Western Cultural Tradition I-II
(HP 001-002 08)
Fall 2013
Professor Constas, Stokes 273S, constas@bc.edu, x21046

Course Description

The Honors Program in the College of Arts and Sciences at Boston College offers a curriculum centered on investigating the meaning and legacy of the Western cultural tradition. We read from among the "Great Books" of this tradition, so identified because of the skill of their presentations and the depth of their ideas. In the first year of the Program, the focus is on the beginnings of this tradition: from the ancient worlds of Athens and Jerusalem to the Middle Ages of Dante. In the first semester, our focus will be primarily on the literature and philosophy of classical Greece and Rome.

Like all traditions, the tradition of the classical world addresses itself to the perennial themes of human existence: mortality, the good life, love, justice, the nature of reality, the divine, and so on. Our investigation of this tradition will seek not only to understand the answers the ancients gave to life’s fundamental questions, but also to understand the ways later generations received the answers of those who went before them. In short, we will see the ways a tradition was constituted and reconstituted over a period of several centuries, from Homer, through tragic and comic drama, to Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics and Epicureans and, ultimately, Virgil.

Books to Purchase

(supplemental texts will be provided by the instructor)

Homer, *Iliad*, tr. Fagles (Penguin) (9780140445923)
*Greek Tragedies*, eds. Grene and Lattimore (Chicago)
  - Volume 1 (9780226307909)
  - Volume 2 (9780226307756)
  - Volume 3 (9780226307916)
Euripides, *Medea* (Dover) (9780486275482)
Plato *et alia, Four Texts on Socrates*, eds. West and West (Cornell) (9780801485749)
Plato, *Republic*, tr. Bloom (Basic Books) (9780465069347)
Plato, *Symposium*, tr. Nehemas (Hackett) (9780872200760)
Plato, *Phaedo*, tr. Grube (Hackett) (9780915144181)
Epictetus, *The Handbook*, tr. White (Hackett) (9780915145690)
Virgil, *Aeneid*, tr. Fagles (Penguin) (9780143105138)
Course Requirements and Expectations

- Participation in class discussion is an important requirement of the course. Members of the class are expected to have read the assigned texts in advance, to have thought about them, and to be prepared to discuss intelligently the themes and questions they raise.
- Regular and prompt class attendance is, therefore, mandatory. Three unexcused absences will lower your class participation grade one full step (e.g. from A to B). More than three will result in a failing class participation grade. A double penalty will be imposed for an absence on Monday, November 25 (the Monday before Thanksgiving).
- No eating or drinking in class, except for documented medical reasons.
- The use of laptop computers or tablets is not permitted in class meetings, except for documented medical reasons.
- Phones must be turned off: phones that ring will be answered by the instructor.
- Members of the class should make it a habit to check their BC e-mail accounts regularly for course news and assignments.
- Students will write five short (minimum 800 words) essays during the course of the semester. For more details, please consult the Essay Guidelines. There are also likely to be short writing assignments throughout the semester.
- Students must attend at least two lectures sponsored by an academic department or program, lecture series (such as the Lowell Humanities Series) or research center and, for each one, write a brief (250 word) report. The report must be e-mailed to the instructor within 48 hours of the lecture. All lecture reports must be submitted by December 1.
- There will be an in-class final exam (nature TBD).
- Failure to complete any course requirement will result in a course grade of Incomplete.

Grading

Course grade breakdown:
- Participation: 33%
- Essays: 33%
- Exam: 33%

The grading system consists of twelve categories: A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-, F. A is excellent; B is good; C is satisfactory; D is passing but unsatisfactory; F is failure.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is central to the mission of higher education. Please observe the highest standards of academic integrity in this course. Please review the standards and procedures that are published in the university catalog and on the web (www.bc.edu/integrity). Make sure that the work you submit is in accordance with university policies. If you have any questions, please consult with me. Violations will be reported to the Deans' Office and reviewed by the College's Committee on Academic Integrity. This could result in failure in the course or more severe sanctions.