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LS 151L.80: Introduction to the Humanities

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LS 151: Introduction to Humanities—Honors Section—Fall 2003

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This course focuses on texts and ideas that have informed the Western world from ancient times to the late Roman/early medieval period. Many of our current ideas concerning the privileging of word and text, the importance of reason and \textit{logos}; the different concepts of the divine, the role of women in hierarchical systems; our ideas of justice and law, what is heroic, what is tragic, who is important in society, who is inside and who is other, and how to construct social and cultural identities—all come from these seminal texts that we will discuss together. All of the texts are provocative and open to many kinds of interpretation. In this course, we will try to open up these “old” texts to multiple viewpoints by first trying to place them in their own historical milieu and time and then by discussing the myriad ways these texts still speak to us, thousands of years later. From the ancient Hebrews, we will read Genesis, some psalms and prophets from the wisdom literature, and \textit{Job}; from the Greeks, we will read one of the most important epics (\textit{Odyssey}), the tragic plays of Sophocles' \textit{Oedipus} and \textit{Antigone}, lyrical poetry including some of Sappho’s work; philosophy from the Platonic dialogues; and from the early Christian period, we will read the Gospels of the New Testament and sections of St. Augustine’s famous autobiography \textit{Confessions}.

Class discussion will be lively, sometimes controversial, and always expected. Your opinions count; this class is fundamentally about you and your encounters with these texts. How do you respond to these important ideas from our own tradition? What parts of this tradition do you value and cherish, which do you reject, which do you think need some serious and thoughtful revision to lead us into a better future, a future of hope and possibility and not despair or cynicism?

Expect a heavy dose of reading and writing, full engagement with these classic texts, each other, and me; expect your writing and ideas to be subject to critical scrutiny. Expect challenges, questions, intellectual excitement—all in an atmosphere that will try to engage you with ideas that have resonated with people in the Western world for millennia. Bring to class a sense of curiosity and humor and a spirit of inquiry.

\textbf{Required Texts:}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{New Oxford Annotated Bible}
  \item \textit{Odyssey}
  \item \textit{Greek Lyric}
  \item \textit{Euripides, I}
  \item Sophocles, \textit{Oedipus Cycle}
  \item Plato, \textit{Five Dialogues}
  \item St. Augustine, \textit{The Confessions}
\end{itemize}
Attendance Policy: As you may know, there is an attendance policy for most Humanities courses. In this class, as in many others, attendance is essential in the give-and-take, the exchange and challenge of ideas at the heart of a true education. This exchange is particularly important for a Humanities course, which asks that you engage in the ideas of the texts, that you talk with others about your responses in order to sharpen your ideas and clarify your own positions on important issues that have plagued thinking humans for thousands of years.

To attend class, then, is to hear the issues raised, to hear other voices responding to these ideas, and to voice your own response to them. Professor Dietrich in a lecture said that a great book is one that doesn't shut up. It still engages us, asks us to talk back to it. All of our texts this semester invite us to into a discussion, a conversation that matters, a debate that is ongoing. Our hearing of other voices is especially important because many voices have been silenced for too long. Like Augustine, we need to re-member, to put the past and present together again with new insights and with a new form and substance. To keep memories alive, to see the past as still present, to see the interrelatedness of all humans is part of the message of many of our texts.

To miss class, then, is to miss out on a memory (no matter how small), to miss a link that connects us to other living minds. I hope you will understand better why it is so important to come to class prepared with insights and questions.

THUS, 3-4 absences: Lowers final grade by 1/2 grade point; 
5-6 absences: Lowers final grade by full grade point; 
7-8 absences: Lowers final grade by 1-1/2 grade points; 
over 10 absences means automatic failure for course. You have missed over 1/3 of the class discussion. It cannot be said that you have "taken" or in any way "passed" the course if you have missed that much. (If there is a family emergency or you are struck by a horrible illness, flu, or an accident, the attendance policy will be more flexible. But I must know there is a problem: call me, leave a message on my voice-mail, ask a friend to notify me, etc. Don't just disappear!)

LS 151 Plenary Lecture Series – Fall 2003

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<td>2. September 11</td>
<td>Law and the Prophets</td>
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<td>Job and Wisdom</td>
<td>Robert Pack, English</td>
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<td>4. September 25</td>
<td>Greek Civilization and Odyssey</td>
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<td>5. October 2</td>
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<td>10. November 6</td>
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<td>11. November 13</td>
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<td>The Letters of Paul (Romans)</td>
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<td>14. December 4</td>
<td>Augustine's Confessions</td>
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<td>15. December 11</td>
<td>Roman and Early Christian Art</td>
<td>Margaret Mudd, Art History</td>
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Lectures are given at 11:10 –12:00 in ULH (Urey Lecture Hall) and repeated at 7:10-8:00 p.m. in SS (Social Sciences) 352
Grading:
25%: Paper One, 3-5 pages. I expect you to continue to build on critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. You will be graded not just on content but organization, rhetorical skills, strength of your argument including supporting evidence, and adherence to the conventions of standard written English. Please note the Guidelines for Writing handout, which will clarify for you expectations for college writing.

25%: Paper Two (Comparison/Contrast: Revision of Paper One with another text added to the discussion and analysis): 5-8 pages

25%: Test and Final essay questions

25%: All other written work and shorter essays. One-page responses to the Plenary lectures are always due on the Tuesday following the Thursday lecture.

I want you to write a personal reaction to some significant idea in the lecture. You may be outraged, amused, surprised, enlightened. No two responses will be the same: speak from your heart and mind. Engage with some ideas from your own perspective, personal history and values.

Reading Assignments (Subject to some change and flexibility as necessary)
Sept 2: First Day of Class: Orientation and Introduction
Sept 4: Genesis, 1-22

Sept 9: Genesis: Further discussion plus 25-28, 32-34
Sept 11: Prophets: all of Amos; Isaiah, 1-5 and 45-66

Sept 16: Job
Sept 18: Ecclesiastes 3, 7, 9-11; Psalms 1, 22, 41, 42

Sept 23: Judith in the Apocrypha
Sept 25: Odyssey, Books 1-7

Sept 30: Odyssey, Books 8-13
Oct 2: Odyssey, Books 14-17

Oct 7: Odyssey, Books 18-24
Oct 9: Lyrics: Archilochus, pp. 1-12; Tyrtaeus #5, pp. 15-16; Semonides, pp. 22-26; Mimnermus, pp. 27-30; Sappho, 51-63. Read other lyrics in the anthology.

Oct 14: Oedipus
Oct 16: Antigone

Oct 21: EXAM
Oct 23: Euripides, Medea

Oct 28: Plato and and Greek Philosophy
Oct 30: Plato PAPER 1 due

Nov 4: Plato’s Apology Apologia: It is not an apology in the sense we think of: he is not apologizing for bad behavior or asking for forgiveness, but it is a defense.
Divided into 3 sections, which correspond to 3 stages of trial.
1) defense proper: at that point jury decides on guilty verdict
2) Socrates asks to be rewarded as public benefactor. He is condemned to death
3) Socrates’s final address to court

In (1) longest part of speech, he deals with general prejudice against him; he is agnostic and not a sophist (one who teaches for high fees). Real reason for trial is that he has shown Athenians to be ignorant and confused. Simply trying to test truth of Apollo’s statement that he is wisest of men. Then he turns from the general to his accusers who claim he has corrupted youth of Athens, disbelieves in gods and introduces new divinities. Cross-questions Meletus and shows charges are invalid. He then announces he will do as he always has done to question Athenians about justice and knowledge. This causes outcry and verdict of guilty. He then refuses to bargain against the death penalty. His speech defies conventions of Athenian legal procedure and rules recommended by sophists. Instead of set oration, Socrates proposes to defend himself in his “usual manner”: Socratic method. It is a defiant speech.

Question: Is Socrates’s philosophical position purely negative, in convincing people they do not understand the words or concepts they use when discussing morality? He himself has no definition to offer, but claims only to know that he himself knows nothing. He rarely proposes solution to dilemmas. But probing questions are a necessary preliminary to definition. Previous philosophers simply announced their doctrines to the world. Socrates insisted true knowledge could not be simply proclaimed and then accepted or rejected. Learner and teacher had to find their way through hard-won agreement on point after point, to define what they could both accept and act on. This process—dialectic— was a startling contrast to the standard procedure of sophist teachers, who gave lectures.

Socrates’s contribution was not just a revolution in method. Also responsible for a decisive shift in areas explored by philosophy. Many philosophers were exploring how to understand the material universe. Thales thought water was basis of all matter (4 elements). Others thought atomic theory; others being, becoming, change and motion. Socrates brought philosophy to bear on moral problems of human life, especially on justice.

Nov 6: Introduction to New Testament
Written response: Sophocles through his plays, Plato through the figure of Socrates as he emerges in the Platonic dialogues, and the figure of Jesus as he comes to be known in the Gospel writings all seem to point to the limits of human knowledge and the ways humans strive to know or understand their place in the world with respect to their understanding of their own virtue, the possibility of the immortality of the souls, and the difference between the unjust or wrong judgment by humans and the vindication or validation by an otherworldly authority (god/s). Compare and contrast these three in terms of how and whether humans can know the truth.

Nov 11: Veteran’s Day Holiday. No class
Nov 13: Gospel of Matthew and Mark

Nov 18: Gospel of Luke and John
Discuss the ways that the Gospel of Luke or the Gospel of John is different from the other two gospel writers in terms of a)intention, meanings and themes; b)audience; c) style and rhetorical power. What is most compelling in how they present their story and tell their message?

Nov 20: St. Paul—Letters
Nov 25: Watch film Jesus of Montreal and write 1-2 page response to it
Nov 27: Thanksgiving holiday. No class
Dec 2: Confessions
Dec 4: Confessions PAPER 2 due
Dec 9: Confessions
Dec 11: Last Day of Class and final discussions. Final essay question due