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HUMN697 MA Humanities Capstone

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Narrative Analysis

I have always been drawn to big questions that challenge assumptions and provide insight for understanding the world. My journey reflects a commitment to understanding humanity—through academic studies, cultural immersion, and the continuous pursuit of knowledge. This portfolio represents that journey. It is a collection of my scholastic work that weaves history, philosophy, science, and literature together to create a broader picture of human thought.

Each piece in this collection reflects a different era and perspective, showing how intellectual traditions build upon one another. In my study of ancient times, I compared religious traditions, exploring how belief systems shape culture and identity. My analysis of Enlightenment thought through Thomas Paine’s prolific pamphlet *Common Sense* examines how rhetoric and philosophy fueled revolutionary change. When looking at 19th-century history and science, I explored how Charles Darwin’s work was misused and how scientific ideas can be twisted to serve ideological agendas. My paper on the Renaissance highlights human potential and creativity, while my research on modern science and ethics dives into astrobiology and the big philosophical questions about life beyond Earth.

Each work stands for a different challenge—some pushed me to navigate scientific and ethical debates, while others deepened my understanding of intellectual history and philosophical exploration. Together, they highlight my growth as a scholar and interdisciplinary thinker, demonstrating my ability to grasp complex concepts, critically analyze historical and contemporary issues, and communicate ideas effectively. More than a collection of research, this

portfolio represents my commitment to lifelong learning and my belief in the power of ideas to shape humanity.

Bridging Science and the Humanities

HUMN550 Evolution of Earth and Universe

HUMN551 Evolution of Life and Intelligence

One of the most exciting and eye-opening parts of my academic journey has been discovering how science and the humanities unexpectedly intersect. My paper, "Exploring Biologically Sound Environments for Extraterrestrial Life: Potential Environments, Communication, and Risks," reflects this by looking at astrobiology through a scientific lens and incorporating philosophy and ethics. Of course, the technical side of detecting biosignatures and identifying habitable planets is likely the first step. Still, we must ask other significant questions—what would finding extraterrestrial life mean for us? How would it reshape our understanding of existence? What ethical dilemmas might arise if we made contact? These questions reveal that extraterrestrial discovery must go well beyond science to determine how we define our place in the universe.

Exploring astrobiology allowed me to connect science with broader philosophical and ethical questions. This highlights my ability to connect ambitious ideas across disciplines, aligning with the objectives of HUMN550: Evolution of Earth and Universe and the MA Humanities Program. This paper shows my capacity to make complex scientific topics more accessible and thought-provoking, showcasing my graduate-level analytical, research, and writing skills. By exploring the philosophical and ethical implications of first contact with extraterrestrial beings, I effectively bridge scientific inquiry with broader questions about humanity's place in the universe. This aligns with HUMN550 objectives by examining the evolution of the Earth and universe, as well as the scientific frameworks used to explore cosmic

phenomena. Additionally, my analysis reflects the MA Humanities Program objective to use advanced science and social science knowledge, methods, and logic to inform and influence scientific and social processes and structures. In this paper, I applied logic to assess scientific evidence and analyze its potential social impact, addressing how technological advancements and extraterrestrial discovery could reshape societal values and ethical frameworks. It also exemplifies how the humanities provide essential tools for interpreting and assigning meaning to scientific discoveries, ultimately shaping how we envision our future and respond to the unknown.

Darwin's theory of evolution was a groundbreaking scientific idea, but history has shown how easily knowledge can be distorted and weaponized. This paper examines how Social Darwinism distorted Darwin's original evolutionary theories, leading to dangerous political ideologies such as forced sterilization, racial hierarchies, and even genocide. This essay demonstrates my ability to critically engage with scientific and philosophical ideas while addressing their social consequences. It also explores how scientific thought, when misapplied, can shape ideologies, public policy, and human rights abuses, reinforcing my belief that science does not exist in a vacuum—how we interpret knowledge is just as important as the knowledge itself.

My research on Darwin's evolutionary theory provided an opportunity to examine how scientific ideas can be misinterpreted and misused, and it represents my ability to connect scientific theory with broader social, ethical, and philosophical questions, aligning with the objectives of HUMN551: Evolution of Life and Intelligence and the MA Humanities Program. This paper examines the impact of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, exploring both its scientific significance and how his ideas were later distorted through Social Darwinism to justify

harmful ideologies such as forced sterilization, racial hierarchies, and even genocide. By critically analyzing how Darwin's theory was misapplied, I demonstrated my ability to assess scientific debates from a humanities perspective, addressing their societal consequences. This aligns with HUMN551 objectives by exploring the evolution of life and intelligence and evaluating how scientific concepts influence social structures, cultural beliefs, and ethical frameworks.

Additionally, my work on Darwin reflects the MA Humanities Program objective to examine the human experience from multidimensional perspectives from antiquity to modern times by analyzing leading authors and works of each age. My analysis explored how Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* revolutionized biological science and shaped intellectual discourse across disciplines, influencing fields such as philosophy, sociology, and ethics. This paper highlights my ability to connect scientific theory with broader historical and cultural developments by examining how Darwin's ideas were interpreted, adapted, and sometimes manipulated. This interdisciplinary approach underscores my ability to evaluate complex ideas and their far-reaching impact on society — a key component of the course and the MA Humanities Program.

Revolutions in Thought: Political and Philosophical Inquiry

HUMN541 Enlightenment and the Modern World

HUMN530 The Renaissance

The power of language, rhetoric, and revolutionary ideas has always intrigued me. How do words shape revolutions? How do philosophical concepts move from theory to action? In "Enlightened Perspectives: A Critical Analysis of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*," I explored how Paine's persuasive writing transformed Enlightenment ideals into a compelling call for independence, proving that the right words at the right time can ignite massive societal change. I

explored how Paine's rhetoric made Enlightenment philosophy accessible, influencing political thought and the American Revolution. This analysis highlights the role of literature as a tool for social and ideological change.

In my analysis of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, I explored how powerful rhetoric can ignite social and political change and it explores key Enlightenment themes such as freedom, truth in government, human rights, reason, and tradition. By applying classical logic to issues related to Enlightenment-era human behavior, society, and civilization, this work aligns with the objectives of both HUMN541: Enlightenment and the Modern World and the MA Humanities Program. The paper demonstrates my ability to critically analyze significant Enlightenment ideas and evaluate their enduring influence on modern governance, social values, and philosophical thought. In particular, my analysis of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* required a deep examination of literary works from that period, emphasizing the role of Paine's rhetoric in driving the democratization of the United States. By illustrating how Paine's persuasive writing transformed Enlightenment ideals into a powerful call for independence, I highlighted the lasting impact of revolutionary ideas on contemporary political and social systems — reinforcing the course's focus on connecting Enlightenment principles to modern-day institutions and ideologies.

My paper "The Renaissance: A Quest for Human Potential Through Growth and Change" examines how figures like da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Machiavelli redefined creativity, governance, and self-improvement, much like Paine did in the political realm. In their own ways, these thinkers challenged established norms, questioned authority, and pushed the boundaries of human potential. I assess how Renaissance thinkers championed the idea of individual achievement and self-determination, shaping the modern view of personal growth and human progress. My writing positions the Renaissance as a historical movement and a continuing

intellectual legacy of ideas that shape modern thoughts on education, self-improvement, and human achievement.

Studying Renaissance thinkers like da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Machiavelli revealed how creativity and individualism shaped modern ideas of progress. This paper on the Renaissance highlights my interest in intellectual history and the evolution of ideas, demonstrating how historical movements continue to influence modern values. This aligns with MA Humanities Program Objectives by displaying my ability to think critically, analyze cultural and historical contexts, and communicate complex ideas effectively. Additionally, the paper meets key objectives of HUMN530: The Renaissance by examining how intellectual and artistic movements fostered individual achievement, self-determination, and social change — themes that remain relevant in contemporary society. Both papers reflect my belief in lifelong learning and the transformative power of knowledge, emphasizing that political, artistic, and philosophical progress is driven by those bold enough to challenge established norms.

Understanding Faith and Tradition Across Cultures

HIST588 History of Religion

The intersection of faith, culture, and ritual has been a key area of exploration in my studies. In "Rituals in Buddhism and Christianity: Vesak vs. Christmas," I examined how these two distinct traditions—one honoring Buddha's enlightenment, the other celebrating the birth of Jesus—use rituals to create meaning, build community, and reinforce belief systems. Despite their theological differences, both emphasize reflection, gratitude, and spiritual renewal, showing how rituals universally connect people to their faith and one another.

I included this paper in my portfolio because it highlights my ability to analyze religious traditions with depth and sensitivity, recognizing their differences and shared human significance. This paper displays how I examine the role of religion in cultural and social

contexts. I also use critical thinking in the comparative analysis of Buddhism and Christianity to explore the logic behind religious traditions, examining how rituals shape personal and collective experiences. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, understanding the common threads between cultures and traditions is more important than ever, making this paper a meaningful reflection of my academic and personal growth.

Final Thoughts

These papers, taken together, reflect my growth as a scholar and interdisciplinary thinker. They highlight my ability to critically analyze literature, history, science, and philosophy while making interdisciplinary connections that bring deeper meaning to these discussions. My portfolio represents my commitment to lifelong learning, curiosity, and exploring the ideas and influences that shape human thought and experience. However, life-long learning encompasses more than formal study.

While taking this incredible scholastic trek, I was fortunate to spend two years working in Southeast Asia. Although my home base was Singapore, I frequently traveled to Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and India. This experience profoundly impacted me in many ways and greatly enhanced my understanding of the Humanities. Being immersed in a region rich with diverse traditions, languages, and histories expanded my understanding of how heritage and modernity coexist. I gained a deeper appreciation for different worldviews and artistic expressions. Living in that environment helped me foster greater empathy and I quickly became adaptable to any new situation. Conversations with locals and fellow expats broadened my perspective on global interconnectedness. People are, after all, just people. We live under differing forms of governance, but we all want the same basic things—roofs over our heads, full bellies, freedom from financial worries, good health, and family and friends we love and who love us in return.

These basic needs take on drastically different meanings from place to place. I frequently think of Cambodia and the wonderfully warm people. A roof over their heads is literally just that. The temperatures are sweltering, and many Cambodians live in tiny, raised shacks with no windows or electricity, on the fringe of swampy rice paddies, where they spend their days standing in knee-deep water to harvest the crops. I will never forget an elderly lady who took my hand as we walked up a mountain to see the sunset at a Buddhist temple. I was just part of a large crowd, but she chose me. With neither of us speaking the other's language, we simply smiled at each other and walked hand-in-hand. My heart still swells when I think of her and how kindness and compassion can cross all language barriers. These are the experiences that round out my education and for which I am so grateful.