of the texts**, with the aim of reading a chapter or two each day during the week prior to our first write-ups and discussions of the material; (b) **engage in a "mental dialogue" with the author as you read the text** – that is, actively question (rather than passively accept) each of the author's claims; and (c) **take notes as you progress through the text**, keeping track of your various reactions to and struggles with the material.

Films. We will also be watching four films this semester and discussing them in relation to our books. These films are *Dreams Rewired* (2015); *Melancholia* (2011); *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010); and *Do the Right Thing* (1989). You can access all these films via Blackboard, where I have embedded them as Panopto files. You should be able to play them on a wide range of devices, but I encourage using the biggest screen and the best speakers available to you.

Please note that the films assigned for this course are not your typical Hollywood productions – they exist more as provocations to thought than as mere entertainments, and you may find some of them strange or disturbing in terms of the attitudes and behaviors they portray. But the field of psychology ideally covers the full range of human thought and activity, and I urge you to approach each of these films with an open mind and a clinical eye.

Articles. Nine articles will be assigned throughout the semester to tie in with specific films and homework assignments. These articles serve to reify certain theoretical claims from the books, to update older ideas in light of newer empirical evidence, and to fill in important conceptual gaps between the psychological perspectives we will be considering. All such articles are available on Blackboard.

Course Evaluation

The maximum number of points you can receive in this course is 100, and point totals will be translated into grades at the end of the semester using this scale:

93 – 100 points = A	73 – 76 points = C
90 – 92 points = A-	70 – 72 points = C-
87 – 89 points = B+	67 – 69 points = D+
83 – 86 points = B	63 – 66 points = D
80 – 82 points = B-	60 – 62 points = D-
77 – 79 points = C+	59 points or less = F

Your grade will be cumulatively determined by the following:

Attendance and Participation. Your attendance will be recorded, and – along with your in-class participation – is worth 20 points. You are allowed to miss one class meeting for any reason without penalty. After that, however, each unexcused absence will deduct two points from your attendance score.

GVSU's official attendance policy, which includes information about what counts as an excused absence, can be found at <https://www.gvsu.edu/catalog/2021-2022/navigation/academic-policies-and->

[regulations.htm#anchor-44](#). I will need some kind of documentation to forgive more than one missed session.

Given the nature of this course, everyone is expected to keep up with our assigned readings and films, and to be fully present during our class discussions and activities. And, of course, everyone should do their very best to arrive to our virtual class meetings on time.

Talking Points. Four times this semester, you will be submitting a set of three talking points about an assigned film and a companion article. These talking points should be written such that, if raised during class, they could stimulate some interesting conversations about the material. They can include questions you would like to ask, scenes or quotes you would like to discuss, connections you made with other things you have learned or experienced, or your personal reactions – be they intellectual or emotional – to what you watched and read. Each set of talking points should demonstrate that you engaged with both the film and the article.

Your talking point submissions throughout the semester are worth 10 points in total. Due dates can be found in our course schedule. **Late talking points will not be accepted.**

Peer-Responded Journal. For each of our books, you will be assigned to a journal group on Blackboard consisting of yourself and two other members of the class. The online journaling that you will do in these groups is one of the most important components of this course, and it is worth 30 points. Please read the following very carefully.

Six times during the semester, you will submit a substantial (**600 words minimum, no maximum**) journal entry engaging with whichever book we have just finished reading. These entries should be written informally – although I expect you to write using complete grammatical sentences, you should not be composing formal essays with polished beginnings, middles, and endings. Rather, jump into the material whenever something strikes you as provocative, problematic, or perplexing. Do not merely summarize the material or attempt to demonstrate your “mastery” of the text. Instead, **struggle** with it – the greater the struggle, the better the journal entry.

Keep in mind that I am using the term “struggle” in the broadest and most positive sense possible. That is, you should not limit the focus of your journal entries to aspects of the material that you found difficult to comprehend, but should more generally (and more importantly) discuss things that challenged your customary beliefs and perceptions, that sparked new questions in your mind, that led to new insights or even inspired you in some way, that raised red flags for being logically inconsistent or factually incorrect, or that otherwise prompted a strong reaction from you. In other words, do not simply treat the term “struggle” as being synonymous with “confusion.”

(And to the extent that you do write about confusions you had with any given text in your journal entries, the struggles you describe should be deep as opposed to shallow ones. For example, if you simply write something like “I have no idea what Freud was getting at in Chapter 1 of *Civilization and Its Discontents*” without saying anything else about the chapter, this hardly suggests much effort on your part in trying to work out possible interpretations of the material. Likewise, if you come across an unfamiliar word, concept, reference, or allusion in any of the assigned readings, you should try doing a web search for clarification before citing it as a point of confusion. The bottom line here is that you should treat every initial roadblock to comprehension as an invitation to further thinking and learning, rather than as an excuse to check out until the going gets easier.)

Every time a journal entry is due, there will be two journal responses due three days later. These responses should be substantial (**300 words minimum, no maximum**) engagements with the journal entries you receive from the two other members of your peer-responded journal group. In these responses, you should spend little time praising – and no time condescending to – either the journal entry or the journalist. Instead of making judgments, grab on to some of the points raised by the journalist and further the discussion. Once again, no formal beginning, middle, and ending is expected or desired. In all your responses, please speak directly to your classmates – that is, do not refer to them in the third person. I will be reading everything you write, but you are each other’s primary audience. And yes, you

should read the responses you receive from the other members of your journal group – and you can reply to these responses whenever you would like to turn a discussion into a conversation.

No individual journal entry or peer response will be graded, but an overall score will be given for your entire set of entries and responses. You will not be evaluated in terms of "getting the right answers," as there is no such approved list for any of our books. To receive high marks for your efforts, do the following on a regular basis:

1) **Produce a sufficient quantity of relevant writing in a timely manner.** (If you do this, it will be hard to get less than 18 out of 30 points.)

2) In addition to (1) above, **struggle, be engaged, open up, and deal with the difficult.** That is, along with describing the sections of the book that struck you as provocative, problematic, or perplexing, discuss *why* you found these sections provocative, problematic, or perplexing – and how you attempted to come to grips with the material. And refrain from simply rehashing your original entries in your peer responses. (If you do these things, it will be hard to get less than 21 out of 30 points.)

3) In addition to (1) and (2) above, **demonstrate significant improvement from the beginning of the semester to the end.** (If you do this, it will be hard to get less than 24 out of 30 points.)

4) In addition to (1), (2), and (3) above, **demonstrate intellectual imagination.** In other words, extend your thinking beyond the covers of the book, and try to approach the material in nonobvious yet illuminating ways. And write your peer responses in the spirit of collaborative exploration. (If you do these things, it will be hard to get less than 27 out of 30 points.)

5) If you want to receive the maximum number of points possible for the peer-responded journal, **do all the above in the extreme**, which will typically require you to go well beyond the minimum word counts. And keep in mind that the best submissions will grapple in some way with the "big picture" being painted by the author(s) of the book.

Journal entries and peer responses may be turned in up to two days late for partial credit, but out of respect for the other members of your group, you should aim to complete all your journaling on time. Detailed instructions for how to submit your journal entries and peer responses will be posted on Blackboard during the first week of class.

Homework Assignments. Six homework assignments will be due this semester, all of which will be made available to you on Blackboard. As often as not, these assignments will ask you to extend whichever psychological perspective we have been considering to a new set of ideas or observations, and they will typically require you to engage with a target article. Each of the six homework assignments is worth 5 points, for a combined total of 30 points. Due dates can be found in our course schedule. **Late homework assignments will not be accepted.**

All homework assignments must be completed using APA style and turned in as either Word documents or PDF files. Guidelines for formatting and submitting these assignments will be posted on Blackboard during the first week of class.

Panel Discussion. Once during this semester, you and two or three of your classmates will be assigned to a panel to discuss whichever book we have just finished reading in front of the rest of the class. A few days in advance of each panel discussion, a short list of questions about the material (and the psychological perspective it represents) will be announced on Blackboard. Acting in the role of moderator, I will pose these questions to the panel at appropriate points during the discussion. The panel members will take turns responding to these questions and are encouraged to engage with one another (in a civil manner, of course) whenever differences of opinion emerge.

Each panel discussion will be divided into two parts. For the first 45 minutes, the discussion will primarily be between panel members. For the remaining 30 minutes, the discussion will open up to include the rest of the class, who can then offer their own opinions or pose their own questions to the panel.

Please keep in mind that a panel discussion is typically defined as discussion of a particular topic by a small number of speakers in front of an audience. Given this, you should treat the first part of your panel discussion as a focused conversation between yourself and your fellow panelists. In other words, you should be talking mostly to each other, rather than directing all your responses at the moderator (me) or at the rest of the class. Of course, all bets are off when we open things up during the second part of the panel discussion.

I realize that it can be difficult to publicly hold forth on a topic that you have only recently begun to grapple with. And it would be unreasonable to treat every member of a discussion panel as an “expert” on the assigned text. But your panel discussion can and should extend beyond the covers of the book. Each of you has a wealth of personal experiences – and probably some long-held beliefs about human nature (which you should continuously reexamine as you progress through this course) – that can potentially be related to the material you are discussing. Moreover, I have little doubt that all of you have read and talked about theories and findings in other courses here at GVSU that can be brought to bear on any of the psychological perspectives being explored in this class. I encourage you to cast a wide net as you prepare for your panel discussion, and to refer to things that you have observed, felt, done, and learned in other contexts as you react to the assigned text.

Your panel discussion is worth 10 points. Panel assignments will be posted on Blackboard during the first week of class.

Students with Disabilities

If anyone in this class has special needs because of a cognitive, physical, or other disability, please let me know, and contact Disability Support Resources (DSR) at (616) 331-2490. Although students with disabilities are held to the same academic standards as all other students, accommodations will be provided as appropriate.

GVSU Policies

This course is subject to all the GVSU policies regarding enrollment, grading, academic integrity, and fairness listed at <http://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies/>.

Generative AI Policy

Generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT) are evolving at a rapid rate, and no doubt many of you will be expected to use this technology in your chosen career. For the purposes of this course, however, students are expected to refrain from adopting these tools. Using Artificial Intelligence to analyze any of our readings or films, to write any portions of your journal submissions or homework assignments, or to in any way impersonate you in our class sessions will be treated as academic misconduct. In other words, you should plan on doing all of your reading, viewing, thinking, and writing for yourself.

COURSE SCHEDULE FOR PSY 492-01

All of our virtual class meetings this summer will begin at noon.

Introduction

June 25 **Class meeting** – overview of course + foundational issues.
Start reading *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

SELF AND SOCIETY, PART ONE: CLASSIC CONCEPTIONS

The Psychoanalytic Perspective (and the Perils of Progress)

June 26 Watch *Dreams Rewired*.
Read “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” when you finish the film.

June 27 Submit your talking points by 11:00 a.m.
Class meeting – movie musings.

June 28 Finish reading *Civilization and Its Discontents* and submit your journal entry by midnight.

June 29 Start reading *Walden Two*.

July 1 Submit your journal responses by midnight.

July 2 Submit Homework 1 (“Social Psychology as History”) by 11:00 a.m.
Class meeting – panel discussion of *Civilization and Its Discontents* + further considerations.

The Behaviorist Perspective (and the Utopian Impulse)

July 4 No class meeting.

July 5 Finish reading *Walden Two* and submit your journal entry by midnight.

July 6 Start reading *Man’s Search for Meaning*.

July 8 Submit your journal responses by midnight.

July 9 Submit Homework 2 (“Psychology, Ideology, Utopia, and the Commons”) by 11:00 a.m.
Class meeting – panel discussion of *Walden Two* + further considerations.

The Existential Perspective (and the Primacy of Meaning)

July 10 Watch *Melancholia*.
Read “Existential Isolation” when you finish the film.

July 11 Submit your talking points by 11:00 a.m.
Class meeting – movie musings.

July 12 Finish reading *Man’s Search for Meaning* and submit your journal entry by midnight.

July 13 Start reading *This View of Life*.

July 15 Submit your journal responses by midnight.

July 16 Submit Homework 3 (“First we invented stories, then they changed us”) by 11:00 a.m.
Class meeting – panel discussion of *Man’s Search for Meaning* + further considerations.

SELF AND SOCIETY, PART TWO: RECENT PROPOSALS

The Evolutionary Perspective (and the Primacy of Groups)

July 17 Watch *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*.

Read “Awe as a Pathway to Mental and Physical Health” when you finish the film.

- July 18 Submit your talking points by 11:00 a.m.
Class meeting – movie musings.
- July 19 Finish reading *This View of Life* and submit your journal entry by midnight.
- July 20 Start reading *Conscience*.
- July 22 Submit your journal responses by midnight.
- July 23 Submit Homework 4 (“Religion and Intragroup Cooperation”) by 11:00 a.m.
Class meeting – panel discussion of *This View of Life* + further considerations

The Neuroscience Perspective (and the Moral Sentiments)

- July 25 No class meeting.
- July 26 Finish reading *Conscience* and submit your journal entry by midnight.
- July 27 Start reading *Liberalism and Its Discontents*.
- July 29 Submit your journal responses by midnight.
- July 30 Submit Homework 5 (“Wisdom and How to Cultivate It”) by 11:00 a.m.
Class meeting – panel discussion of *Conscience* + further considerations.

The Political Perspective (and the Challenges of Diversity)

- July 31 Watch *Do the Right Thing*.
Read “How Could They?” when you finish the film.
- August 1 Submit your talking points by 11:00 a.m.
Class meeting – movie musings.
- August 2 Finish reading *Liberalism and Its Discontents* and submit your journal entry by midnight.
- August 5 Submit your journal responses by midnight.
- August 6 Submit Homework 6 (three big ideas) by 11:00 a.m.
Class meeting – panel discussion of *Liberalism and Its Discontents* + further considerations.