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### **Texts and Ideas**

Antiquity and the Enlightenment: Fall, 2014

This is a very ambitious course. It includes a great deal of reading on many critical issues and problems of Western culture. These issues spanned the centuries and concerned diverse communities. They help us understand why our society looks like it does today, where many of our values come from, and why certain tensions characterize our culture. But our primary focus is not our society today, but the great authors, philosophers and religious leaders of the past who influenced the different cultures that preceded and informed our own. Our first task is to understand the authors in their historical situations. Although we study the perennial problems of Western culture, every moment in history is comprised of unique events, circumstances and peculiarities.

The first half of our course explores the “Judeo-Christian” and Hellenistic traditions. The former tradition emerged from the civilization of Ancient Israel, the second from the civilizations of Greece and Rome. Already in antiquity the traditions collided, and both the Christian Scriptures and Augustine are products of that encounter. The second half of our course jumps to the Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries. Enlightenment thinkers grappled with the fusion of these traditions that they had inherited, subjected both to serious criticism, and tried to revise them based on recent scientific advances. In a way we will see the Judeo-Christian and Hellenistic traditions merging together in the first half of our course and splitting apart in the second half, as a new tradition—science and technology—rises to prominence.

**Required Texts:** (Note: Except for the Bible, you must purchase these editions, and not rely on online texts.)

1. Oxford Study Bible.
2. *Sophocles I*, trans. David Greene (University of Chicago Press)
3. Plato, *Apology* and *Crito* in *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Hackett)
4. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff (Hackett)
5. Augustine, *Confessions* (Penguin)
6. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, trans. C.J. Betts (Penguin)
7. Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man* (Dover)
8. Voltaire, *Candide and Other Stories*, trans. Roger Pearson (World’s Classics.)
9. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*, trans. R. and J. Masters (St Martin’s Press, New York, 1964)
10. Diderot, *Encyclopédie* (posted on NYU Classes).

## Requirements

(1) Reading and Participation: This is most important. You will not learn unless you read the texts, think about them and struggle with the ideas. Lectures will help you to understand the texts, but you will gain the greatest rewards by analyzing, thinking critically, grappling with the writings yourself and participating in discussions. “Reading and Participation” includes several elements:

(a) Attending discussion sections. Too many absences will adversely impact your grade. **(6 absences will entail failure of the course. 5 absences will result in an F for the “participation” component of the course, i.e., 35 %. 4 absences will result in a much reduced grade for “participation.”)** Please always come to discussion sections (and lectures) with your text for that day.

Attendance is mandatory at lectures, although attendance will not be formally recorded. However, since discussion section will often take up issues raised in lectures, failure to attend lectures will impact the quality of participation in discussion.

(b) Keeping up with the reading and participating in the discussion sections.

(c) Selection of passages for discussion sections. Each student will select for each discussion section a passage from the text for that day that s/he judges to be important and intriguing. You should be prepared to explain to the class why you found this passage to be important and interesting. The passage can be one with which you agree (and explain why) or with which you disagree (and explain why you disagree, and why the author found his perspective compelling). Or you might select a passage that you don't completely understand but that you believe is important and wish to attempt to puzzle out with the class. The goal is to focus on specific passages, not the text as a whole.

Some texts will strike you as strange or offensive. You are welcome to select for discussion what seems strange or offensive to you. But your approach should be to try to understand why the author proposes an idea that you find alien. For example, you might find that the depiction of God in the Bible clashes with how you conceive of God, or that Plato's celebration of homoerotic love strikes you as immoral. Avoid this type of reaction: “The picture of God in Exodus is primitive and silly. How can God get so mad at the Egyptians and kill them all? How stupid to portray God as if he is on a power trip....” “Plato must have been a pedophile to celebrate the love of boys....” Rather, you should approach the passages as follows: “The portrayal of God in Exodus as punitive and warlike differs radically from my conception of God. I have always been taught that God is merciful to all his creatures. What could have motivated the author of Exodus to conceive of God in this fashion? Perhaps the Israelites were constantly fighting battles with the surrounding nations and it inspired the soldiers to think that their God fought on their side in war etc.” I am asking you not simply to react, but to try in each case to understand the author within his world and to share that with the class.

You will usually not be asked to hand in a paper about your selection. But you should have notes to consult so that you will be prepared when called upon to share your selection with the class.

(d) Two 4-6 page papers, assigned in sections. And occasional minor writing assignments.

- (2) A midterm exam
- (3) A final exam

## Grading

Participation (recitation sections), writing assignments: 35 %  
 Midterm: 30 %  
 Final: 35 %

## Schedule

Sept 3: Introduction  
 Sept 8: Genesis 1-50  
 Sept 10: Exodus 1-24  
 Sept 15: Exodus 25-34, Deut 29-30, Jonah  
 Sept 17: Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* (entire play)  
 Sept 22: Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*  
 Sept 24: Sophocles, *Antigone*  
 Sept 29: Plato, *Symposium*  
 Oct 1: Plato, *Symposium*  
 Oct 6: Plato, *Apology, Crito, "Death Scene"*  
 Oct 8: Matthew 1-13  
 Oct 13: --No class  
 Oct 15: Matthew 14- 26 / Acts 1-11  
 Oct 20: Galatians, John 1  
 Oct 22: Midterm  
 Oct 27: Augustine, *Confessions*  
 Oct 29: Augustine, *Confessions*

Nov 3: Enlightenment: Introduction  
 Nov 5: The Philosophes: Denis Diderot, *Encyclopedie* (on NYU Classes)  
 Nov 10: Deism and Optimism: Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*  
 Nov 12: Deism and Optimism: Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*  
 Nov 17: Encounter with Other Cultures: Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*  
 Nov 19: Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*  
 Nov 24: Rousseau, *Second Discourse*  
 Nov 26: Rousseau, *Second Discourse*  
 Dec 1: Voltaire, *Candide*  
 Dec 3: Voltaire, *Candide*  
 Dec 8: TBA  
 Dec 10: Conclusions, Review  
 Final exam: Wed 12/17 12:00-1:50 pm, in our classroom

For each text I have prepared study questions. These will help guide your reading and focus you on important passages. When I lecture I will assume that you have paid close attention to the questions and the passages to which they refer. The questions may also serve as the basis of discussions in the discussion sections.