

**On (thinking about) Being Human**  
Director's Class, 2018-19  
Christian Study Center

**Introduction**

We are having a hard time thinking about being human these days. We typically identify ourselves as members of groups, but increasingly, even when we locate ourselves at the intersection of several groups, this move fails to satisfy. Our tendency to find our identity as members of groups not only puts us in oppositional stances toward members of other groups, it also distances us from the humanity we share with others and even obscures our ultimately unique individuality.

How, then, shall we think about being human?

In this class we will begin by thinking historically in order to try to understand the first-order narrative of modernity that has come to frame our thinking and to consider how this framework has come to be what it is. Looking only to historians and culture critics (rather than to any kind of religious literature) we will attempt to answer questions such as: Where are we as a culture? And how did we get here? What are the background ideas that shape the ways we think and give us the very language we use to think about life? What most-central challenge does the modern story create for us? And how are we doing at meeting this challenge?

In the spring semester, having gained some understanding of the frameworks that shape our thinking, we will explore a thoughtful Christian understanding of human experience. I call it *a* Christian understanding, not *the* Christian understanding, because it will be *my* understanding as a Christian. Others who identify as Christians may emphasize different aspects of Christian teaching and may simply disagree with me at some points, but all I can do is offer the first-order narrative that I have found compelling—an understanding of human experience that is drawn from Christian scripture, teaching and tradition.

Don't let the location mislead you. This class is not designed for Christians but for anyone and everyone who is interested in (thinking about) being human.

**Instructor**

Dr. Horner earned his PhD at the University of Virginia in modern western thought under the direction of Richard Rorty, a leading intellectual of the late twentieth-century whose voice continues to capture our time in thought. Dr. Horner's earlier work focused on the parallels between French thinkers and the American pragmatists, and his interests continue to be in the history of the modern mind, ranging from the seventeenth century to the present. His most recent publications have focused on the thought of Blaise Pascal. He has taught part-time at the University of Delaware, James Madison University, and the University of Florida. Currently, he serves as Executive Director of the Christian Study Center of Gainesville.

## Schedule

### Part One: Encountering the Contradiction at the End of Modernity

Sep. 12 – The Quest for Certainty and the End of the Cultural Logic of Modernity

Sep. 19 – Nietzsche, Foucault, Rorty, and Derrida on our Late-Modern Condition

### Part Two: Negotiating the Contradiction at the End of Modernity

Sep. 26 – The Fate of Reason: The Turn to Reason's Other and the Triumph of Taste

Oct. 3 – The Fate of Reason: The Enduring Power of Instrumental Rationality

BREAK (Class will not meet on October 10 and 17.)

Oct. 24 – The Fate of the Body: The Body as Limit and the Body as Possibility

Oct. 31 – The Fate of the Self: The Centrality of the Individual and the Loss of the Self

Nov. 7 – The Fate of the Gods: The Death of God and the Enduring Appeal of Idolatry

### Part Three: Still Caught in the Contradiction at the End of Modernity

Nov. 14 – Consumerism, Technopoly, and the Enduring Power of the Embedded Cultural Logic

This is not a University of Florida Syllabus and is, therefore, not a binding contract. It provides a good indication of what we will consider this semester but is open to revision at the instructor's discretion. As the course and the conversation unfold, I may want to make adjustments. There are no required readings or assignments for this course (but do see the suggestions below).

I am always eager to have conversation well beyond the one hour a week that class allows. I will be available on Wednesdays after class and am glad to make appointments to meet with you at other times to talk about issues that this class will raise and about anything else that you want to discuss. Please do not hesitate to contact me at [richard@christianstudycenter.org](mailto:richard@christianstudycenter.org).

**Suggested Readings** (available on the shelves at the top of the stairs in Pascal's Coffeehouse)

Richard Rorty, "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids"

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*

Walker Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book*

Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*