

Contemporary Civilization
Fall 2013, Section 27
Monday and Wednesday, 4:10-6:00
Fairchild 601C

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It could be that we, who are earth-bound creatures and have begun to act as though we were dwellers of the universe, will forever be unable to understand, that is, to think and to speak about the things which nevertheless we are able to do.

Welcome to Contemporary Civilization, a rite of passage at Columbia. In this course, we will be reading some of the greatest works of philosophy and theology ever written. All of them are challenging. Some may seem obscure, objectionable, or even wrong. Our task in this course is therefore twofold: first, to attempt to understand these texts on their own terms, that is, to be generous, open and rigorous readers; second, to draw out and clarify the broader problems these works raise in conversation with one another. Through careful reading and active discussion, we will see how questions of cosmology, epistemology, social order, human nature, and ethics have been linked since Plato and remain intertwined today. Though we may disagree with many of their answers, these authors begin by helping us to ask the right questions.

Details and Course Requirements

This course is a seminar, organized around discussion. The most important 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 unexcused absences will be noted. If you must miss a class, let me know as far in advance as possible. If you are ill, a doctor's note is required.

You are required to post on Courseworks once a week. At the beginning of the semester you will be divided into two groups; one group will be responsible for posting before Monday's class, the other before Wednesday's class. You are required to read all of the responses on both days. Your post should take the form of a short quotation – a single sentence, two at the most – from the text followed by a discussion (200-300 words) of the quotation's relevance to the work under discussion. Try to be as creative as possible in your selected quotation and analysis. Posts will be due at midnight the night before class.

Every so often there will be in-class quizzes. I will give you prompts (quotes, thematic questions etc.) and ask you to write a 2-4 paragraph response in class. Quizzes are closed book, closed note. They are not a large percentage of your grade, but you are expected to apply the feedback I give you to future essays. I will usually give you a couple of days notice before a quiz, but reserve the right to make them pop quizzes if I deem it necessary.

You will be asked to write two 1700-2200-word essays (6-8pages): the first will be on either Plato or Aristotle; the second will address texts that come later in the course. I will distribute a

list of possible paper topics in advance of each due date. The first essay will be due on Friday, October 11; the second on Wednesday, December 11. Submit papers to me via email no later than 5:00pm on the day that they are due. I am happy to meet with you to discuss ideas and approaches. Drafts are not required but will be accepted any time up to five days prior to the essay deadline. Papers submitted late without prior approval will be docked one grade level per day (e.g. from an A- to a B+).

Cell phones, laptops, tablets, etc. must be turned off and put away during class. If you need to use a laptop for any reason, speak to me.

Academic Integrity

This is the College's official policy on plagiarism: "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."

My take on plagiarism: it is the worst thing you can do in this class, and I 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; 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.

Assessment

40%: Class Participation, Attendance, Quizzes, Courseworks posts

30%: Papers (10% first paper; 20% second paper)

10%: Midterm

20%: Final

Required Texts

The following texts are available at Book Culture and on reserve at Butler Library. I've provided the publisher and ISBN for each in case you want to order them online. However, please ensure that you order the specified edition; there can be crucial differences between translations and pagination across various editions. Please ensure that you bring the day's texts with you to class (if the readings are online, bring a printout).

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

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford), 0199213615

Aristotle, *Politics* (Hackett), 0872203883

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (Penguin), 0140449337

The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Ed. (Meridian), 0452006478

Augustine, *City of God* (Penguin), 0140444262

The Holy Qur'an (Amana), 2004046368

Three Early Modern Utopias (Oxford World Classics) 978-0199537990

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Hackett), 0872203174

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses* (Penguin), 9780140444285

Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Protestant Reformation* (Harper & Row), 0061148477

René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy* (Hackett), 0872204200

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford World's Classics), 0192834983

John Locke, *Political Writings* (Hackett), 0872206769

Course Schedule

September 4: Introduction

September 9: Plato, *Republic*: Books 1-3

September 11: Plato, *Republic*: Books 4-6

September 16: Plato, *Republic*: Books 7-10

September 18: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*: Book I, chs. 1-2, 4, 7-8, 13; Book II; Book III, chs. 1-9

September 23: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*: Books VIII & X

September 25: Aristotle, *Politics*: Book I; Book 3, chs. 4, 6-13; Book 4, chs. 1-12; Book 7, chs. 1-3; Book 8, chs. 1-3.

September 30: Roman and Hellenistic Philosophy: Epicurus, "Letter to Herodotus" [Core website]; **Epictetus, *The Handbook* (on Butler reserve, or buy on Amazon for about \$5)**

October 2: Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* **Books 2-4, 7-9, 12**

October 7: Hebrew Bible: *Exodus* 1-24 *Deuteronomy*, 1-6, 9-11, *Judges* 4-10, *Ecclesiastes*

October 9: New Testament: *Matthew*; *Romans*

October 11 Paper 1 due

October 14: Qu'ran: Suras 1, 114, 112, 68, 63, 56, 39, 26, 17, 12, 4, 3, 2 (in that order)

October 16: Qu'ran part 2

October 21: Augustine, *City of God* I.P-4, 15-36; IV.1-4; VIII.1-12; X.32; XIV.1-4, 8, 10-19, 22-28; XVIII.1, 54 [final paragraph]; XIX.13-17, 21, 24, 26-28.

October 23: Ibn Tufayl, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*

October 28: Midterm

October 30: The Reformation: Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian Man” and “On Governmental Authority” [in *The Protestant Reformation* reader]

November 4: NO CLASS

November 6: Machiavelli, *The Prince*

November 11: Machiavelli, *Discourses*, Book I (Preface, chs. 1-13, 16-18, 29, 32, 34, 42, 55, 58); Book II (Preface, chs. 1-3, 29); Book III (chs. 1, 3, 7-9, 22, 34, 43)

November 13: Bacon, *New Atlantis*

November 18: Descartes, *Discourse on Method*

November 20: Descartes *Meditations* 1-2, 4

November 25: Class Canceled

November 27: NO CLASS – Happy Thanksgiving!

December 2: Hobbes, *Leviathan*: Book I, Introduction, chs. 1-7, 12-16

December 4: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Book II, chs. 17-21, 29-30; Book III, chs. 32-33, 46-47, Review & Conclusion

December 9: Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, 1-9, 18, 19

December 11 Paper 2 due 5pm – Final exam review 5-7pm

December 13, 12:30-3:30pm: FINAL EXAM