

## Conversations of the West: Antiquity and the Enlightenment

Professor Joy Connolly

Department of Classics

Lecture Monday/Wednesday 3.30-4.45

Preceptors: Ipek Celik, Reesa Grushka, Zachary Levine, Daniel Rosenberg

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γνῶθι σαυτον, “know yourself,” was the phrase inscribed over the entrance to the temple of Apollo at Delphi. Roman thinkers called the search for the good life *cura sui*, the “cultivation of the self.” Our concerns in this course are how the ancient Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans came to know themselves and those around them—as male and female, naturally isolated or social, civilized or barbarian, virtuous or vicious, rational or passionate, slaves to fate or masters of their destinies—and how Enlightenment thinkers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century reworked classical thought about the self. Our texts explore the challenge of self-understanding on the individual and communal levels; what we strive for in life, and why; and where literature, art, and religious belief fit into the project of living an ethical life.

We will focus on four themes. 1) How do different genres—drama, history, autobiography, epic poetry, philosophical dialogue, and scripture, among others—present practical ideas about the truly well-lived life? 2) Must we understand the past and its traditions to live well in the present? 3) How do these texts represent the human condition and its capacity to change? 4) How is self-knowledge affected by the communities humans create (family, political regime, nation, religion, race, ethnicity, gender)?

In lecture, the assigned texts will regularly be discussed alongside selected works of art and music. Papers will encourage a mix of creative and analytical thinking. Attendance at lecture and precept is required. In-lecture exercises will be held most weeks.

### Advice, contact information, and bonuses

Three things will help you stay on top of the reading in this course. 1) Read the assigned texts before lecture. 2) Stay tuned at the end of lecture, where I'll wrap up with advice on what to focus on for our next meeting. 2) Talk, listen, and think in precept.

Office hours: Tuesdays 3-5 PM in Room 710, 7<sup>th</sup> floor of 25 Waverly Place. If these hours are inconvenient, e-mail to make an appointment.

Contact: office 212 992-9517 (2-9517 from an NYU phone) or [joyc@nyu.edu](mailto:joyc@nyu.edu)

Website: <http://www.nyu.edu/fas/dept/classics/faculty/connolly/index.html>

For your enjoyment, we will screen a couple of relevant evening films (Eastwood's *Unforgiven* and Pasolini's *Oedipus Rex* are possibilities): these are optional.

## Schedule of lectures and readings

Sept 7: Introduction. Precepts will be held this week.

### I. Drama and identity

Sept 12: Euripides, *Bacchae* (read whole play)

Sept 14: *Bacchae* (revisit selected passages)

### II. History: reason and rhetoric in democratic Athens

Sept 19: Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, pp. 3-15 (introduction), 32-43 (debate at Sparta), 67-71 (first speech of Perikles), 90-108 (Perikles' funeral oration, the plague, Perikles' last speech)

Sept 21: Thucydides, *History*, pp. 142-154 (Mytilenian debate), 294-301 (Melian debate), 310-321 (Sicilian debate), 404-407 (the end of the Sicilian expedition), 442-446 (temporary downfall of Athenian democracy)

### III. Philosophy, love, and eternal life

Sept 26: Plato, *Symposium*, pp. 1-44

Sept 28: Plato, *Symposium*, pp. 45-75

Oct 3: Plato, *Phaedo*

**\*\* First paper due \*\***

### IV. Epic and national identity

Oct 5: Vergil, *Aeneid* 1-2; Livy, *History of Rome* (excerpt on Blackboard)

Oct 10: NO CLASS

Oct 12: Vergil, *Aeneid* 3-4

Oct 17: Vergil, *Aeneid* 6, 7, 8.822-992, 9.240-end, 10.1-160 and 967-1275, 12

### V. God, the self, and the social order

Oct 19: *Genesis* chs. 1-9, 12-27

Oct 24: **\*\* MIDTERM EXAM on Greek and Roman texts \*\***

Oct 26: *Genesis* 37-50; *Exodus* 1-20

Oct 31: Augustine, *Confessions* Books 1-5

Nov 2: Augustine, *Confessions* Books 6-8

#### **VI. Enlightenment travels: thinking beyond the West**

Nov 7: Montesquieu, *Persian Letters* 1-14, 24, 28, 46, 69, 80, 89

**\*\* Second paper due \*\***

Nov 9: *Persian Letters* 26, 34, 38, 55, 62, 64, 65, 86, 102-104, 131, 147-161

#### **VII. Inventing society from the ground up**

Nov 14: Rousseau, *Social Contract* Book 1 (pp. 45-62)

Nov 16: *Social Contract* Book 2

Nov 21: *Social Contract* Book 4

Nov 23: NO CLASS

#### **VIII. Did women have an Enlightenment?**

Nov 28: Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, pp. 79-174, 223-30

Nov 30: *Vindication*, pp. 245-278, 307-328

#### **IX. Men and monsters: prelude to Romanticism**

Dec 5: Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" and "Idea for a Universal History"

Dec 7: Shelley, *Frankenstein*, pp. 1-149

Dec 12: *Frankenstein*, pp. 150-end

**\*\* Third paper due \*\***

Dec 14: Wrap-up (no precepts this week)

**Final examination:** take-home essays due by e-mail to your TA at noon Dec 20<sup>st</sup>

## Requirements, grading, general policy

Three short papers: 5 pages each (15%, 15%, 20%)

Midterm exam (15%): IDs, short essays

Final (20%): IDs, short essays, long essay (take-home)

Participation in precept (including attendance) and in-lecture exercises: 15%

*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 lowest grade will be dropped. Missed exercises count as zeroes.

If you must miss lecture or precept due to illness or emergency, inform your preceptor. 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.

No extensions will be granted on or after the day papers are due. If you must turn in late work due to illness or other emergency, contact your preceptor immediately. Papers turned in late without good reason given at prior notice will receive appropriately lower grades.

If you find yourself struggling with any aspect of the course, consult Professor Connolly and/or your preceptor early and often. We set aside office hours to answer your questions, and you're encouraged to use them.

## Reading list (available at the Bookstore): please secure these editions/translations

Euripides: *Bacchae*. Trans. Paul Woodruff.

Thucydides: *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Trans. Steven Lattimore.

Plato, *Symposium*. Trans. Paul Woodruff and Alexander Nehamas.

Plato, *Phaedo*. Trans. David Gallop.

Vergil: *Aeneid*. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald.

Augustine: *Confessions*. Trans. Henry Chadwick.

Montesquieu, Charles Louis de Secondat: *Persian Letters*. Trans. C. J. Betts.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *The Social Contract*. Trans. C. J. Betts.

Mary Wollstonecraft: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein: or the Modern Prometheus*.

Readings in the Hebrew Scriptures and Kant will be posted on Blackboard.