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LS 152L.01: Introduction to the Humanities

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LS 152: Introduction to Humanities

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This course will explore the ways in which the Western world has investigated questions concerning the nature of humans and the human condition from medieval times through the 20th century. We will examine selected great works of literature, philosophy, political thought, and the arts. We will look closely at the ways that humans are conditioned and formed in relation to their families, their cosmos, law and society, and political and social institutions. We will explore what humans are capable of: the best and worst in us; how much control we have over the environment and nature and how we see ourselves in relation to god or ultimate realities. What is the individual’s responsibility to the polis, what are the limits of human freedom and what are the constraints? What ideas of justice or social organization have humans imagined? What idealistic ideas or utopian visions have humans created in the face of an imperfect and flawed world? What is the role of conscience or civic duty? What do we owe our families, our society, our government, our religion, our selves? How has western civilization moved from its medieval roots through the age of enlightenment through revolutions and into modernity? Has increasing self-consciousness been detrimental to a sense of connection to others and to the earth? An interesting quotation from D.H. Lawrence, Apocalypse:

"We cannot bear connection. That is our malady. We must break away and be isolated; we call that being free, being individual. Beyond a certain point, which we have reached, it is suicide. What man most passionately wants is his living wholeness and his living unison, not his isolate salvation of his soul. I am part of the sun as my eyes are a part of me. That I am part of the earth my feet know perfectly, and my blood is part of the sea. There is nothing of me that is alone and absolute except my mind, and we shall find that the mind has no existence by itself. It is only the glitter of the sun on the surface of the waters."

Required Texts:
Dante’s Inferno
Sir Thomas More’s Utopia
Shakespeare’s Hamlet
Descartes’s Discourse on Method
William Blake poetry—Dover edition
William Wordsworth –Dover edition
Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment

Materials on internet, handouts, as well as works on electronic reserve (ERES):
http://eres.lib.umt.edu Go to Liberal Studies for department and then Dietrich, Paul (or me) for instructor. Your password is Erasmus
Attendance Policy: In this class, as in many others, your attendance is essential to the give-and-take, the exchange and challenge of ideas at the heart of a true education. This exchange is particularly important in a Humanities course, which asks that you engage with the ideas of the text, that you talk with others about your responses in order to sharpen your own ideas and clarify your positions on important questions that have plagued thinking human beings for thousands of years. You will hear views you disagree with; some you may find repugnant, offensive, or threatening. I expect civility and a level of discourse that allows all opinions to be aired. To attend class, then, is to hear issues raised, to hear other voices responding to these ideas, and to voice your own response to them. People have said that great books are those that never shut up; they engage each successive generation of readers in new and different ways, they invite us to talk back to them. All of our texts this semester invite us into a serious conversation, a conversation that matters, a debate that is on-going. Our hearing of other voices is especially important because many voices have been silenced for too long. Like St. Augustine, we need to re-member, to put the past and present together with new insights, with new form and substances. To keep memories alive, to see the past as still present, to see the interrelatedness of all humans is part of the message of this course. To miss class, then, is to miss out on a memory—no matter how small—to miss a link that connects each of us to other minds. Perhaps these introductory remarks will help you understand why it is so important to come to class prepared to talk and to share your insights and questions with others. THUS,

2 absences lower your final grade by ½ grade point;
3 absences lower your final grade by a full grade point;
4 absences lower your final grade by 1-1/2 grade points;
5 or more absences means automatic failure. You have missed too much to say that you have “taken” or passed the course. If there is a family emergency or you are struck by a horrific illness or accident, the attendance policy may be more flexible. I need to know, however, if there is a problem. Please call me, email me or ask a friend to notify me about your present problem. Do not wait a week or two and do not just disappear.

No late papers or assignments are accepted. No make-up tests.

GRADING: Once you have fulfilled the attendance policy, your grade will be based on two tests (20% each: Feb 24 & April 14); Polished Essay, 4-7 pages (20%) with drafts attached due on April 28; Shorter Assignments including written answers to questions I give in advance as well as a 2-3 page My Utopia due on Feb. 15th (20%); Final essays due on May 5th (10%); Weekly writings to plenary lectures due the following Tuesday and in-class engagement. I expect active engagement with the materials, intelligent conversation, and strong insights. I may ask you to do specific exercises or come to class prepared with written answers to specific, directed questions. If you engage in negative, disruptive or inattentive behavior by activities such as sleeping, talking, reading non-class materials, you will receive at least a half a grade point less on your final grade. If you are extremely shy or have a problem talking before others, please see me privately and we will find other ways for you to engage with the materials. (10%).

4th hour or Plenary: Thursday plenary lectures are mandatory. They constitute the 4th hour of this course. Go to the 11 am lecture in Urey Underground Lecture Hall or the 7:10pm lecture in Social Sciences 352 on Thursday night. Listen and take notes. For the following class, hand in a typed or computer-generated page or two in which you engage
with some aspect of the lecture that grabbed your attention. You might object to ideas, be thrilled about the novelty of a concept, or apply it to your own thinking or life experiences. This is your personal and idiosyncratic reaction/response to the materials you hear.

### Plenary Lectures

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Lectures are at 11:10-noon, ULH (Urey Lecture Hall) and repeated at 7:10-8:00 pm in SS 352

### I. Individual and the Cosmos: Authority and Experience; Sacred and Profane and Pilgrimage of Life in Medieval Culture:

**Tu: Jan 25:** Introduction to course and Medieval Culture

**Th: Jan 27:** Christine de Pizan (eres) taking on the misogynistic tradition
1. What is she objecting to in the misogynist tradition? 2. How does she mount her own attack on it, speaking in a woman’s voice, which was considered inferior?

**Tu: Feb 1:** Introduction to Dante’s *Inferno*, Cantos 1-6 (Vestibule and Circles 1-3)

1. Role of women in and behind *Divine Comedy* and ultimately positive message (*Paradiso*)
2. Different levels—literal, allegorical, political (revenge poem), spiritual and religious, moral, artistic, and aesthetic.
3. Contrapasso technique and his placement of various sins in different circles of Hell.
4. His concern about his role as poet and the role of Vergil in *Inferno*.
5. Why is his vision so personal and idiosyncratic when he intends his message to be available to everyone? His use of specificity for a general and abstract message.
Th: Feb 3: Dante's Inferno, Cantos 7-17 (Vestibule, Circles 4-7)  
[Plenary on Dante--Drake]
Tu: Feb 8: Dante's Inferno, Cantos 18-end

II. Early Italian Renaissance and the Wonder of the Human
Th: Feb 10: Dante's Inferno and excerpts from Purgatorio and Paradiso  
[Plenary on Italian Renaissance Art & Culture--Chacon]

III. Folly and Freedom: Ideas of Reform  
Tu: Feb 15: Erasmus from Praise of Folly and Pico and Italian humanism:
1. In what 3 fundamental ways does Pico's vision differ from that of medieval world view?
2. How is man's indeterminate nature different from other kinds of creation? Does this nature make humans more culpable/responsible?
3. Does Pico seem to value free will more than Dante, who might rely on grace and repentance?
4. What accounts for these new ideas about humans' "wondrous" nature?
5. How do humanist thinkers see themselves as heirs of the ancient classical Greek and Latin world rather than medieval one? What in the medieval vision do the artists and writers and thinkers of Renaissance seem to reject?

Sir Thomas More's Utopia: Good Place or No Place. Is it "good" because it does not and cannot exist? Is it an idle dream of perfection or a rational attempt to remake human institutions to overcome the worst in human nature and create a better world for more people? What is the purpose of utopian visions and what is the use to which we can put them in our own imaginative lives or in changing our world? Are they merely imaginative constructs--impractical and unattainable fantasies--or do they serve some concrete need in our discourse about social order and justice?

On Utopia and More:
1. Ironies in work and embedding of his vision
2. What is More's vision of man?
3. What are best and worst aspects of Utopia?
4. What is More trying to control in human nature, and what promote?
5. How is he a "humanist" and what values does he represent?

Th: Feb 17: Sir Thomas More's Utopia and more conversations about utopian visions.
Bring to class your own "My Utopia"—2-3 pages in length.  
[Plenary on Renaissance Humanism--Dietrich]

IV. Exploration of Self in Northern Renaissance
Tu: Feb 22: Montaigne's Essais (eres)

1. What is he trying to achieve in his essai form? Important to see what his essays are NOT: not formal arguments, not structured with clear purpose leading to logical conclusion.
2. What is M's attitude to experience? To custom? To Truth with a capital "T"
3. Why is dogmatic thinking or authority so bad?
4. What is his relationship to classical learning? Clearly, he quotes lots of Latin authors, but is he using them to support his positions? To look erudite or smug? To place himself as a thinker in the long, venerable tradition?
5. What does M say about custom? Does custom allow us to be lulled into thinking our way of doing something is the only or best way to do something? Does he promote a kind of cultural relativism?
6. What are some of his main ideas or points about educating children?
7. What position towards cannibals is M mocking or trying to overturn? What is his position about such a dramatic other?
8. Are learning how to live and learning how to die related? The same? How does philosophy help?

Th: Feb 24: TEST #1 on all materials so far
[Plenary on Reformations of Religion & Society--Farr]
Shakespeare’s Hamlet: 1. Hamlet as tragic hero 2. Shakespeare’s views about human nature? Is he more cynical than Pico? 3. Images of corruption/disease, bodily decay (this too sullied flesh) and treachery and betrayals 4. Pre-occupation about knowing. How do you know what you know? Is world deceiving? Appearances only appearances and not realities. How can one tell the difference? Play within the play. A lot of acting and playing on acting/seeming. Sometimes through play and acting one can find out more about what is real and true. 5. Importance of love and emotion as well as rationality 6. Justice versus revenge. Which is better? How can humans do divine will and how do they know it is right? 7. Great Chain of Being: crimes committed or things broken and the reverberations up and down the chain from nature to state of state.(things rotten in state of Denmark, odd occurrences in nature, supernatural apparition)

Tu: Mar 1: Hamlet, Acts I and II
Th: Mar 3: Hamlet, Acts III, IV and V
[Plenary on Shakespeare by Hunt]

Tu Mar 8: Discussions and synthesis of Renaissance texts and ideas

V. 17th-19th Centuries: From meditation on the human condition to exploiting human reason in the Age of Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment

Th Mar 10: Descartes from Discourse on Method and Kan’s essay “What is Enlightenment?” (eres)
[Plenary on Descartes and Birth of Modern Philosophy]

Tu Mar 15: Voltaire’s Candide
Th Mar 17: Voltaire’s Candide
[Plenary The Art of the Baroque—Hedquist]

Neoclassical or Augustan/Enlightenment Poetry (1660-1740)
- Attitudes towards tradition: In one word, conservative. Many people believed the greatest works of imagination were already achieved. Poets were to emulate the great models from the past: Horace, Ovid, Cicero, Virgil, Homer. The word neo-classical thus means a new kind of classical poetry. There was a distrust, almost a fear, of innovation.
- View of own art: Poetry is first of all a craft. It must be learned. The poet must be disciplined and diligent, patient and hard-working in terms of re-writing and polishing; he must make a conscious effort to adapt the means to an established end. Personal style is not intentionally idiosyncratic, individualistic or unique, but rather a
re-created effort for the new poet to carry culture forward. Poets affirm poetry is still possible and try to measure up to old masters. Decorum is important. The traditional ends of poetry to instruct and delight are still upheld. No art of art’s sake. Art is for the sake of society.

- **Dominant subject matter:** society or human life lived in organized or civilized society. Satire and irony are the dominant modes of writing. Emphasis is on law, restraint, measure; what can be done within limitations. The couple is the perfect form: it brings order to the world and satisfied that deep-seated need for creating order from chaos. It is a reassuring form since it is repeated over and over. But the order is artificial

**SPRING BREAK**

Tu: March 29: Marvell, Donne, and other Metaphysical poets (eres)
Th: March 31: Alexander Pope: Essay on Man(eres)

[Plenary on Music: Baroque, Classical, Romantic]

**VII: Revolution, Realism and Modernism (19th century)**

Tu: Apr 5: Mary Wollstonecraft (eres) and Blake (separate edition)
Th: Apr 7: Wordsworth (separate edition of his poetry)

(Draft of paper due)

[Plenary on Enlightenment: Borgmann]

Tu Apr 12: Marx (eres)
Th Apr 14: TEST #2

[Plenary on Romanticism--Pack]

Tu April 19: Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, Part I up to Part II, ii
Th Apri 21 Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, Part II, ii to end of Part II

[Plenary: Russian Novel—Justman]

Tu April 26: Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, Part III to Part 4, iii
Th April 28: Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, Part 4, iii to end of Part 5

[Plenary: Modern Political Thought—Drake]

**PAPER DUE with accompanying drafts attached**

May 3: Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, Part 6 and epilogue
May 5: Last Day and Final Discussions. **Final essays due**