

## **Conversations of the West: Antiquity and the Enlightenment**

Professor Joy Connolly  
Department of Classics  
Lecture MW 3.30-4.45, Silver 207  
Preceptors: Joel Christensen, Sasha Watson, Carole Woodall  
V55.0403.015

γνωθι σαυτον, “know yourself,” was the phrase inscribed over the entrance to the temple of Apollo at Delphi. Our concerns in this course are how the ancient Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans came to know themselves and those around them—as mortal men and women, civilized or barbarian, slaves to fate or masters of their destinies, naturally virtuous or vicious—and how Enlightenment thinkers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century reworked classical thought about the self. We will orient ourselves around five themes. 1) How do philosophical ideals and literary inventions relate to practical ideas about the truly well-lived life? 2) How do the writers we will read—historians, philosophers, poets, and priests—defend their chosen paths to knowledge: memory, imagination, reason, passion, or religious devotion? 3) Must we understand our past to make sense of our present? 4) How do our writers represent the human condition, especially the unpredictable effects of love, the irrational, the unknown, and luck? 5) We will also discuss the evolution of various ideas of human community, based on family, nation, race, religion, species, or belief, and their effects on conceptions of the good life. In lecture, the texts will regularly be discussed alongside selected works of comparative literature, art, and music. Papers will require a mix of creative and analytical thinking. In-lecture exercises of various types will be held most weeks.

### **Advice and bonuses**

Three things will help you stay on top of the considerable amount of reading in this course. Read the assigned texts before lecture; stay tuned at the end of lecture, where I’ll wrap up with advice on what to focus on for our next meeting; and be alive in precept.

Office hours: Thursday 11 AM-1.30 PM, Room 710, 7<sup>th</sup> floor of 25 Waverly Place, across the street from Silver. If this time is inconvenient, make an appointment at 212 992-9517 (2-9517 from an NYU phone) or e-mail [joyc@nyu.edu](mailto:joyc@nyu.edu).

You are welcome though not required to join in the following informal events: an evening film screening, a visit to Ellis Island (late October), and the Metropolitan Museum (mid-November). Details to be announced in due course.

### **Schedule of lectures and readings**

Sept 8: Introduction. Precepts will be held this week.

## **I. Hebrew Scriptures**

Sept 13: *Genesis* chapters 1-35 (pp. 11-60)

Sept 15: *Genesis* chapters 37-50 (pp. 62-81) and *Exodus* 1-24, 32-34 (pp. 84-118, 128-134)

## **II. Tragedy in democratic Athens**

Sept 20: Sophocles, *King Oedipous* (read whole play)

Sept 22: *King Oedipous* (revisit selected passages)

Sept 27: Euripides, *Bacchae* (read whole play)

Sept 29: *Bacchae* (revisit selected passages)

**\*\*\*First paper due in lecture Wed 9/29**

## **III. Athenian history and philosophy**

Oct 4: Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, pp. 3-15 (introduction), 32-43 (debate at Sparta), 67-71 (speech of Perikles), 91-108 (Perikles' funeral oration, the plague, Perikles' last speech)

Oct 6: *History*, pp. 142-154 (Mytilenian debate), 294-301 (Melian debate), 310-321 (Sicilian debate), 399-407 (the Sicilian expedition), 442-446 (temporary downfall of Athenian democracy)

Oct 11: Plato, *Symposium*, pp. 1-44

Oct 13: *Symposium*, pp. 45-75

## **Monday Oct 18: MIDTERM EXAMINATION**

## **IV. Roman epic**

Oct 20: Vergil, *Aeneid* Books 1-2

Oct 25: *Aeneid* 3, 4 and 6

Oct 27: *Aeneid* 7, 11.610-end, 12

## **V. Christian testimony**

Nov 1: Paul, *Letter to the Galatians*; Augustine, *Confessions* I-V (pp. 1-88)

Nov 3: *Confessions* VI-VIII (pp. 89-154)

## VI. Enlightenment thought

Nov 8: transition to the 18<sup>th</sup> century: no reading assignment

**\*\*\*Outline of second paper due in lecture Monday 11/8**

Nov 10: Rousseau, *Social Contract* Bk. 1 (pp. 45-62)

**\*\*\*Second paper due in lecture Monday 11/15**

Nov 15: *Social Contract* Bk. 2; Bk. 3 chs. 1, 10, 11, 17, 18; Bk. 4 ch. 1

Nov 17: Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” and “Idea for a Universal History”

Nov 22: Kant, “Essay on Perpetual Peace”

Nov 24: no lecture

## VII. Did women have an Enlightenment?

Nov 29: Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, pp. 79-174, 223-30

Dec 1: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, pp. 245-278, 307-328

## VIII. The fantastical Enlightenment: prelude to Romanticism

Dec 6: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, pp. 1-149

**\*\*\*Third paper due in lecture Monday 12/6**

Dec 8: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 150-end

Dec 13: Review

## Requirements and grading

Three short papers: details will be provided in lecture and precept

#1 (10%): exercise in casting, costuming, and staging Greek drama (3 pages)

#2 (15%): creative paper plus stylistic analysis (at least 4 pages)

#3 (15%): analytic essay (5 pages)

Midterm exam (15%): IDs, short essays

Final (20%): format to be announced

Precept attendance, participation, and in-lecture exercises: 20%

*In-lecture exercises* range from 5 minute quiz-type affairs to quick responses to the reading and will be graded accordingly. Any exercise demanding a bit of extra study (i.e. maps or timelines) will be announced in lecture a week ahead. Your two lowest grades will be dropped. Missed exercises will count as zeroes.

If you must miss lecture or precept due to illness or emergency, inform your preceptor as soon as possible. Except in special cases, the course is too large to arrange make-up lecture exercises or examinations. After two missed precepts, your grade will suffer incremental decreases.

Familiarize yourself with University regulations on academic integrity.

If you find yourself struggling with any aspect of the course, consult Professor Connolly or your preceptor early and often.

### **Reading list (available at the Bookstore)**

- 1) *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Trans. by committee
- 2) Sophocles: *The Theban Plays*. Trans. Ruby Blondell.
- 3) Euripides: *Bacchae*. Trans. Paul Woodruff.
- 4) Plato: *Symposium*. Trans. Paul Woodruff and Alexander Nehamas.
- 5) Thucydides: *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Trans. Steven Lattimore.
- 6) Vergil: *Aeneid*. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald.
- 7) Augustine: *Confessions*. Trans. Henry Chadwick.
- 8) Immanuel Kant: *Political Writings*. Trans. H. B. Nisbet.
- 9) Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *The Social Contract*. Trans. Christopher Betts.
- 10) Mary Wollstonecraft: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.
- 11) Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*.