

Contemporary Civilization
Fall 2011, Section 13
Monday and Wednesday, 11-12:50
306 Hamilton Hall

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There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, "Morning, boys, how's the water?" And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, "What the hell is water?"

Welcome to Contemporary Civilization, one of the rites of passage of a Columbia education. In this course, we'll be encountering some of the greatest works of philosophy and theology ever written. Some of it will seem opaque—worse, some of it will seem irrelevant. Our duty as a seminar will be to clarify these works, and to make them speak to contemporary readers. And speak they can: although we might not agree with the answers, they grapple with some of the most significant questions that we face as human beings. In this semester, especially, we will be circling around one question that is both simple and immensely complex: What is it to live a good life?

Details and Course Requirements

This is a seminar, organized around discussion. The most important course requirement is that you do the reading and that you come to class prepared to discuss it. CC is a group effort, and the experiment will only succeed if everyone participates. Given the nature of the course, attendance is mandatory, and all absences will be noted. If you have a reason to be absent, let me know as far in advance as possible. If you are ill, a doctor's note is absolutely required.

In addition to classroom discussion, two other forms of participation are required, both on Courseworks. You will each be assigned a day on which you are to be the "expert." There is no presentation component, but you will be expected to have done the reading especially closely on that day, and to help me facilitate discussion. Within one week of the class, and drawing on class discussion, you will e-mail me a review sheet, which I will post on Courseworks (this should be no more than 2 pages). When these are compiled, it will serve as the review sheet for the midterm and final exam. Your document will have either three or four portions, each one paragraph long. First, a brief introduction to the author, including his biographical details and some historical context. This should only be done if you are the first "expert" on the particular author (if there are multiple authors, discuss them all in a single paragraph and sacrifice detail). Second, a brief summary of the day's reading. There is no space for in-depth analysis, so only include the main ideas that were discussed in class (you are encouraged to note controversies!). In this paragraph you should define at least two key, new concepts, putting them in **bold** in the document. Third, a connection of the author to the course as a whole: how does he connect, historically and intellectually, to other authors? To whom is he responding, and in what way? For this last paragraph, you could also draw on texts from Lit Hum.

There will also be an ongoing discussion on Courseworks. Directly after class each day, I will post a series of questions about the next session's readings. Eight times over the course of the semester, you will be responsible for responding to one of these questions in a well-developed post, including at least one citation from the text (at least 250 words). You may also choose to respond to another student's response instead of responding directly to my own questions; you can also, if you wish, write something of your own, without responding to my prompt (this is your chance to guide class discussion). Feel free to be creative here. These will be due at midnight the night before each class.

You will be asked to write two 1500-2000 word essays (5-7 pages): one of these will be on Plato or Aristotle, and another on figures from later in the semester. These will be due on October 26 and December 14. In each case, a thesis statement is due to me via e-mail beforehand (on October 12 and December 7, respectively). For the first paper, a draft is **required** on October 19, while for the second, drafts will be accepted up to 9 December. Papers submitted late, without prior approval, will be docked one grade level per day (i.e. from an A- to a B+).

You are highly discouraged from using laptop computers; if you wish to use them, turn off the wireless function. You are not permitted to browse the internet during class.

Note on plagiarism: I take plagiarism extremely seriously, and will not be lenient with those found guilty. It is far better to turn in a mediocre paper than to plagiarize: the former will hurt your grade but, if caught, the latter will jeopardize your academic career. There is little need to use secondary sources in this course, but if you choose to use them, they must be properly cited. If you have any questions about this—that is, if you are not sure whether or not a certain act constitutes plagiarism—ask me about this before turning in your paper.

Here is the official policy on plagiarism, which I will follow: “Columbia College is dedicated to the highest ideals of integrity in academia. Therefore, in Literature Humanities and Contemporary Civilization, any instance of academic dishonesty, attempted or actual, will be reported to the faculty chair of the course and to the dean of the Core Curriculum, who will review the case with the expectation that a student guilty of academic dishonesty will receive the grade of "F" in the course and be referred to dean's discipline for further institutional action.”

Assessment

40%: Class Participation, Attendance, Courseworks

30%: Papers (15% per paper)

10%: Midterm

20%: Final (cumulative)

Required Texts

The following texts are available at Columbia University Bookstore, Book Culture, and on reserve at Butler Library. I have also listed the publisher and ISBN for each in case you want to order them online. You should bring the day's texts with you to class (if the readings are online, you should bring a printout).

Plato, *Republic* (Hackett), ISBN # 0872201368

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Hackett), 0872204642

Aristotle, *Politics* (Hackett), 0872203883

Epictetus, *The Handbook* (Hackett), 0915145693

The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Ed. (Meridian), 0452006478
Augustine, *City of God* (Penguin), 0140444262
The Holy Qur'an (Amana), 2004046368
Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Penguin), 0140449159
Machiavelli, *The Discourses* (Penguin), 9780140444285
Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Protestant Reformation* (Harper), 0061148477
René Descartes, *Discourse on Method etc.* (Hackett), 0872204200
Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford World's Classics), 0192834983
John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* (Hackett), 091514493X
Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Hackett), 091514560X

Course Schedule

September 7: Introduction

Part I: Athens: Reason and Virtue

September 12: Plato, *Republic*, Books 1-3

September 14: *Republic*, Books 4-6

September 19: *Republic*, Books 7-10 (skim 10)

September 21: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I: 1, 2, 4, 7-8, 13, II, III: 1-9

September 26: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books VIII, IX, X

September 28: Aristotle, *Politics*, Books I:1-8, II:1-4.

October 3: Hellenistic Thought: Epicurus, "Letter to Herodotus" and "Letter to Menoecus"
(available on Core website); Epictetus, *Handbook*

Part II: Jerusalem: Faith and Duty

October 5: Hebrew Bible: Exodus [entire, but you can skim chapters 26-31 and 35-40], Ecclesiastes, Amos

<Paper 1 topics circulated>

October 10: New Testament: Matthew, John

October 12: New Testament: Romans, James

<Paper 1 thesis statements due>

October 17: Qu'ran: Suras 1, 114, 112, 68, 63, 56, 39, 26, 17, 12, 4, 3, 2

October 19: Interpreting Religious Texts: Qu'ran (continued)

<Paper 1 First Draft Due>

October 24: Augustine, *City of God*, Book I:Preface-4, 29-36; IV:1-4; VIII:1-12; X:32; XIV:1-7, 10-28

October 26: Medieval Transitions: Aquinas, "Summa Against the Gentiles" and "On Kingship";

Averroës, "On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy" (all available on Core website)

<Paper 1 Final Draft Due>

October 31: Midterm

Part III: New Worlds and the Birth of Modernity

November 2: The New World: Montaigne, “On Cannibals” [Courseworks]; de las Casas, *Apologetic History of the Indies* and *Thirty Very Juridical Propositions*; de Sepulveda, *Democrates Alter* (on Core website)

November 7: NO CLASS—ELECTION DAY HOLIDAY

November 9: Machiavelli, *The Prince*

November 14: Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, Book 1 (preface, chs. 1-5, 10-13, 16-18, 21, 55, 58), Book 2 (preface, chs. 1-3), Book 3 (chs. 1, 3, 8-9, 31, 41, 43)

November 16: Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian Man”; Luther, “On Governmental Authority”; Calvin, “Institutes of the Christian Religion” (213-230) [in *The Protestant Reformation* reader]

November 21: Descartes, *Discourse on First Philosophy* (pages 1-13), *Meditations* (entire)

November 23: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving holiday)

November 28: The Scientific Revolution. Galileo, *Letter to the Grand Duchess* [on Core website]; selections from the works of Bacon, Copernicus, and Newton [available on Courseworks]

November 30: Hobbes, *Leviathan* Book I, entire (esp. Chapter 1, 6, 13, skim Chapters 8-11)
<Paper 2 topics circulated>

December 5: Hobbes, *Leviathan* Book II, chapters 17-21, 29-30

December 7: Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chs. I-V, VI (53-61), VII-IX, XI, XVI (175-6)
<Paper 2 thesis statement due>

December 12: Locke, *Second Treatise*, Chs. XVIII, XIX; Locke, *Letter on Toleration*

December 14 at noon: Paper 2 Due (via e-mail)