

# General Studies 146: Modernity

Whitman College – Spring 2009

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Tu 2:30-3:30 & W 1:00-3:00

## Course Description

Antiquity & Modernity is a year-long exploration of the formation and transformation of some Western worldviews – conceptions of what is most fundamental and important in human life, both as it is and as it ought to be. We will explore ways of understanding nature, society, the self, and the transcendent. Attention will be given not only to the continuity within the dominant worldviews, but also to competing and alternate visions. The course will examine some of the important individuals, texts, and events that have significantly shaped, reshaped, and challenged these worldviews.

During the first semester, we explored four of the principal roots of Western culture: ancient Greece, the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and ancient Rome. We concluded with Augustine's attempt to synthesize and build on aspects from each of these sources. During the second semester, we will look at various events and ideas that extended and challenged the dominant worldview issuing from Western antiquity. These include the "constructive" projects of the Enlightenment, modern science, and Romanticism, as well as the "deconstructive" projects that called those into question. We will conclude with Toni Morrison's Beloved, which will provide an opportunity for reflecting on both the constructive and the deconstructive projects in a contemporary context.

This class is "core" not only in texts and ideas, but also in skills. This class will be an intensive exercise in careful reading, thoughtful reflection, enlightening conversation, and clear and compelling writing. Our goal as a group is to help each other further develop and refine these skills.

## Texts to Be Used

\*\* A good dictionary. (You can't understand the readings if you don't know what the words mean!)

Hacker, Diana. A Pocket Style Manual. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Bedford / St. Martin's, 2004.

Applebaum, Stanley, ed. English Romantic Poetry: An Anthology. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1996.

Brontë, Emily. Wuthering Heights. Ed. Diane Long Hoeveler. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002.

Descartes, René. Discourse on Method. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Trans. Donald Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998.

Frayn, Michael. Copenhagen. New York: Anchor Books, 2000.

Harvey, William. On the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals. Trans. Robert Willis. Buffalo: Prometheus, 1993.

Kafka, Franz. The Metamorphosis. Trans. Stanley Corngold. New York: Bantam Dell, 1972.

Machiavelli, Niccolò. The Prince. Ed. and Trans. David Wootton. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995.

Marx, Karl. Selected Writings. Ed. Lawrence Simon. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994.

de La Mettrie, Julien. Man a Machine and Man a Plant. Trans. Richard Watson and Maya Rybalka. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994.

Morrison, Toni. Beloved. New York: Plume, 1987.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, Discourse on the Origin of Inequality. Trans. Donald Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992.

Shakespeare. The Tragedy of Othello the Moor of Venice. Ed. Russ McDonald. New York: Penguin, 2001.

## Class Format

One of the main purposes of Antiquity & Modernity is to help students *personally engage* difficult texts like the ones we read. While I will sometimes present background information, alternative interpretations, or so on, those occasions will be rare and brief. The bulk of our class time will be spent actively working with the readings and the larger issues that they suggest, through whole-class and small-group discussions and other activities. More details about expectations for individual participation are provided on a separate handout.

For this class to work, everyone in the room must be *fully mentally present*. Turn off your cell phone, put away your other work, and really focus on the conversation. If you find that you're too drowsy or too distracted by something else to concentrate, you should simply (and unobtrusively) leave. Otherwise, I may interrupt class to ask you to leave.

## High Tech

- I will often distribute important announcements, reminders, and clarifications through e-mail. It is your responsibility to *check your account every day*.
- There is a *new* e-mail list-server to forward messages to everyone in the class: [gens146c\\_09sp@whitman.edu](mailto:gens146c_09sp@whitman.edu)
- The General Studies website ([http://www.whitman.edu/general\\_studies](http://www.whitman.edu/general_studies)) has a variety of useful information and links.

## Summary of Requirements and Grading

Preparation and participation	20%
Brief essays	15% combined
Two-text paper	20%
Three-text paper	30%
Writer's statement	15%

(Detailed explanations of each of these components are provided on a separate handout.)

### **\*\* NOTE: You *cannot* pass the class if:**

1. You miss 9 or more class meetings *for any reason*.
2. You miss either of the papers or the *for any reason*.
3. You fail the final portfolio assignment.

## Academic Honesty

**All of the work that you submit in this course must be entirely your own.** Of course, you can seek help in a variety of ways as you prepare your weekly paragraphs and 1000-word essays. But it is not permitted for you to use someone else's words or ideas in your written work without giving proper acknowledgment. Guidelines for citation can be found in Hacker's Pocket Style Manual.

Plagiarism will *not* be tolerated in any form. You have signed a statement indicating that you understand and will abide by the College policy on plagiarism. **Any student caught plagiarizing will automatically fail the course, and may be expelled from the College.** For more details, see the Student Handbook.

## Schedule of Readings & Assignments

**Note:** The questions printed here are *tentative*, and may be changed based on our particular class discussions.

- Wed. Jan. 21 Machiavelli, The Prince, Letter to Vettori, Dedication, and chs. 1-11  
*Q: One of the central concepts in Machiavelli's discussion is expressed by the Italian word 'virtù'. (Our translator uses a number of different English words for it, but always notes the original Italian.) What do you think is the underlying concept that links the different ways that Machiavelli uses that word? How does it fit into his overall view?*
- Fri. Jan. 23 Machiavelli, The Prince, chs. 12-20  
*Q: Identify the main lesson(s) for a ruler of your assigned chapter, and then find an example of it in ch. 19.*
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- Mon. Jan. 26 Machiavelli, The Prince, chs. 21-26  
*Q: How would Cicero respond to Machiavelli? Consider The Prince as a whole, and identify at least one key point of agreement, and one key point of disagreement.*
- Wed. Jan. 28 Shakespeare, Othello, acts 1-2  
*Q: Describe how your assigned character actually is, how that character views him- or herself, and how that character is viewed by others.*
- Fri. Jan. 30 Shakespeare, Othello, act 3  
*special assignment instead of daily question*  
\* brief essay on Machiavelli due \*
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- Mon. Feb. 2 Shakespeare, Othello, act 4  
*student-led discussion*
- Wed. Feb. 4 Shakespeare, Othello, act 5  
*Q: Why exactly does Othello kill Desdemona? Why exactly does he kill himself?*
- Fri. Feb. 6 Shakespeare, Othello (cont.)  
*Q: What exactly is the tragedy of the play?*
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- Mon. Feb. 9 Descartes, Discourse on Method, parts 1-3  
*student-led discussion*  
\* brief essay on Shakespeare due \*
- Wed. Feb. 11 Descartes, Discourse on Method, part 4  
*Q: How does Descartes prove the existence of God? Why is it so important for him to do so?*
- Fri. Feb. 13 Descartes, Discourse on Method, parts 5-6  
*Q: For Descartes, how does the process of scientific inquiry work? How does it fit into his overall view?*
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- Mon. Feb. 16 NO CLASS – Presidents’ Day Holiday
- Wed. Feb. 18 Harvey, On the Motion of the Heart, dedication and chs. 1-2 and 7-14  
*Q: How does Harvey’s understanding of the process of scientific inquiry compare to Descartes’? (Look for both similarities and differences.)*  
\* brief essay on Descartes due \*
- Fri. Feb. 20 La Mettrie, Man a Machine, 63-87 [through “...no particular classification.”]  
*Q: What exactly does La Mettrie mean in saying that a human being is a machine? How does he support that claim so far?*
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- Mon. Feb. 23 La Mettrie, Man a Machine, 87-118  
*student-led discussion*
- Wed. Feb. 25 Rousseau, Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, pp. 1-18  
*Q: The question which the Discourse is written to address is, “What is the origin of inequality among men, and is it authorized by the natural law?” (p. 16). What is the method that Rousseau says he will use in attempting to answer that question? Why?*
- Fri. Feb. 27 Rousseau, Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, part I  
*student-led discussion*
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- Mon. Mar. 2 Rousseau, Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, part II  
*Q: Rousseau clearly thinks that contemporary society is the cause of much inequality, suffering, and unhappiness. But what does he think we can / should do about it?*
- Wed. Mar. 4 Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?” – *distributed in class*  
*student-led discussion*
- Fri. Mar. 6 Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?” (cont.)  
\* Maxey Auditorium lecture by Prof. Jeanine Grenberg, St. Olaf College  
\*\* draft of two-text paper due \*\*
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- Mon. Mar. 9 Wordsworth, “My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold” and “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”  
Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale” and “Bright Star, ...”  
*student-led discussion*
- Wed. Mar. 11 Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and “Ode on Melancholy”  
Wordsworth, “On Mutability”  
Shelley, “On Mutability” – *distributed in class*  
*Q: What are the poets’ views of art and/or time?*
- Fri. Mar. 13 Wordsworth, “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey...”  
*special assignment instead of daily question*  
\*\* final version of two-text paper due \*\*
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SPRING BREAK

- Mon. Mar. 30      Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, pp. 56-79  
*Q: Marx identifies four types of alienation experienced by the worker in a capitalist system: from the product, from his work, from his "species being," and from other people. Explain the nature and cause of each type.*
- Wed. Apr. 1      Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, pp. 99-101  
and Preface to a Contribution on the Critique of Political Economy, pp. 209-13  
*Q: Marx famously states: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is, to change it" (p. 101). What does he mean by that? And why does he think it's true?*
- Fri. Apr. 3      Marx and Engels, Communist Manifesto, secs. I-II and IV (pp. 158-76 and 185-6)  
*student-led discussion*
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- Mon. Apr. 6      Marx and Engels, Communist Manifesto (cont.)  
*Q: TBA after student-led discussion.*
- Wed. Apr. 8      Brontë, Wuthering Heights, chs. 1-7  
*special assignment instead of daily question*
- Fri. Apr. 10      Brontë, Wuthering Heights, chs. 8-12  
*student-led discussion*  
\* brief essay on Marx and/or Marx and Engels due \*
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- Mon. Apr. 13      Brontë, Wuthering Heights, chs. 13-20  
*Q: Heathcliff tells Catherine that she has, essentially, killed herself (p. 145). What exactly does he mean by that? And do you think that he's correct? Why or why not?*  
7:00 in Olin 130 – optional lecture by Prof. Lisa Sternlieb (Penn State) on female narrators in Wuthering Heights
- Wed. Apr. 15      Brontë, Wuthering Heights, chs. 21-29  
*student-led discussion*
- Fri. Apr. 17      Brontë, Wuthering Heights, chs. 30-34  
*Q: Is the novel ultimately tragic? Why or why not?*
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- Mon. Apr. 20      Kafka, Metamorphosis, chs. 1-2  
*student-led discussion*  
\* brief essay on Brontë due \*
- Wed. Apr. 22      Kafka, Metamorphosis, ch. 3  
*Q: What does Gregor really want? Is that consistent throughout the story, or does it change? Either way, how so?*
- Fri. Apr. 24      Frayn, Copenhagen, act 1  
*Q: How do the personalities of Bohr and Heisenberg compare? How are those personalities shown to relate to their approaches to science?*
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- Mon. Apr. 27 Frayn, Copenhagen, act 2  
*Q: Both the characters within the play and the play itself draw analogies between the theory of quantum mechanics and human existence. Identify and explain any one of those analogies which you find to be particularly interesting and important.*  
\* brief essay on Kafka due \*
- Wed. Apr. 29 Morrison, Beloved, red cover pp. 1-59 / other covers pp. 1-52 or pp. 1-49  
[through "...the shadows of three people still held hands."]  
*student-led discussion*
- Fri. May 1 Morrison, Beloved, red cover pp. 60-124 / other covers pp. 53-111 or pp. 50-105  
[from "A fully dressed woman..." to "The hem darkened in the water."]  
*Q: In the clearing (pp.102-4 / pp.92-4 / pp. 87-9), what is Baby Suggs preaching? What problems does the novel present that would prevent a (freed) slave from achieving that?*
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- Mon. May 4 Morrison, Beloved, red cover pp. 125-195 / other covers pp. 112-174 or pp. 106-165  
[through the end of part I]  
*student-led discussion*
- Wed. May 6 Morrison, Beloved, red cover pp. 197-277 / other covers pp. 175-247 or pp. 167-235  
[through the end of part II]  
*Q: Carefully analyze the chapter that begins, "I am Beloved and she is mine. I see her take flowers..." (p. 248 / p. 221 / p. 210). What exactly is being described in this chapter? Who exactly is the speaker?*
- Fri. May 8 Morrison, Beloved, red cover pp. 279-324 / other covers pp. 249-290 or pp. 237-275  
[through the end of the novel]  
*Q: Consider the last two pages of the novel. What is Morrison saying there? How do you see that message relating to the story that preceded?*
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- Mon. May 11 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS  
\*\* draft of three-text paper due \*\*

**\*\*\* Sat. May 16 @ 11:00 a.m. – final version of three-text paper and writer's statement due \***