HUM 098 – Myth, Reason, and Faith

[The search for, and the preservation of, values of the present and for the future . . . requires abandonment of spurious, restrictive canons of eternal greatness and eternal truth: we must have the historical sense and the moral courage of the German classicist who said, addressing students at the Free University of Berlin in 1962, “We are experiencing the collapse of a lie, the humanist lie of the identity of the true, the beautiful, and the good.”

M.I. Finley (1972)

Course Logistics:

HUM 098.03
TR 9:30 - 10:52AM, Hunt 124
M 7-8:52PM, Bio 101

Instructor: Professor John Hunter, Program in Comparative Humanities
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Course Description:

This course is an introduction to the literature, religion, and philosophy of the Western world, beginning with the Greeks and Romans, continuing with the Hebrews, and ending with the emergence of Islam and the Christian West. The texts that we will examine represent some of the most important currents of Western thought prior to the modern age; we will examine them in their historical contexts, and explore the complex question of how the thought of the past interacts with that of the present. Among the issues that will recur in the semester will be: the nature of divinity, the connection between spiritual beliefs and the material means through which they are expressed, the distinction between law and justice, the conflict between tradition and innovation, and the historical evolution of gender roles. Our starting point will be the realization that the “Western tradition” is not a unified, easily-described body of permanent truths, but a multi-faceted, heavily-contested, and historically-mutable body of provisional positions.

The conduct of the course will center on class discussions, and it will work (or fail) based on your willingness to engage with the issues and texts before us. In addition, students will attend a series of Monday evening common hours. These will consist of a variety of discussions, lectures, and films designed to complement the class sessions. One or more field trips will be part of the common experience of the class as well. An introduction to the different modes of university-level writing will be woven into the writing assignments in the course, and we will try as much as possible to break-down the idea that form can ever be separated from content.

Book List:

Required:

The Bible, NRSV – the annotated edition in the Bookstore is best, but any NSRV will do
Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, trans. Grube and Cooper, Hackett
Dante, *Vita Nuova*, ed. and trans. Mark Musa, Oxford
*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, trans. Winny, Broadview
Gordon Harvey, *Writing with Sources – A Guide for Students*, Hackett
Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, 3rd edition, Hackett

E-Reserves or photocopies:

Ovid, *Amores*
Eric Auerbach, “Odysseus’ Scar” from *Mimesis*
Walter Burkert, “Introduction” to *Babylon Memphis Persepolis*
Soren Kierkegaard, extract from *Fear and Trembling*
Selected artworks and architectural plans
Robin Osborne, selections from *Greece in the Making*

Reserve Books:

Peter Toohey, *Reading Epic*
W. A. Camps, *An Introduction to Homer*
Simon Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy*
Charles Rowan Beye, *Ancient Greek Literature and Society*
Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*
---, *The Origins of Greek Thought*
W. A. Camps, *An Introduction to Virgil’s Aeneid*
Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation*
Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*
---, *Authority and the Sacred*

Reference Books:

- a good quick reference to practically everything in the classical texts on the course

*The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (BS440.M434 1993)
- same as above, but for the Bible

- useful for broader background information

Reliable Web Sites:

Classical Studies

Perseus is an amazing collection of searchable texts, images, sites, secondary resources on the ancient world (and a few other topics): http://www.perseus.tufts.edu (hint: the mirror sites are often faster than the main site -- it has a lot of webtraffic).

Stoa.org is probably the 2nd best classics site out there, with articles, bibliographies, images, virtual tours: http://www.stoa.org/

Diotima is a collection of resources (bibliographies, articles, links, etc.) on women and gender in the ancient world: http://www.stoa.org/diotima/

William Johnson at UCincinnati provides a useful collection of resources (summaries, background, etc.) on Greek Tragedy: http://classics.uc.edu/~johnson/tragedy/

Virgil.org provides bibliography, texts, maps, links etc. on Virgil: http://virgil.org/
VRoma (virtual Rome) is a site developed by Latin teachers with a collection of images, and other resources: http://vroma.org/

The Bucknell Classics Department also has a large collection of links to sites on all aspects of the ancient world: http://www.bucknell.edu/Classics/Resources.html#weblinks

Jack Lynch at Rutgers has a more succinct, annotated collection of links on Classical literature (including the Bible & Augustine): http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Lit/classic.html

Vergil

http://vergil.classics.upenn.edu/home/
http://virgil.org/

Bible and Augustine

Resource Pages for Biblical Studies provides links to all aspects of the Bible, from texts and commentaries to scholarship and broader background on the ancient Mediterranean world: http://www.torreys.org/bible/

Augustine of Hippo provides images, texts, and other background resources: http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/augustine.html

Help with writing

http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/advise.html
http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/
http://nutsandbolts.washcoll.edu/

Assignments:

Journals (40%) – Seven times this semester you will be required to write a 2-3 page journal on the readings for that week, using topics that I will assign. This journal will be collected at the beginning the class in which it is due. The purpose of the journals is for you to directly engage with some aspect of the text under discussion and with a particular problem in college writing in general, so use of secondary sources (except for reference works) is prohibited. We will talk more about how a journal differs from an essay in class.

Essays (40%) – Two 5-7 page papers on topics that I will assign. The first paper will be graded in two stages, once on a first draft that you submit and again on the final draft when you resubmit it. The second will have an optional rewriting portion.

Class Participation (20%) – the goal of this course is to help you to acquire a set of skills, as well as to give you access to a body of knowledge. Given this, it can only work properly when everyone participates as much as possible. No course of lectures can tell you how to read and write about a given subject; you’ve got to try it for yourself and talk about your efforts with others in class and elsewhere. The more you do of this, the better you will get at it. The class participation mark will be awarded based on how much you contribute to our collective attempt to come to grips with the course material: this does not necessarily mean talking a lot, but rather being prepared every class and willing to enter into debates. Those who are “shy” or “just don’t talk a lot in class,” be warned now: I have no compunction about calling on people. Being comfortable speaking in front of others is a life skill. Attendance will not be taken, but you cannot participate while being absent.

Contractual Obligations:
All late assignments will be penalized at a rate of one grade unit per day (i.e. a B becomes a B- and so forth). Technological excuses for lateness (“My printer cartridge ran out . . .”; “My roommate borrowed my laptop for the week-end . . .”; “My dog ate my hard drive . . .” etc.) will not be accepted, so please don’t try them. Use your creative energy on your writing instead, and try to spare yourself the anguish caused by the last-minute-hellride method of essay composition. Late journals will not be accepted at all unless you have a medical or university-activity related reason.

Extensions for the essays will be readily granted, provided that you ask me at least a week in advance. After that point, they will be granted very selectively, usually only for medical reasons.

A word on plagiarism: I expect you all to know what plagiarism is in all of its various forms. If I detect it, you will get my best effort to have you kicked out of the university. Please do not be tempted by the many essay-providers on the Net: I know where they are too, we have access to detection software, and the wares they peddle are usually the products of the various paper-swapping arrangements that exist within fraternities (i.e. they are stupid, as well as unethical). If you are not sure about what does and does not constitute plagiarism, PLEASE come and talk to me—I will be happy to explain it to you.

Schedule:

**The End of Violence and the Escape from the Past: Epic and Covenant**

For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth,
And ancient lineaments are blotted out.
Irrational streams of blood are staining earth;
Empedocles has thrown all things about;
Hector is dead and there’s a light in Troy;
We that look on but laugh in tragic joy
W. B. Yeats, “The Gyres” (1938)

Week One. August 25.

R: Introduction to Homer; essays by Osborne and Burkert

Week Two. August 30 and September 1.

T: Iliad 1, 6, 9, 12
R: Iliad 16, 18, 22, 24. **FIRST JOURNAL DUE**.

Week Three. September 6 and 8.

T: Odyssey 1-6
R: Odyssey 7-12. **SECOND JOURNAL DUE**

Week Four. September 13 and 15.

T: Odyssey 13-18
R: Odyssey 19-24

Week Five. September 20 and 22.

T: Introduction to Hebrew Bible; Auerbach, “Odysseus’ Scar”
Genesis 1-17. **THIRD JOURNAL DUE**.
R: Genesis 18-50
F: **FIRST DRAFT OF FIRST ESSAY DUE**
Week Six. September 27 and 29.

**Drama and Philosophy in Classical Greece**

Greek society was founded upon slavery, and had, therefore, for its natural basis, the inequality of men . . . The brilliancy of Aristotle’s genius is shown by this alone, that he discovered, in the expression of the value of commodities, a relation of equality. The peculiar conditions of the society in which he lived, alone prevented him from discovering what, “in truth,” was at the bottom of this equality.

Karl Marx, *Capital*

**T:** Introduction to Classical Greek Culture; Sophocles, *Antigone*

**R:** *Antigone*

**F:** **FINAL DRAFT OF FIRST ESSAY DUE**

Week Seven. October 4 and 6.

**T:** Plato, *Symposium*

**R:** Plato, *Symposium*; Trial and Death of Socrates. **FOURTH JOURNAL DUE.**

Week Eight. October 11 and 13.

**T:** FALL BREAK

**R:** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

Week Nine. October 18 and 20.

**T:** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

**R:** Introduction to Roman culture; Ovid, *Amores* (selections)

Week Ten. October 25 and 27.

**T:** Vergil, *Aeneid* 1-4. **FIFTH JOURNAL DUE.**

**R:** *Aeneid* 6-8

Week Eleven. November 1 and 3.

**T:** *Aeneid* 10 and 12

**R:** Introduction the New Testament; Gospel of John

Week Twelve. November 8 and 10.

**T:** Gospel of John

**R:** Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. **SIXTH JOURNAL DUE.**

Week Thirteen. November 15 and 17.

**T:** Augustine, *Confessions* (selections)

**R:** Augustine, *Confessions*
F:      SECOND ESSAY DUE

The Carnal and the Spiritual in Medieval Culture

Whoever thinks that in this mortal life a man may so disperse the mists of bodily and carnal imaginings as to possess the unclouded light of changeless truth, and to cleave to it with the unswerving constancy of a spirit wholly estranged from the common ways of life—he understands neither what he seeks, nor who he is who seeks it.

St. Augustine, On the Harmony of the Evangelists (c. 400 CE)

Week Fourteen. November 22 and 24.

T:   Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
R:   THANKSGIVING

Week Fifteen. November 29 and December 1.

T:   Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
R:   Dante, Vita Nuova. SEVENTH JOURNAL DUE

Week Sixteen. December 6.

T:   Dante, Vita Nuova and Course conclusion.
R:   OPTIONAL REWRITE OF SECOND ESSAY DUE.