HNRS130-007 Conceptions of Self
Syllabus Spring 2018
Course Theme: Selves/Others, Human/Nonhuman/More-than-human

TR 3pm - 4.15pm
West Building 1008

Instructor: Prof. Rachel Jones (Philosophy)
email: rjones23@gmu.edu
Open Office Hours: T12 noon - 1pm, R1pm - 2pm, Robinson B465A

Where to find information about this course: all course information including the syllabus, assignment instructions, and any additional announcements or changes to the schedule (including assignment deadlines) will be posted on the Blackboard site for this course. You should also check your GMU email regularly for class announcements.

Course Outline: On this course, we will explore how the modern (Cartesian) concept of the self was born; how it developed and matured (particularly through the work of existentialist thinkers such as Sartre); and how it can be questioned, challenged and transformed.

We will pay particular attention to the ways in which the western conception of self takes shape in relation not only to others, but to a particular conception of ‘the Other’ against which self and identity is defined and secured. With de Beauvoir and Fanon, we will examine the ways in which conceptions of gender and race have led to particular human beings being cast into the position of the ‘Other’. With Plumwood and Wynter, we will explore how non-human others have also served this function, deepen our understanding of the production of racialized ‘Others’, and examine how structures of colonization work on humans and nonhumans, as well as across political, social, and ecological levels.

In the last part of the course, we will explore how the Self-Other dualism might be displaced by re-situating the self as relational, and re-thinking bodies, things and materialities as agential. We will explore the extent to which ‘identity’ itself is part of the problem, and investigate the possibilities opened up by re-framing human-animal relations as well as relations between humans, drawing on feminist, ecological, decolonial, and critical disability theories.

Two novels will serve as key anchoring points in the course: Toni Morrison’s Beloved will allow us to explore the afterlives of gendered and racialized ‘Othering’ in intersectional ways; and Indra Sinha’s Animal’s People will allow us to explore the effects of colonization (particularly in the context of global capitalism) along with possibilities for decolonizing the self and forging new modes of kinship across difference.

Book Requirements
You will need to purchase your own copy of four books for this course:


3. Toni Morrison, Beloved, Vintage, 2004. Paperback. NB other editions are acceptable, for this book only!

We will also be using a number of texts posted on BB:

Sartre, “The Look”
de Beauvoir, “Introduction” to The Second Sex
Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks (selected chapters)
Crenshaw, extract from “Mapping the Margins”
Plumwood, extracts from Feminism and the Mastery of Nature
Wynter, extracts from “Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter”; “Unparalleled Catastrophe for our Species”; and “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom”
Lewis and Maslin, “Defining the Anthropocene”
Haraway, extracts from Staying with the Trouble
Bennett, extract from Vibrant Matter
Spivak, extract from “Can the Subaltern Speak?”
Kafer, extract from Feminist, Queer, Crip

Please note:
1. Unless you have copies of the original source material (i.e. the relevant books in the required edition or translation), you will be responsible for printing off each of the set readings on BB listed above so that you have a paper copy to work with in class.

Please note: this is a course requirement. We will be doing close work with the texts both in class and for assignments. In addition, all laptops, phones and other electronic devices (e.g. coffee makers) must be normally turned off during class time, so you must have either the relevant book or a paper copy of the class reading with you on the appropriate day.

A proportion of your participation grade will be attached to producing your own portfolio of readings (see section on participation below). Checklists for the portfolio will be distributed at class 2.

Reading: the schedule of readings is given below. I will expect you to have done the set reading before the relevant class. This means reading through the set text at least once; going back and re-reading either the whole text, or the passages that seem especially important/difficult/puzzling/interesting to you; and writing down your thoughts and questions. I recommend keeping a notebook/electronic file just for your reading notes for this course that you can bring to class, as a reminder of what you want to ask or comment on.

If you don’t have questions, you’re not reading properly! If you do the reading in advance, you will get a lot more out of classes. Often, you will also find it helpful to read through the texts once more after the class discussion.

Questions and Problems: if you have a question about the course, or a problem with a class or assignment, please do one or more of the following:

• ask in class (often others will have the same question/concern)
• come and see me in my open office hours (see above for details)
• email me with a question or query, or to ask for an appointment: rjones23@gmu.edu

I will respond to emails as soon as I reasonably can, though as a general rule I will not answer emails in late evening and will only check intermittently at weekends. This means you should not panic if you email me on Saturday morning (for example) and have not heard back by Sunday afternoon! It also means you need to plan ahead – please don’t leave questions about assignments or reading until the last minute.

Commitment to Diversity: In keeping with the general ethos of the University and the Honors College, this class seeks to create a learning environment that fosters respect for people across differences. We welcome and value individuals and their differences, including gender expression and identity, race, economic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age and ability. We encourage all members of the learning environment to engage with the material personally, but to be open to exploring and learning from experiences different than their own.
NB: this does not mean not being critical: respecting others’ views means taking them seriously, and taking them seriously means thinking about their strengths and weaknesses, asking questions, and offering constructive criticisms or alternative viewpoints where appropriate. It also means thinking about where the views of others can challenge and change our own, and being open to what they have to teach us.

Valuing diversity is not just an attitude – it is a matter of developing an active practice. Amongst other things, this practice involves:
- learning to listen to other perspectives;
- being open to criticism of one’s own views;
- being willing to evaluate different positions while being unsure where one stands;
- having good reasons for one’s views, but being willing to change one’s mind;
- not rushing to judgment;
- basing critical comments or questions on as good an understanding of another or text or theory as one can manage;
- and being willing to accept that there will always be things one cannot see or understand;
- learning to express criticisms and differences of opinion in ways that are not personal or hurtful and that leave space for other voices.

Sexual Misconduct and Interpersonal Violence: George Mason University is committed to providing a learning, living and working environment that is free from discrimination, and we are committed to a campus that is free of sexual misconduct and other acts of interpersonal violence in order to promote community well-being and student success. We encourage students who believe that they have been sexually harassed, assaulted or subjected to sexual misconduct to seek assistance and support. University Policy 1202 Sexual Harassment and Misconduct (http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/sexual-harassment-policy/) speaks to the specifics of our process, our resources, and the options available to you.

Confidential student resources are available on campus at the Student Support and Advocacy Center (http://ssac.gmu.edu/), Counseling and Psychological Services (http://caps.gmu.edu/), and Student Health Services (http://shs.gmu.edu/).

All other members of the University community (including faculty, except those noted above) are not considered confidential resources and are required to report incidents of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator. For a full list of resources, support opportunities, and reporting options, contact Dr. Jennifer Hammat, Title IX Coordinator, at http://diversity.gmu.edu/title-ix, at 703-993-8730, or in the Compliance, Diversity, and Ethics office in the Aquia Building, Suite 373.

Assignments and Grading

Summary Breakdown:
- Participation: 5%
- Worksheets: 3 x 5% = 15%
- Response Papers: 2 x 10% = 20%
- Essay 1: 30%
  - Animal’s People Curriculum: 10%
  - Essay 2: 20%

1. Attendance & Participation: There are no points for showing up. However, showing up has value for all other aspects of assessment and you should not expect to do well on the course if you miss classes. After week 1, you will lose one letter grade on your participation grade for each unexplained absence (you cannot participate if you are not there).

Your participation grade (5% of final grade) will be based on class activities that will vary from week to week and may include small group discussions, informal writings, blackboard discussions, reading
quizzes, etc. Please note that if you are absent and miss an activity that contributes to the participation grade, you will forfeit the points unless you have mitigating circumstances and contact me to arrange a make-up activity.

**Portfolio of readings:** as noted above, from Week 4 onwards you are responsible for printing off some of the set readings for this class (these will be available on BB). A checklist of the required readings will be provided in class 2. As having a paper copy of the text to work with in class is essential, **20% of your of your participation grade** will be dependent on producing your own portfolio of course readings. Once you have printed off the readings for the course, you should ask another member of the class to check your portfolio is complete, sign off the check list for you, and hand it to me. **This must be completed by the end of class on Thursday February 8th (week 3) - no exceptions!**

2. **Worksheets (5% each / 15% total):** there will be three worksheets based on close textual analysis: one on Descartes, one on Sartre, and one on Plumwood and Wynter. Completing these worksheets will help you to engage with the texts and theories we are examining and to write better, more rigorous essays. For submission deadlines, please see the class schedule below.

3. **Response Papers (10% each / 20% total):** you will write two response papers of c. 3 pages; the first will be in response to Fanon (readings in weeks 5 and 6), the second will be a structured response to the readings that accompany our examination of Animal's People (weeks 13 and 14). These short writings will give you an opportunity to explore your ideas before writing the relevant class essay. Specific instructions will be distributed according to the class schedule below (see schedule for submission deadlines also).

4. **Essays (30% & 20%):** You will write two course essays, the first of c.8 pages on the first part of the course (30% of final grade), the second of c.6 pages to be submitted during the exam period (20% of final grade). The first paper will apply concepts drawn from Sartre, de Beauvoir and Fanon to Toni Morrison's Beloved; the second will use a selection of concepts and theories examined in the second half of the course to analyze key aspects of Indra Sinha’s Animal's People. In both cases, the novels should also be used to interrogate the limits and value of the concepts and theories. Specific paper topics and further instructions will be distributed in advance (in class and on BB); see schedule below for submission deadlines.

5. **Animal’s People Curriculum (10%):** this is a group exercise. The class will be divided into groups of five in week 12 and each group will produce a short curriculum of suggested further readings to support our engagement with Animal’s People. The curriculum will include suggestions for texts that provide both historical context and theoretical perspectives; short annotations will be provided for each suggested reading. This is a chance to build on your HNRS110 research skills and will help prepare you for writing the second course essay, as well as providing you with further resources for that essay. Further instructions will be provided in week 12 (in class and on BB) and a model will be provided by the instructor, in the form of a reading guide for Morrison’s Beloved.

**Submitting Written Work:** all written work should all be submitted on BB by the relevant deadline (see course schedule below). Paper copies of the response paper and the first two essays should also be submitted at the first class after the submission deadline. If you cannot attend class, please hand the paper copy in to the Philosophy Office (Robinson B465) during office hours (9am-4pm, weekdays), clearly marked for my attention.

**Please note:** the date of submission will always be taken from when you upload the work on BB. If there is a system problem that means you can’t upload the work, please email me and let me know, attaching a copy of the relevant assignment.

**Late Submissions & Extensions:** extensions can be arranged if you have a good reason for submitting work late. Whenever possible please let me know and arrange the extension in advance (by email is fine).

- Extensions cannot be given beyond the last day of the exam period.
• Where an assignment is late without an agreed extension, one letter grade will be deducted for each
day it is late (weekends count as two days - work can always be uploaded on BB). So an A grade
paper that is one day late will become an A-; if two days late, it will be a B+, etc. Please note that in
the interests of fairness to all students (i.e., so that everyone has the same amount of time for
each assignment), this policy will be strictly enforced.
• Lateness penalties can be waived only if you have a very good reason for submitting the work late
and let me know about it, preferably in advance of the assignment deadline. Please provide me with
some evidence to support your case whenever possible (e.g. a doctor’s note or emergency room
receipt).

Incompletes (IN): requests for a grade of incomplete must be made to me in writing (preferably by
email), and must be submitted 24 hours before the last assignment deadline for this course.

Accommodations for Disabilities: if you require academic accommodations for a disability, please
let me know and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 703-993-2472. All academic accomm-
odations (e.g. arrangements for note-takers, modified assignments, etc) are made through that office.

Academic Integrity and the Honor Code: this course is conducted in accordance with the GMU
Honor Code as set out on the University website:

‘Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize,steal,
or lie in matters related to academic work.’ http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode/

It is your responsibility as students, and mine as instructor, to be aware of the Honor code and to act in
accordance with it. The key issue here is that you always respect both your own work and that of others.
In teaching this course, I am interested in your ideas and your work: no matter how tired, panicked or
under pressure you feel, do not give in to the temptation to pass off the work of others as your own. This
is a major violation of trust and academic integrity. If you are struggling, please come and talk to me.

Passive plagiarism (e.g. failing to cite properly or give proper references for sources) is as bad as active
plagiarism (e.g. downloading an essay off the internet). Always appropriately cite and reference your
sources. For acceptable citation models, see Purdue University Online Writing Lab (Purdue OWL),
“Research and Citation”: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/

Where there is evidence of plagiarism (or any other form of cheating), I will refer the case to the
University Honor committee, in keeping with the Honor Code. For further guidance, see the Honor Code
website: http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode/

COURSE AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE
NB: This schedule is subject to change. It is your responsibility to CHECK BB AND YOUR GMU EMAIL
REGULARLY for any posted changes in reading material, assignments or deadlines. If in doubt - having
checked those places first! - you can always email me.

COURSE OUTLINE

WEEK ONE
Reading: Course Syllabus
Descartes, Meditation 1

Jan 23: Introductions

PART ONE: SELVES AND OTHERS

Jan 25: Descartes 1: doubt and the search for certainty
Descartes worksheet distributed
WEEK TWO
Reading: Descartes, Meditation 2; plus selected pages, Meditation 6 (exact pages tbc in class 2)
Letters, Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia and Descartes (photocopy to be provided)

Jan 30: Descartes 2: The Birth of the Self
Feb 1: Descartes 3: Mind/Body and the need for an Other (God)

Descartes worksheet due: Friday Feb 2nd 11.59pm on BB (no paper copy needed)

WEEK THREE
Reading: Sartre, “Existentialism is a Humanism”

Feb 6: Sartre 1: Existence Precedes Essence
Feb 8: Sartre 2: Freedom and Responsibility
Sartre worksheet distributed

WEEK FOUR
Reading: Sartre, ‘The Look’ (BB)
de Beauvoir, Introduction to The Second Sex (BB)

Feb 13: Sartre 3: Subject and Other
Feb 15: de Beauvoir 1: woman as Other
Sartre worksheet due (by 12 noon and bring paper copy to class)

WEEK FIVE
Reading: de Beauvoir, Introduction to The Second Sex
Fanon, Introduction to Black Skin / White Masks (BB)

Feb 20: de Beauvoir 2: liberty not happiness
Feb 22: Fanon 1: Introduction
Fanon Response Paper instructions distributed

WEEK SIX
Reading: Fanon: “The Experience of the Black Man”, chapter 5 in Black Skin / White Masks (BB)
M. NourbeSe Philip, Zong! (extracts to be distributed as photocopy in week 5)

Feb 27: Fanon 2: the Epidermal Racial Schema and the Negation of Self
Mar 1: Fanon 3: Neither Subject nor Other: objectification and non-being

WEEK SEVEN
Reading: Crenshaw, extract from “Mapping the Margins”
Morrison, Beloved (pages tbc)

Mar 6: Beloved 1: the need for an intersectional approach
Fanon Response Paper due by 12 noon on BB (bring paper copy to class)
Mar 8: Beloved 2: slavery, memory, haunting
WEEK EIGHT: SPRING BREAK

WEEK NINE
Reading: Morrison, Beloved (pages tbc)
Sharpe, In the Wake (short extract to be distributed as photocopy in week 7)

Mar 20: Beloved 3: relations, wake-work, weathering

Mar 22: peer review on essay 1

Essay 1 due on BB 11.59pm Sunday March 25th, bring paper copy to class on Tues Mar 27th

PART TWO: HUMAN SELVES AND NONHUMAN OTHERS

WEEK TEN
Reading: Plumwood, “Dualism and the Logic of Colonialism” & “Descartes and the dream of power” (BB)

Mar 27: Plumwood 1: dualism as a logic of colonialism
Plumwood/Wynter worksheet distributed

Mar 29: Plumwood 2: Descartes revisited

WEEK ELEVEN
Reading: Wynter extracts from “Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter”;
“Unparalleled Catastrophe for our Species”; and “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom” (BB)
Lewis and Maslin, “Defining the Anthopocene” (BB)

Apr 3: Wynter: Man1 and Man2: colonialism as ecological disaster

Apr 5: The Anthropocene and the 1492 event
Plumwood/Wynter worksheet due by 12 noon on BB (bring paper copy to class)

PART THREE: CHANGING THE FRAME WITH ANIMAL’S PEOPLE

WEEK TWELVE
Reading: Plumwood, “Ethics and the Instrumentalizing Self”
Fuss (short extract from “Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification” to be provided as photocopy)
Cavarero, extract from Inclinations (short extract to be provided as photocopy)

Apr 10: Plumwood and Fuss: the problem of egoism and identity

Apr 12: Relational / Ecological Selves
Response Paper 2 instructions distributed

WEEK THIRTEEN
Reading: Animal’s People (pages tbc)
Haraway, extract from Staying with the Trouble (BB)
Kafer, extract from Feminist, Queer, Crip (BB)
Apr 17: Animal’s People / companion species and humanimals

Apr 19: Animal’s People / queer bodies, crip subjects

WEEK FOURTEEN
Reading: Animal's People (pages tbc)
   Spivak, extract from “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (BB)
   Bennett, extract from Vibrant Matter (BB)
   Haraway, extracts from Staying with the Trouble (BB) and “Situated Knowledges” (provided as photocopy)

Apr 24: Animal’s People / subaltern voices and distributed agency

Apr 26: Animal's People / the trickster; making kin otherwise
   Response Paper 2 due by 12 noon on BB (bring copy to class)

WEEK FIFTEEN
Reading: Animal’s People

May 1: Animal’s People: curriculum presentations (10 minutes per group)

May 3: Animal’s People: concluding discussion & wrap up of course

Final Paper deadline: Thursday 10th May, 3pm (please submit a paper copy to the Philosophy Department Office if possible)