

**HISTORY 3402F**  
**Homer to St. Augustine: Classic Texts and Debates in Western Culture**  
**Fall 2022**

**Wednesdays, 9:30-11:30, SH-3355**

**Course delivery: in-person**

**Instructor: Eli Nathans**

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1:00-3:00pm  
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**This is a draft syllabus. Please see your course OWL site for the final syllabus.**

**Course delivery with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic**

The intent is for this course to be delivered in-person but should the COVID-19 landscape shift, the course will be delivered on-line synchronously (ie., on Zoom at the times indicated in the timetable). The grading scheme will not change. The course will return to an in-person mode of delivery when the University and local health authorities deem it safe to do so.

**Course Description:**

Homer's *Odyssey*, Aristotle's *Ethics*, the Hebrew Bible, and St. Augustine's *Confessions*, which influenced both the ages in which they were composed and subsequent Western thought, depict distinctive and often conflicting ideals for the individual and society. The class examines these ideals and the larger debates they embody and reflect.

**Prerequisite(s):** 1.0 History course at the 2200 level or above.

Unless you have either the prerequisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

**Course Syllabus:**

In each half of the course we examine paired texts in which the second text can be read as - in part - a response to the first text. The first pair is Homer's *Odyssey* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. The second half of the course pairs selections from the Hebrew Bible and St. Augustine's *Confessions*. To help us interpret each text and to provide historical context, secondary sources are also assigned. Near the end of the class we compare the approaches and teachings of the texts from both halves of the course.

*The Odyssey* depicts a social order based on Greece of the tenth and ninth centuries BC. The poem recounts one man's efforts to return to his island home after he had helped lead a large-scale pirate expedition. Deadly storms,

hunger, violence in many forms, and captivity, block his path. Through a combination of deceit, piety, self-discipline, awareness of others' characters, capacity to learn and to make wise choices, and his passion to return home, he triumphs over adversity. The poem contains many seemingly life-like sketches of gods and men and - somewhat less frequently - women. The characters depicted are drawn from a range of social positions, from slaves to warriors. Homer's characters include the admirable and the despicable, the foolish and the wise. We discuss both the poem and a classic analysis of the relationships and values found in it and Homer's second poem, *The Iliad*, Moses Finley's *The World of Odysseus*.

The fourth century BC Greek philosopher Aristotle formulated an ideal of human conduct that was both more philosophical and more ethical, more universal, than that of Homer. We examine Aristotle's understanding of what constitutes human excellence, and his analysis of the forms taken by friendships. To the extent friendship can be found in Homer, it has a very different foundation and character. The enduring influence of Aristotle's work is suggested by the fact that in medieval Europe Aristotle was considered an authority second only to the Bible.

In the second half of the class we examine key chapters of the Hebrew Bible and compare their depiction of the human condition and human possibilities with those found in Homer and Aristotle. We focus in particular on the opening stories of Genesis and related stories that can be read as a kind of internal dialogue with the opening stories. We then read selections from the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, a fourth and fifth century Christian bishop whose writings reflected the influence of Greek and Roman authors, contemporary religious and ideological debates, and the dire contemporary circumstances of the Roman Empire. Augustine proposed his own interpretations of the opening chapters of the Hebrew Bible. St. Augustine's work has been deeply influential in the history of Christianity.

This course will be discussion based. Students should be prepared to participate actively in analyzing the assigned texts.

As this summary suggests, the larger aim of the course is to introduce students to, or deepen their understanding of, conversations in Western culture that have endured over many centuries and from which it is still possible to learn.

### ***Learning Outcomes:***

Students who take this course will be able to explain the meanings of the assigned texts, place them in their historical context, and explain their relationships to each other.

### **Course Materials:**

St. Augustine, *The Confessions* (New York: Oxford World's Classics, 2008).

M.I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (New York: New York Review Books, 2002).

Homer, *The Odyssey*, translated by Richmond Lattimore (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2007).

Coursepack containing starred sources, as well as documents that will found in the Resources section of the course OWL website.

## Methods of Evaluation:

Weekly response papers on assigned readings, to be completed in class (unless the class is required by a revival of the pandemic to move to on-line instruction, in which case the response papers will be completed before class) . 10 points

Class participation: 20 points

Two six to eight page essays, on set questions based on readings assigned for the course (or different questions approved by the instructor). There will be one required essay based on the Homer assignment, due by October 19th, and one essay based on other texts assigned for the class, due by December 7th. Students who fail to complete the assigned essay on Homer, or one of the questions based on the other assigned texts, will be assigned an alternative essay question. A penalty of ten points will be imposed on the alternative essay for the failure to meet the deadline for essay submission.

35 points each

Students must pass the required written work in order to achieve a passing grade in the course. What this means is that the weighted average of the grades for the essays and the weekly response papers must be 50 or higher.

The lowest of the participation and response paper grades will be dropped when calculating the grade for the semester. This means that each student may miss one class and one response paper without a penalty. All other absences from class will be excused only on the basis of an accommodation request from the student's Academic Counseling Office.

## Course Schedule and Readings:

### Wednesday, September 14

Introduction.

Homer, *The Odyssey*, books 1-2.

### Wednesday, September 21

Homer, *The Odyssey*, books 3-6.

Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, 5-45 (chapters 1-2).

### Wednesday, September 28

Homer, *The Odyssey*, books 7-11.

Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, 46-108 (chapters 3-4)

### **Wednesday, October 5**

Homer, *The Odyssey*, books 12-17

Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, 109-46 (chapter 5)

\*A.W.H. Adkins, *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece. From Homer to the end of the Fifth Century* (New York: Norton, 1972), 10-21.

### **Wednesday, October 12**

Homer, *The Odyssey*, books 18-24

### **Wednesday, October 19**

\*Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated with commentaries and glossary by Hippocrates Apostle (Grinnell: Peripatetic Press, 1984), 21-34 (Book Beta).

\*Adkins, *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece. From Homer to the end of the Fifth Century* (Norton, 1972), 22-31.

\*Jonathan Barnes, "Aristotle," in R.M. Hare, Jonathan Barnes, and Henry Chadwick, *Founders of Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 89-101, 164-74.

### **Wednesday, October 26**

\*Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated with commentaries and glossary by Hippocrates Apostle (Grinnell: Peripatetic Press, 1984), 140-61 (Book Theta)

### **Wednesday, November 2nd: Reading Week - classes do not meet**

### **Wednesday, November 9**

\*Genesis 1-3; 6-9:17.

\*Marc Zvi Brettler, *How to Read the Jewish Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7-12, 29-47.

### **Wednesday, November 16**

Judy Klitsner, *Subversive Sequels in the Bible. How Biblical Stories Mine and Undermine Each Other* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society (2009), xv-xxxii, 95-133.

### **Wednesday, November 23**

Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (2000, 2nd ed.).

### **Wednesday, November 30**

*The Confessions of St. Augustine*

Book One, chapters 7, 16, 19

Book Two, chapters 1-4

Book Four, chapters 1, 2, 4, 7

Book Five, chapters 9, 10, 13, 14

Book Six, chapters 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 12 -15

Book Eight, chapters 6, 7, 12

Book Ten, chapters 3, 4, 31-39

### **Wednesday, December 7**

*The Confessions of St. Augustine*

Book Twelve, chapters 7, 24, 27, 28, 30, 31

Book Thirteen, chapters 22, 23, 28

Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, chapters 1,2,4,5,6.

### **Additional Statements:**

Please review the Department of History Course Must-Knows document, <https://www.history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/Docs/Department%20of%20History%20Course%20Must-Knows.pdf>, for additional information regarding:

- Academic Offenses

- Accessibility Options
- Medical Issues
- Plagiarism
- Scholastic Offences
- Copyright
- Health and Wellness

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