



School of Athens, Raphael (1509–1511)
Stanza della Segnatura, Papal Palace, Vatican

HUMA 2301 The Western Tradition I: Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages

Mondays 1–3:40 PM

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Office Hours: Apart from when I am teaching or eating lunch, I am in my office from 8:30–4:30 Mondays–Fridays. You are always welcome to stop by to talk with me. I truly enjoy visiting with students, so do not hesitate to come by to talk about anything. If you want to discuss something for an extended amount of time, please email me to arrange a time. I view it as my responsibility to be available and responsive to you. I aim to respond to all emails within 24 hours (weekends excluded).

“We spend our lives reading but we no longer know how to read — that’s to say, pause and free ourselves from our concerns, return to ourselves, leave aside our search for subtlety and originality, to meditate calmly, ruminate, and allow the texts to speak on their own.”

Diogenes Laertius

Note bene: Anything on this syllabus can change at the professor’s discretion in order to accommodate the needs of the professor and/or the students. Any changes will be communicated via email, Canvas announcement, or in-class notice. In some cases, a revised syllabus may be posted on Canvas.

Course Description (from AGST catalogue)

This course is a survey and critical examination of Western human history and explores the social, political, religious, intellectual, and artistic achievements from antiquity through the early middle ages. Classes will focus on engaging with some of the key texts of the Western intellectual tradition.

Detailed Course Description

This is a new experiment for AGST. It fulfills one half of the required six hours in Western Civilization for the BA program. This course is not a lecture-based course. The faculty member leading the course will not be presenting extended lectures with PowerPoint

presentations, describing in greater details historical periods that you studied in high school. Instead, this course will be taught by the books that we are reading. The professor should not be considered an expert on all of the texts but should be thought of as a more experienced reader whose task is to facilitate the conversation. We will read some difficult texts. We will read them with care and generosity of spirit. This can be intimidating, for it is both a challenge and a risk. It is a challenge because most of the texts we are reading are thousands of years old. They will use language in ways that we are not used to using language. They will speak about things that we do not normally think about. This is where the risk comes in. These texts have the power not just to inform like a dictionary or a car's repair manual, but to *transform*. The texts we will be reading have had a major impact on world history and have transformed the lives of people and whole societies. If you do the work this semester you will be deeply enriched as a result of this course, you may even find that a whole new world has been opened to you.

What I ask from you:

- I ask you to believe in your abilities. Our skills do not grow unless they are challenged, so when you encounter a passage that is perplexing or difficult, don't give up, thinking you can't understand it. Work patiently and the texts will unlock for you. Bring questions that you have about the text to class so we can explore them together.
- I ask you to read carefully and generously. Reading generously means avoiding the temptation to import your own meaning or judgment into a text and to instead resolve to first seek to understand it on its own terms.
- I ask you to come to class prepared. And I ask you to be trusting, gracious, and confident in class. I want you to feel confident enough to speak up and voice your opinions and questions. I want you to be gracious to others who are speaking (being gracious does not mean being afraid to disagree; it means being kind to others). And I want you to trust your classmates enough to share your thoughts, even if you are still forming them. We are thinking and reading together. We must have trust to do this.
- I ask for your undivided attention during our class time. Whether you are participating in our class in-person or through Zoom, I ask that you refrain from allowing external things to grab your attention (e.g. cell phones, social media, emails, etc.). I also ask that you try to remain free from internal distractions during our time together (e.g. thinking "what do I need to do after this?" etc.). Please be as fully present as you can be during our class time.
- I ask for you to attend class. Because we only meet one day a week, there are no allowances for unexcused absences. One unexcused absence will have a substantially negative impact on your grade. When a legitimate need for an excused absence arises, communicate with me and I will make accommodations.

What you can expect from me

- You can expect me to come to class prepared, having freshly read the same texts that you have read in preparation for class, as well as having consulted some scholarly secondary sources that will inform my comments.

- You can expect me to be honest and to admit when I do not know the answer to a question that we encounter.
- You can expect communication from me to be clear and timely.

Learning Objectives

A widespread practice in recent years is for professors to name measurable skills that students will develop in their courses. While this makes intuitive sense in courses that rightly focus on acquiring practical skills (e.g. nursing), it has always been awkward for courses in the humanities (e.g. philosophy, history, theology, literature). Most professors in the humanistic sciences who have gone in this direction (often under pressure from educational administrators) have generally claimed that their courses will give students skills like “critical thinking,” “clarity in written and verbal expression,” or help them to develop “cultural literacy.” As we will discuss during our first class, I believe that it is a serious mistake to treat education as if its purpose is to acquire skills, invariably skills that make the student more marketable upon completion of the course of instruction. To be clear, you *will* develop skills in this class, especially skills related to critical thinking, reading comprehension, and written and verbal expression. But gaining those skills is not the end for which we are aiming. Our objective in this course is to grow in wisdom through encountering the Good, the True, and the Beautiful in conversation with great books and with one another.

Course Textbooks

Note: There are many editions of the ancient works that we will be reading, including free versions online (usually these are translations that are so old they are in the public domain). You are required to use the editions listed here. When everyone uses the same edition, discussion is far easier.

- Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Belknap Press, 2004) ISBN: 978-0674013735
- Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Emily Wilson (Norton, 2018) ISBN: 978-0393356250
- Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom, 3rd ed. (Basic, 2016) ISBN: 978-0465094080
- Aristotle, *De Anima* (On the Soul), trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (Penguin, 1987) ISBN: 978-0140444711
- Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions* (Ignatius Critical Editions), trans. Maria Boulding (Ignatius, 2012) ISBN: 978-1586176839

Course Assignments

- **Class participation (70% of grade)**
 - The main requirement for this course is to come to class prepared to discuss the texts and to participate in class discussions. Students should create a reading journal, either a physical notebook or an electronic document (I recommend a physical note book). In your journal you should write your observations and questions about the text: list and describe the characters, summarize sections, outline, write down quotes that are particularly interesting to you (note the page number). Bring your journal to class and

use it during class discussion. I do not plan on having you submit your journals for a grade. However, I may ask you to look at your journal at any point in the semester.

- Begin class discussions. Every class session will be divided into two periods of about 70 minutes (we will have a short break between them). For each period a student will be assigned the task of beginning the class discussion. This should include an overarching summary of the material to be discussed in light of how it fits within the work as a whole. This summary should take at least five minutes and no more than ten minutes. It should be typed and shared with the class via the Canvas website. It should also include at least three questions for group discussion. We will sign up for these together in class.
- There may be periodic quizzes over the readings. These will be included in your participation grade.
- **Confessions and self-discovery paper (20% of grade)**
 - Write your own *Confessions* (5–7 pages). Model your reflections on Augustine’s *Confessions*, but do not attempt to replicate his style, format, and substance. Instead, tell the story of your spiritual and/or intellectual journey in your own way, employing your own distinctive literary style. Like Augustine’s *Confessions*, tell your story by engaging some of the key themes (philosophical questions, theological questions, important people, etc.) that have directed your life and vocation. Further details on this assignment will be given as the course progresses (due **Friday**, December 11).
- **Final Exam (10% of grade):** There will be a comprehensive final exam consisting of both objective questions and discussion questions. More details on the format of the exam will be provided later in the semester.

Date	Reading	Discussion Starter
Aug 24	None	Prof. Lawson
Aug 31	“How to Read a Book Summary,” (Canvas) Homer, <i>The Odyssey</i> , intro & bks. 1–8	1 st session (bks. 1–4): Prof. Lawson 2 nd session (bks. 5–8): Prof. Lawson
Sep 7	Labor Day (no class)	
Sep 14	Homer, <i>The Odyssey</i> , bks. 9–16	1 st session (bks. 9–12): 2 nd session (bks. 13–16):
Sep 21	Homer, <i>The Odyssey</i> , bks. 17–24	1 st session (bks. 17–20): 2 nd session (bks. 21–24):
Sep 28	Hadot, <i>What is Ancient Philosophy?</i> , 1–145	1 st session (1–76): 2 nd session (77–145):
Oct 5	Hadot, <i>What is Ancient Philosophy?</i> , 146–281	1 st session (146–233): 2 nd session (237–281):
Oct 12	Plato, <i>The Republic</i> , intro & bks. 1–3	1 st session (bk. 1): 2 nd session (bks. 2–3):

Oct 19	Plato, <i>The Republic</i> , bks. 4-6	1 st session (bk. 4):
		2 nd session (bks. 5-6):
Oct 26	Plato, <i>The Republic</i> , bks. 7-10	1 st session (bks. 7-8):
		2 nd session (bks. 9-10):
Nov 2	Aristotle, <i>On the Soul</i> , intro & bks. 1-2	1 st session (bk. 1):
		2 nd session (bk. 2):
Nov 9	Aristotle, <i>On the Soul</i> , bk. 3	1 st session (bk. 3):
		2 nd session: Prof. Lawson
Nov 16	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , intro & bks. 1-3	1 st session (bk. 1):
		2 nd session (bks. 2-3):
Nov 23	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , bks. 4-6	1 st session (bk. 4):
		2 nd session (bks. 5-6):
Nov 30	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , bks. 7-9	1 st session (bk. 7):
		2 nd session (bks. 8-9):
Dec 7	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , bks. 10-13 (regular class during finals week)	1 st session (bks. 10-11):
		2 nd session (bks. 12-13):