

# CONVERSATIONS OF THE WEST: ANTIQUITY AND THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

Professor David Levene

Department of Classics

Lectures: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11.00-12.15, Silver 206

Precepts: Mondays 8.00-9.15 (48CS 119), 9.30-10.45 (Silver 500)

Fridays 9.30-10.45 (Silver 404), 11.00-12.15 (Silver 508)

Preceptors: Kyle Johnson, Michael Mascio

Every society places demands on individuals: it could not do otherwise and still remain a society. But what happens when those demands are inconsistent? Can – or should – an individual determine the right course of action by reason alone? Or should one simply obey – but then, whom should one obey? What happens when people's moral judgements differ from the expectations of those around them? How can one maintain a society in the face of such conflicts? From the first moments of Western literature those questions are explored; they became all the more insistent in the unprecedented political, social, intellectual, and economic upheavals of the 19th century. This will form the centre of our study.

We will be examining these questions through a variety of texts from both of our periods, focusing on three themes in particular. First, what are the primary conflicts that our texts identify – conflicts within a single individual torn in two directions, or between different individuals, or between a single person and society more broadly? Second, what resolutions to those conflicts are proposed or assumed within the works – and are those resolutions unproblematic, or might they lead to further conflicts of their own? Third, how do these texts conceive of the role of society: are there shared values that might allow it to cohere and survive, and if so, how can those values be adopted or maintained?

## Study Advice

The first rule of this, as of every other course, is to READ the prescribed texts, and to do so in time for the lectures in which they will be discussed. You will get little out of the lectures, and even less out of the precepts, if you come to them unprepared. The second rule is that you should be prepared to talk, listen, and think, especially in the precepts, but also in the lectures – there will be plenty of opportunities both to ask and answer questions.

## Readings

Books originally in foreign languages should be read in the prescribed translations. In the case of texts translated from Hebrew, Greek, Latin, or German, translations can vary substantially, and you will often find it bewildering if you try to use a translation different from the rest of the class. The prescribed translations are as follows:

*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*

Homer, *The Iliad*, tr. Robert Fagles (New York, 1990)

Sophocles, *Antigone*, in *The Complete Greek Tragedies: Sophocles 1*, tr. D. Grene and R. Lattimore (Chicago, 1991)

Plato, *Gorgias*, tr. Donald Zeyl (Indianapolis, 1987)

Virgil, *Aeneid*, tr. Allen Mandelbaum (New York, 1971)  
Richard Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future and Other Works*, tr. W. Ashton Ellis (Omaha, 1994)  
Richard Wagner, *The Ring of the Nibelung*, tr. Stewart Spencer (in S. Spencer & B. Millington, *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion* (London, 2000))  
Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. K. Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge, 1994)

However, the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* is a translation (the 'New Revised Standard Version', or NRSV) which is also available in other editions. It is also on the Internet at <http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm> and <http://bible.oremus.org/>, though both sites only allow a limited portion to be downloaded at a time, which makes for inconvenient reading.

Texts originally written in English are another matter. Everything we will be reading is available on the Internet – indeed, in some cases it is for practical purposes only available on the Internet, as there are either no texts in print or else they exist only in editions that are expensive and/or hard to find. Personally I prefer reading books – especially in the case of long texts like *Culture and Anarchy* or *Idylls of the King* – rather than screens or printouts, so I have recommended cheap editions where they exist, but the choice is entirely yours.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Major Works*, ed. Z. Leader & M. O'Neill (Oxford, 2003). Poems to be read: *Queen Mab*, *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, *Ozymandias*, *To a Skylark*, *Ode to the West Wind*, *Adonais*, *To Liberty*. All also at

[http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/s/shelley/percy\\_bysshe/s54cp/complete.html](http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/s/shelley/percy_bysshe/s54cp/complete.html)

*Queen Mab* also at <http://www.bartleby.com/people/ShelleyP.html>

Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. S. Collini (Cambridge, 1993).

Also at [http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/nonfiction\\_u/arnoldm\\_ca/ca\\_titlepage.html](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/nonfiction_u/arnoldm_ca/ca_titlepage.html)

Poems by Matthew Arnold: *Bacchanalia*, *The Buried Life*, *Dover Beach*, *Philomela*, *Rachel*, *Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse*, *A Summer Night*, *Thyrsis*. All at

<http://whitewolf.newcastle.edu.au/words/authors/A/ArnoldMatthew/index.html>

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King and a Selection of Poems*, ed. G. Everett (New York, 2003). Poems to be read: *The Coming of Arthur*, *Lancelot and Elaine*, *The Holy Grail*, *Pelleas and Ettarre*, *Guinevere*, *The Passing of Arthur*, *The Palace of Art*\*, *The Lotos-Eaters*, *The Epic*\*, *Ulysses*. All also at

<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=8601> and

<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=610>. Note that the two poems asterisked in the list above do not appear in the recommended volume but can be read online.

Other poems will be supplied on handouts in the lectures.

### Requirements, grading, general policy

Two short papers: 7-8 pages each (20%, 25%)

Midterm exam: IDs, short essays (15%)

Final (take-home): short and long essays (30%)

Participation in precept, including attendance (10%)

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

Familiarise yourself with University regulations on academic integrity; read in particular <http://www.nyu.edu/cas/map/guidelines/academicintegrity.html>.

No extensions will be granted on or after the day papers are due. If you must turn in late work because of illness or other emergency, contact your preceptor immediately. Papers turned in late without prior notice and good reason will have grades reduced appropriately.

### Schedule of Lectures and Readings

Sept 5: Introduction.

Sept. 7: *Genesis* 1-22; *Exodus* 11-16, 19-24.

Sept. 12: *Genesis* 23-50; *Exodus* 1-10, 17-18.

NOTE: The following pages of the *Iliad* should be read for the next three lectures: 77-115 (to 'looming over armies'), 145-7 (to 'Argives in their triumph'), 195-213, 231-75, 296-324, 334-6 ('But not even now' ... 'win it for ourselves!'), 369-441, 467-502, 520-4 (to 'out of action'), 541-58, 588-614. In each lecture I will give specific passages to focus on for the next lecture, but the whole thing should be read as swiftly as possible.

Sept. 14: Homer, *Iliad*.

Sept. 19: *Iliad*.

Sept. 21: *Iliad*.

Sept. 26: Sophocles, *Antigone*.

Sept. 28: *Antigone*.

Oct. 3: Plato, *Gorgias*, pp. 1-50.

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

Oct. 5: *Gorgias*, pp. 51-113.

Oct. 10: Virgil, *Aeneid*, pp. 1-54, 79-102.

Oct. 12: *Aeneid*, pp. 128-211.

Oct. 17: *Aeneid*, pp. 239-69, 300-31.

Oct. 19: *Matthew*.

- Oct. 24: *I Corinthians*.
- Oct. 26: **\*\* MIDTERM EXAM \*\***
- Oct. 31: Shelley, *Queen Mab*.
- Nov. 2: Shelley, remaining poems.
- Nov. 7: Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future*, pp. 30-53, 182-210, 288-90, 366-75, 389-92.
- Nov. 9: Wagner, *The Ring of the Nibelung*.
- Nov. 14: *The Ring of the Nibelung* (focus on *Rheingold* and *Walküre*).
- Nov. 16: *The Ring of the Nibelung* (focus on *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*).
- Nov. 21: Tennyson.
- Nov. 23: NO CLASS.
- Nov. 28: Tennyson. **\*\* Second paper due \*\***
- Nov. 30: Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*.
- Dec. 5: Arnold, poetry.
- Dec. 7: Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, pp. 3-71.
- Dec. 12: Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, pp. 72-128.

**Final examination:** take-home essays due by e-mail to your preceptor by 10.00 a.m. on Tuesday, 19 December.

## General information

### *Office Hours:*

Professor Levene: Wednesday 11.00-12.30 in Room 708, 7<sup>th</sup> floor of 25 Waverly Place. Or if you prefer you can call me (212-998-8598 – 88598 if calling from an NYU telephone) or e-mail me ([D.S.Levine@nyu.edu](mailto:D.S.Levine@nyu.edu)) to make an appointment – or in fact you are welcome just to turn up without an appointment and knock at my door at any time. I'm always happy to see students if I am otherwise unoccupied; the worst that will happen is that I will be otherwise occupied, in which case I'll arrange to see you at a mutually convenient time.

Mr Johnson: Monday 11.00-1.00 in Room 707, 7<sup>th</sup> floor of 25 Waverly Place. E-mail: [kpj204@nyu.edu](mailto:kpj204@nyu.edu).

Mr Mascio: Friday 1.00-3.00 in Room 707, 7<sup>th</sup> floor of 25 Waverly Place. E-mail: [mcm300@nyu.edu](mailto:mcm300@nyu.edu).

*Video showings.* I'm going to try to arrange evening screenings of Wagner's *Ring* on DVD, though I haven't quite worked out timings or logistics yet. These will (needless to say?) be optional, though I hope that people will find them enjoyable and indeed useful.