

Student name

ENGL461

Final Paper Proposal

### Humanity and Emotion

I will be taking an in depth look at the movie *Equilibrium*, which was produced in 2002. The movie centers on a dystopian world known as Libria where emotions are outlawed after the third world war. The government reasons that emotion is the cause of conflict, and in order to prevent another world war that could devastate humanity and perhaps end the human race altogether, all emotional content is banned and citizens are required to take Proxium, a drug that neutralizes all emotions. The movie follows a high-level enforcer of the anti-emotion laws and regulations, John Preston. John, like the rest of the Librians, feels no emotion and acts based only on reason and logic. The movie focuses on John's rediscovery of emotion and its importance in human life.

The exploration on the role of emotion in *Equilibrium* will be my springboard for discussion on the causes, effects, and roles of emotion in human existence. These questions are also explored in Houellebecq's *The Possibility of an Island*, so I will use the evolution of the clones toward an emotionless state presented in that novel to further delve into the positive and negative attributes of emotion. The movie presents emotion as negative from the government's perspective because it is the cause of conflict. Emotion is volatile and difficult to control without getting rid of it entirely. Therefore, emotion is dangerous. However, emotion is also a source of many good things, such as familial bonds, compassion, and moral drive, which will be discussed in more detail using two works of Damasio.

I will be using Damasio's "Emotion and Feeling" to provide a biological background for this discussion. As Damasio points out in this work and in an interview that I will be using as another supporting source, emotion is at the root of most moral decisions. Many animals have a moral system based on the chemical emotional responses they have to different scenarios that cause a shift away from equilibrium. The emotions felt drive our sense of what should or should not be done, which evolves into an ethical code. Humanity takes this emotional morality a step farther than other animals by manipulating it, creating laws and justice system. This manipulation of morality through laws is the basis of the government's control in *Equilibrium*, but the government also centers on ridding society of emotion, which Damasio would likely argue would rid society of morality as well. I would also like to draw in Damasio's biological and technical view of the brain, emotion, and feeling in order to analyze the government's use of medication to control the feelings, thoughts, and lives of the Librians.

Using the biological perspective of Damasio and the social perspective of Houellebecq's *The Possibility of an Island*, emotion's role in human life will be analyzed for its importance, its costs, and its benefits. These qualities of emotion are portrayed through the depiction of emotion in the dystopian world of Libria, and *Equilibrium* will serve as an excellent basis for discussion on emotion and feeling in human life.

All of the sources referred to here were listed on my Annotated Bibliography.