

**Conversations of the West: Antiquity and the Nineteenth Century  
"Humans and the Natural World"  
New York University, Spring 2007  
V55.0404 (028)  
T-TH 2:00-3:15, SILV 408**

**INSTRUCTOR**

Prof. Jennifer Baker, Dept. of English  
19 University Place, 5th floor  
jbaker@nyu.edu  
office hours: T 3:30-5:00 and by appointment

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course examines Western conceptions of the relation between humans and the natural world. We will consider how 19th-century thinkers embraced, revised, and rejected ancient ideas about creation, natural order, the distinction between humans and animals, and the risks and rewards of probing nature's mysteries.

**PRECEPTORS AND SECTIONS**

Joanna Holzman  
jsh242@nyu.edu  
029: F 9:30-10:45, WAVE 370  
030: F 11:00-12:15, 25 W4 C-13  
Zach Holbrook  
zach.holbrook@gmail.com  
031: M 8:00-9:15, 145F 210  
032: M 9:30-10:45, SILV 501

**BOOKS** (available at the NYU Bookstore)

Aeschylus. *Prometheus Bound* (Oxford)  
Aristotle. *De Anima (On the Soul)* (Penguin)  
Augustine. *Confessions* (Oxford)  
Darwin, Charles. *Origin of Species* (Penguin)  
*English Victorian Poetry* (Dover)  
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Faust, Part I* (Oxford)  
Hardy, Thomas. *Hardy's Selected Poems* (Dover)  
Homer. *The Odyssey* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)  
Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge)  
*Oxford Study Bible* (Oxford)  
Plato. *Phaedo* (Oxford)  
--. *Timaeus and Critaeus* (Penguin)  
Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein, 1818 Edition* (Norton)  
Wells, H.G. *The Time Machine* (Dover)

**ELECTRONIC TEXTS** (available on Blackboard)

Aristotle, Book 1, *On the Parts of Animals*

Byron, George Gordon, Lord. "Prometheus"  
Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Plato" and *Nature*  
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. "Prometheus"  
Hawthorne, Nathaniel. "The Artist of the Beautiful," "Rappaccini's Daughter" and "The Birth-mark"

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES:**

Attendance and Participation: Students are expected to attend and participate in lectures and sections. Please arrive punctually and, except in cases of emergency, do not leave the room until the session has concluded; please also make sure to turn off all cell phones and pagers. Discussion will be an especially integral part of each section meeting, and you will be expected to complete the section assignments and come prepared to discuss readings. More than three unexcused absences from lectures or section meetings could lower your final grade.

#### Writing Assignments:

There will be three papers assigned for this class: a midterm paper (4-5 pages), a final paper (6-8 pages), and a brief response paper based on the play *Prometheus Bound* (see "Play Attendance and Paper" below). Preceptors may also assign informal writing assignments in conjunction with section meetings.

Paper Submission: Individual preceptors will determine whether papers are to be submitted electronically or in hardcopy. Papers should be double-spaced with one-inch margins; pages should be numbered and, if submitted in hardcopy, stapled. A separate title page is not necessary, but the first page should include your name, your preceptor's name, the date, and the title of the essay.

Due Dates and Late Papers: Papers must be submitted by the deadline. Late papers will be penalized one-third of a grade per day (a B+ becomes a B, etc.).

Use and Citation of Sources: Papers require that students formulate their own ideas in response to readings, lectures, and discussions; therefore, you should not consult outside scholarly texts when writing them. It may be necessary at times to refer to ideas from printed/electronic sources or from class discussion. Please take care to credit ideas that are not your own; if you are not sure whether a citation is required, please consult me or your preceptor. Unauthorized collaboration with other students and the submission of work you previously submitted for another class are unacceptable. *Plagiarism or academic dishonesty of any kind will result in failure.*

#### Exams

There will be a midterm before spring break and a final exam during exam period. Review guidelines will be distributed as the exams approach.

#### Play Attendance and Paper

Students will be required to attend a performance of *Prometheus Bound* at the Classic Stage Company (136 E. 13th Street). A short writing assignment based on

the performance will be due in April. I will arrange for a discounted group rate, and students can purchase their own tickets.

Grades: Preceptors will distribute a list of criteria for paper grades at the beginning of the semester. Final course grades will be based on the following:

Midterm Paper	15%
Midterm Exam	20%
Response Paper for <i>Prometheus Bound</i>	10%
Final Paper	25%
Final Exam	20%
Participation	10%

#### Additional Assistance

Preceptors and I will hold regular office hours and will be available through email. If you contact us by email, please allow sufficient time for a response. Do not wait until the night before a deadline to email us with questions or concerns. The College Learning Center, located on the first floor of Weinstein Hall (right behind Java City) and on the first floor of Third Avenue North Residence Hall, can help students process lecture material, prepare for exams, and organize paper ideas. For information on one-on-one and group peer tutoring, go to their website: [www.nyu.edu/cas/clc/index.html](http://www.nyu.edu/cas/clc/index.html). The Writing Center, located on the 3rd floor of 411 Lafayette, can offer additional advice on paper writing. Their website is [www.nyu.edu/cas/ewp/html/writing\\_center.html](http://www.nyu.edu/cas/ewp/html/writing_center.html).

### **SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS**

#### Creation: Time, Matter, Form

T 1/16 Introductions

TH 1/18 "Reading the Bible" ("Articles," 3-8); "Introduction to Old Testament" (3-9);  
Genesis, 1-11

T 1/23 Plato, *Timaeus*

TH 1/25 "Introduction to New Testament" (1261-1262); "The Gospels" (1263-1265);  
Gospel of John

T 1/30 Augustine, *Confessions*, books 1, 4-8

TH 2/1 *Confessions*, books 11-13

T 2/6 Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (selections TBA)

TH 2/8 *Origin of Species* (cont.)

#### The Organization of Life: Idealism, Teleology, Design

T 2/13 Plato, *Phaedo*

TH 2/15 Aristotle, *On the Soul*, books 2 and 3; *On the Parts of Animals*, book 1  
F 2/16 Paper #1 due  
T 2/20 Emerson, "Plato" and *Nature*; Hawthorne, "The Artist of the Beautiful"  
TH 2/22 Darwin, *Origin of Species*, chapters 13-14  
T 2/27 *English Victorian Poetry* and *Hardy's Selected Poems* (selections TBA)  
TH 3/1 Midterm Exam

Civilization and the Nature of Human Nature

T 3/6 Homer, *Odyssey*, books 1-12  
TH 3/8 *Odyssey*, books 13-24  
T 3/13 and TH 3/15 Spring Break  
T 3/20 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, preface, essays 1 and 2; "The Greek State";  
"Homer's Contest"  
TH 3/22 *Genealogy of Morality*, essay 3  
T 3/27 Wells, *The Time Machine*  
TH 3/29 *The Time Machine* (cont.)

Nature and the Quest for Knowledge: Prometheus and Faust

T 4/3 Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*  
TH 4/5 Goethe, "Prometheus"; Byron, "Prometheus"  
F 4/6 Paper #2 due  
T 4/10 Book of Job  
TH 4/12 Goethe, *Faust, Part I*  
T 4/17 *Faust* (cont.)  
TH 4/19 Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter" and "The Birth-mark"  
T 4/24 Shelley, *Frankenstein*  
TH 4/26 *Frankenstein* (cont.) and Conclusions  
T 5/8 Final Exam, 2:00-3:50pm  
*Please note: I may modify this schedule slightly if the need arises. All changes will be announced in class or through email.*