THE WESTERN CULTURAL TRADITION  
HP 00113  
Boston College  
Fall 2012

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Office Hours: By appointment  
Class Meeting: Mondays and Wednesdays 3-4:50 PM, Carney 231

REQUIRED BOOKS  
NOTE: EVERYONE MUST USE THESE TRANSLATIONS

E. H. Gombrich, A Little History of the World
Homer, The Iliad, trans. Robert Fitzgerald
Homer, The Odyssey, trans. Robert Fitzgerald
Aeschylus, The Oresteia, trans. Ted Hughes
Aristophanes, Clouds, trans. Jeffrey Henderson
Plato, Symposium and Phaedrus, trans. Benjamin Jowett
Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, trans. David Ross
Donald Senior, et al (editors), The Catholic Study Bible
Epicurus, The Epicurus Reader, trans. Inwood and Gerson

GENERAL INFORMATION

The function of a syllabus is to offer a clear account of how the course is structured and what is expected of the students (and of the professor). Please read this carefully and keep it on hand.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

I) READING NOTES

For the ancient Greeks, the foundation of education was music and gymnastic: nonverbal training for mind and body. In the 21st century we tend to regard education as pure information storage and
processing, likening our brains to computers. But human learning hasn’t changed all that much. We become good thinkers the same way we become good musicians or athletes: through steady effort sustained over time – in a word, practice. That is one reason (among many) why this course is structured around weekly reading notes. Here’s how it works.

STEP ONE: To promote a fruitful discussion, each student is required by NOON EACH MONDAY to email me a one-page, single-spaced set of “Notes” on the work to be discussed in class that week. These will be graded and returned at the end of Monday’s class.

What is required here is a serious effort to wrestle with the substance of the reading, in response to questions provided by me. I do not mean free association between minor aspects of the texts and other topics you find more congenial to think about. The long-term goal is to relate these foundational works to your own lives and to contemporary concerns. But this is possible only after grasping the substance.

STEP TWO: To prepare for Wednesday’s class, each student is required by NOON EACH WEDNESDAY to email me a shorter set of notes on a shorter reading assignment. On weeks when there is no additional reading, I will ask for a short “Afterthought” based on what was discussed in Monday’s class. This can be a self-correction, a new insight, or an unanswered question. These Notes and Afterthoughts will be also graded and returned at the end of class on Wednesday.

For both Notes and Afterthoughts, the most reliable method is to write them as a document, so you can save them and then email them to me as an attachment. Please do not compose them as an email message – these often get lost. I KNOW THIS IS THE ERA OF FACEBOOK AND TWEETING, BUT THIS COURSE REQUIRES THE CONTINUAL USE OF EMAIL.

The style of the notes can be informal. Use the first person and casual language if it aids understanding. Quote the reading but not at length. Find your own words. At the same time, you must proofread your notes. Errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and mechanics will be marked down.

II) ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

I will take attendance and mark down for tardiness and absence. Your participation in discussions will count significantly toward your final grade.

A) Class Participation

This course is taught seminar style, which means a large proportion of the talking is by the students not the professor. After much experience teaching such classes, I have developed a system for making sure the conversation does not always take place between the same half-dozen people. It’s very simple: I will sometimes call on a student without waiting for you to raise your hand. This is done in law school, business school, and other settings where everyone is expected to come prepared. So come prepared.
B) Reading Aloud

I find that many students have a good ear for language and take pleasure in the sheer sound of some (not all) of the works studied in this course. So another component in the course will be practice – and critique – in reading aloud.

As we go along, I will occasionally ask you to prepare a passage from the assignment to read aloud. The purpose of this exercise is to take a break from analyzing the texts and to work on bringing them to life. The best way to do this is in your own physical voice. We will work together on the skills involved. It is both hard and easy to read these imposing texts well. Doing so will make your understanding of them more penetrating and subtle.

III) FINAL EXAM

The final exams for both fall and spring semesters will be take-home and involve writing short formal essays on assigned questions. You may quote the works, but only briefly. The essays must be proofread, typed, and double-spaced, with proper citations for all quotations and references. Errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and mechanics will be marked down.

You may use your class notes as a study aid and reference for the exams, but do not reproduce your notes as a substitute for answering the exam questions. I will consider that plagiarism.

ALL WRITTEN WORK MUST BE HANDED IN ON TIME. I do not give extensions except under unavoidable circumstances. Late papers not given an extension will be penalized one grade level per 12-hour period. That means if an “A” paper due at noon misses the deadline but comes in before midnight, it will be graded “A minus.” If it comes in before noon the following day, it will be graded “B plus.” And so on.

I take very seriously academic integrity and intellectual property rights. Cheating, plagiarism, and misuse of sources will result in a failing grade and referral to the dean of students. For more information on the College’s policies, see the following link:
http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/enmgststserv/acad/univ.html#integrity

GRADES WILL BE BASED ON:

- 50% Notes and Afterthoughts
- 25% Attendance and participation
- 25% Final take-home exam
SYLLABUS

CLASS 1 / Wednesday, Sept. 5 - Introduction to course and to Homer

PRE-CLASS ASSIGNMENT
DUE NOON WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 5

CLASS 2 / Monday, Sept. 10 - Homer

NOTES ON ILLIAD (Books 1-10)
DUE NOON MONDAY, SEPT.10

CLASS 3 / Wednesday, Sept. 12 - Homer

NOTES ON ILLIAD (Books 11-14)
DUE NOON WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 12

CLASS 4 / Monday, Sept. 17 - Homer

NOTES ON ILLIAD (Books 15-24)
DUE NOON MONDAY, SEPT. 17

CLASS 5 / Wednesday, Sept. 19 - Homer

NOTES ON ODYSSEY (Books 1-4)
DUE NOON WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 19

CLASS 6 / Monday, Sept. 24 - Homer

NOTES ON ODYSSEY (Books 5-18)
DUE NOON, MONDAY, SEPT. 24

CLASS 7 / Wednesday, Sept. 26 - Homer

NOTES ON ODYSSEY (Books 19-24)
DUE NOON WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 28

CLASS 8 / Monday, Oct. 1 - Aeschylus

NOTES ON ORESTEIA (I and II)
DUE NOON MONDAY, OCT. 1
CLASS 9 / Wednesday, Oct. 3 - Aeschylus

NOTES ON ORESTEIA (III)
DUE NOON WEDNESDAY, OCT. 3

NO CLASS MONDAY, OCTOBER 8 - COLUMBUS DAY

Class 10 / Wednesday, Oct. 10 - Aristophanes and Plato

NOTES ON CLOUDS AND REPUBLIC (ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE)
DUE NOON WEDNESDAY, OCT. 10

CLASS 11 / Monday, Oct. 15 - Plato

NOTES ON SYMPOSIUM
DUE NOON MONDAY, OCT. 15

CLASS 12 / Wednesday, Oct. 17 - Plato

NOTES ON SYMPOSIUM
DUE NOON WEDNESDAY, OCT. 17

CLASS 13 / Monday, Oct. 22 - Plato

NOTES ON PHAEDRUS
DUE NOON MONDAY, OCT. 22

CLASS 14 / Wednesday, Oct. 24 - Aristotle

NOTES ON ETHICS
DUE NOON WEDNESDAY, OCT. 24

CLASS 15 / Monday, Oct. 29 - Aristotle

NOTES ON ETHICS
DUE NOON MONDAY, OCT. 29

CLASS 16 / Wednesday, Oct. 31 - Aristotle

NOTES ON ETHICS
DUE NOON WEDNESDAY, OCT. 31
CLASS 17 / Monday, Nov. 5 – Hebrew Bible

NOTES ON GENESIS (Chapters 1-25)
DUE NOON MONDAY, NOV. 5

CLASS 18 / Wednesday, Nov. 7 – Hebrew Bible

NOTES ON GENESIS (Chapters 37-50)
DUE NOON WEDNESDAY, NOV. 7

CLASS 19 / Monday, Nov. 12 – Hebrew Bible

NOTES ON EXODUS (Chapters 1-24)
DUE NOON MONDAY, NOV. 12

CLASS 20 / Wednesday, Nov. 14 – Hebrew Bible

NOTES ON EXODUS (Chapters 32-34)
DUE NOON WEDNESDAY, NOV. 14

CLASS 21 / Monday, Nov. 19 – Hebrew Bible

NOTES ON ISAIAH
DUE MIDNIGHT WEDNESDAY, NOV. 19

NO CLASS WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 21 – THANKSGIVING BREAK

CLASS 22 / Monday, Nov. 26 – Hebrew Bible

NOTES ON JOB (Chapters 1-31)
DUE NOON MONDAY, NOV. 26

CLASS 23 / Wednesday, Nov. 28 – Hebrew Bible

NOTES ON JOB (Chapter 32-Epilogue)
DUE NOON WEDNESDAY, NOV. 28

CLASS 24 / Monday, Dec. 3 – Epicurus

NOTES ON EPICURUS
DUE NOON MONDAY, DEC. 3
CLASS 25 / Wednesday, Dec. 5 - Review

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW
DUE NOON WEDNESDAY, DEC. 5

CLASS 26 / Monday, Dec. 10 - Review and Film

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW
DUE NOON, MONDAY, DEC. 10

FINAL EXAM (TAKE-HOME)
DUE 5 PM WEDNESDAY, DEC. 19

*** HAPPY HOLIDAYS ***