

# Contemporary Civilization

Fall 2016

**Section 008**

**When:** MW 10:10am-12pm

**Where:** Broadway 206

**Professor:** Kathryn Tabb (Philosophy)

**Office:** 721 Philosophy Hall

**Email:** kct2121@columbia.edu

**Office Hours:** Monday 2pm-3pm, Wednesday 1pm-2pm, or by appointment

*“The function of the university is not simply to teach bread-winning, or to furnish teachers for the public schools, or to be a centre of polite society; it is, above all, to be the organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life, an adjustment which forms the secret of civilization.”*

- Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, p. 60

## Course Description

Contemporary Civilization has two joint aims: to educate you about the intellectual traditions that have shaped Western society, and to give you some of the tools necessary to transform it.

Over the year we will read texts from the classical period up to the current century, which present an enormous diversity of theories about the human being as creature, as subject, and as citizen. Through exploring different explanations of how individuals come together to form a civic body, we will bring the contingency of our contemporary practices into view. We will track the power struggles between political, religious, and scientific authorities through the centuries that can help explain those of the present day. We will consider how definitions of “civilization” contribute to structures of power, oppression, and other-ing. We will trace changing conceptions of human nature: our differences from non-human animals, our capacities to care for each other, and our place in the universe.

On the methodological side, this course aims to build the skills necessary for participation in a democracy, which include the capacities to question authority, to disable ideology, and to think critically and creatively about the challenge of living among others. Rather than remembering names or dates, your task is to analyze the claims put before you and to relate them to each other, and, ultimately, to come to your own conclusions about the questions at hand. We will work together on your reading, writing, and argumentative skills through assignments and brief in-class tutorials. Contemporary Civilization requires consistent and substantial effort — the rock of procrastination will be deadly, as will be the hard place of perfectionism! I am always happy to meet with you one-on-one to discuss strategies for reading more productively, writing more efficiently, and managing your workload.

## Readings

It is far preferable to get the editions listed below, so that you have the same page numbers as the rest of the class, but if you already own the texts or have secured a cheaper alternative you may use them. NB though that the books can be bought as a heavily discounted bundle at Book Culture or the CU bookstore, so consider making your purchases there. Readings not on the following list will be provided in digital copy on Courseworks. **Laptops, tablets and e-readers are not permitted in this classroom unless you get permission from me in advance – you have a printing allowance for PDF readings. Bring hardcopies.**

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford)  
Aristotle, *Politics* (Hackett)  
Augustine, *City of God* (Penguin)  
*New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha* (Oxford)  
Epictetus, *Handbook* (Hackett)  
Galen, *Three Treatises on the Nature of Science* (Hackett)\*  
Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford)  
Locke, *Political Writings* (Hackett)  
Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Hackett) - n.b. you do not need to buy the *Discourses*  
Plato, *Republic* (Hackett)  
*The Qur'an* (Oxford)  
*The Protestant Reformation* (Harper & Row)

\*Only available at Book Culture

## Evaluation

Your grade for this course will be made on the basis of the following components:

- - Participation (in-class discussion / office hours) — 10%
- - Discussion questions — 10%
- - 1<sup>st</sup> paper (7-10 pages) — 20%
- - 2<sup>nd</sup> paper (7-10 pages) — 30%
- - Midterm: 15%
- - Final (not cumulative): 15%

I prefer to grade anonymously and will ask you to prepare your work for blind review.

## Attendance

The Core has a very strict policy about student attendance. **After your first unexplained absence, any further unexplained absence will result in a 3% drop in your final grade for the course.** If you must miss class due to a family emergency, religious holiday, extracurricular conflict, horrible breakup, etc., you must **let me know before the session** — otherwise I will expect a note from a doctor or your academic advisor. In line with Core policy recommendations, more than 4 unexcused absences in a single semester leads to a failure in this course.

## Class Participation and Discussion Questions

As you'll note, participation is a significant portion of your grade. This class will be the most fun for all of us if we can achieve intense and rich discussions each week, so I ask you to come having done the reading, ready to focus and engage throughout class. It is to this end that I ask you to **put away all electronics during discussion**. If I sense that people are not doing the reading, we will start having pop quizzes. It's on you to save us from this fate!

Discussion will be based on the **discussion questions** you email to me (in the body of an email, not as an attachment) no later than **9 pm Sunday** and **9 pm Tuesday**. Discussion questions that are late will not be counted. Questions will be graded on a scale of 1 (more effort needed) to 2 (fine job) to 3 (great work) to 4 (truly impressive). Questions covering matters of fact (such as the clarification of a concept, the identity of a historical player, etc.) will in most cases be graded lower than those addressing matters of interpretation (such as a criticism of an argument, an inquiry into the relation of material covered to other course material, etc.). Occasionally I will send out announcements for talks and other events; if you attend these and send me a paragraph-long summary, you in return will get a "pass" to be used for a future discussion question. In addition, you will get 3 free "passes" a semester — to use one, email me to let me know at the usual discussion-question time. I use these questions to structure discussion, and will often read or summarize somebody's question in class or ask them to elaborate. **If you do not want me to identify a question as yours in class, please identify it as \*confidential\* in your email.**

While I encourage everyone to contribute to discussion, I recognize for some this is difficult and I offer these discussion questions as well as office hours as an alternative way to increase your participation grade.

## Written Work

You will write **two papers** of 7-10 pages long, double-spaced, size 12 font, 1" margins. The due dates are included on the schedule. I will provide a few topics for you to choose from, and will provide them on a rolling basis throughout the semester, so you can make your own schedules for working on your papers. While I do grade anonymously, I encourage you to come in to talk to me about how best to structure your argument. I will not read drafts that are emailed to me, but will look over work you bring in to office hours.

These papers must have a thesis – that is, make an argument – rather than simply summarizing material read or discussed in class. We will talk about what this means before your first assignment.

For every day a paper is late you will lose half a grade, unless you have a note excusing you from your academic advisor or a doctor or unless we have agreed to an extension in advance. If you get behind in your work **tell me sooner rather than later** as I will be more likely to be charitable.

## Exams

There will be **one midterm and one final exam** (dates listed below). These exams will be a combination of shorter- and longer-answer questions. I will provide a review sheet for each exam, but your best asset is your peers – I encourage you to study together and collaborate to assemble study materials that everyone can use.

## Accessibility

I recognize that there are multiple ways to learn, and I encourage you to discuss your learning style and comprehension requirements with me during my office hours or by appointment. I am always happy to discuss study habits, homework management methods, etc., and to work with you to assure you get the most possible out of our class. If you find yourself struggling with accessibility issues in the classroom and have not yet contacted Disability Services (DS), I encourage you to do so; once you register with them, they can provide note-takers, extra time for assignments, transcribers, and interpreters, among other services, as well as liaise between you and your professors. Students who think they may have specific accessibility requirements can contact Disability Services for a confidential discussion at (212) 854-2388 (Voice/TTY) or by email at [disability@columbia.edu](mailto:disability@columbia.edu). More information on the DS registration process is available online at [www.health.columbia.edu/ods](http://www.health.columbia.edu/ods). Finally, if you are struggling psychologically during our time together, I can help connect you with services on campus that can help — just ask.

## Office Hours

If you are unable to attend the office hours listed above, you can email me to make an alternative arrangement – I will be happy to meet at some other time. Office hours can be used to talk over assignments, reading, or class performance, or to have a more freewheeling discussion about the topics at hand. If you are struggling in the course the best thing you can do is come in and explain the situation to me as soon as possible so we can work out a solution together. If you would like to talk about something confidential, email me for an appointment so we will not be interrupted. Discussions in office hours count toward your participation grade.

**Academic integrity:** Just like you, I have taken a pledge to abide by Columbia’s statement of policy regarding cheating and plagiarism. This means that I must report any instances of academic dishonesty that occur in our class. To avoid this unpleasant outcome, please get in touch with me immediately if you are tempted to either cheat or plagiarize so we can find another way forward for you. Unfortunately, many cases of academic dishonesty are due to ignorance, but cannot be excused for that reason. Be sure to educate yourself about proper citation practices (we will also go over these together in class) and consult with me or the Writing Center if there is any risk of improper citation. This is the official Core statement on academic dishonesty:

**Columbia College is dedicated to the highest ideals of integrity in academia. Therefore, in Literature Humanities and Contemporary Civilization, any instance of academic dishonesty, attempted or actual, will be reported to the faculty chair of the course and to the dean of the Core Curriculum, who will review the case with the expectation that a student guilty of academic dishonesty will receive the grade of “F” in the course and be referred to dean’s discipline for further institutional action.**

**Schedule (all readings and dates subject to change)**

**September 7 (W):** Plato, *Republic*, Books I-II \*Introduction to the Syllabus\*

**September 12 (M):** Plato, *Republic*, Books III-V

**September 14 (W):** Plato, *Republic*, Books VI-VII

**September 19 (M):** Plato, *Republic*, Books VIII-X \*Reading Tutorial\*

**September 21 (W):** Aristotle, *Physics*, Book II §1-3 (on Courseworks); *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I, II §1-6

**September 26 (M):** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books V, VII §1-8; VIII; X

**September 28 (W):** Aristotle, *Politics*, Books I; III §1-13; VII §1-3; VIII §1-3

**October 3 (M):** *Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible), *Exodus* §1-24; *Deuteronomy* §1-6; Samuel §2, 8-10, 17-20; *Ecclesiastes*

**October 5 (W):** Epicurus, "Letter to Herodotus;" "Letter to Menoecus;" "Principle Doctrines;" "Vatican Sayings"

**October 10 (M):** Epictetus, *Handbook* (entire)

**October 12 (W):** Galen, *Three Treatises on the Nature of Science*, "On the Sects for Beginners;" "On Medical Experience," §1-10 \*Paper-Writing Tutorial\*

**October 17 (M):** New Testament, *Matthew*; *Romans*; *Galatians*

**October 19 (W):** Augustine, *City of God*, Book I §Preface-3, 15-27; Book IV §1-4; Book V §P-1, 8-16; Book VIII §1-12; Book X 32

**FIRST PAPER DUE Friday, October 21\* by midnight**

**October 24 (M):** Augustine, *City of God*, Book XI, 1; Book XII §7-8, 23; Book XIII 1-8; Book XIV §1-5, 10-19, 24-28; Book XVIII §1, final paragraph of 54; Book XIX §13-17; Book XXII 6, 28-30

**October 26 (W):** *The Qur'an*, Suras 1, 114, 112, 107, 98, 96, 68, 56, 39, 26, 2-3 (recommended that you read them in that order) \*midterm review sheet handed out\*

**October 31 (M): MIDTERM**

**November 2 (W):** Ibn Tufayl, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (selections); Al-Ghazali, *The Rescuer from Error*

**November 7 (M):** NO CLASS (academic holiday)

**November 9 (W):** Thomas Aquinas, *St. Thomas on Politics and Ethics* pp. 3-7, 14-29, 30-

38, 46-53

**November 14 (M):** Machiavelli, *The Prince*

**November 16 (W):** Sepulveda, *Democrates Alter*; Vitoria, *On the American Indians* (pp. 231-251, 264-65, 271-272, 277-291); Bartolomé de Las Casas, "Apologetic History of the Indies"

**November 21 (M):** Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," "Concerning Government Authority;" John Calvin, "Institutes of the Christian Religion" (in *The Protestant Reformation*)

**November 23 (W):** Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, "Preface" and "Plan of the Great Renewal;" Book I Aphorisms I-XLVI, XCV-CVI (on Courseworks); Galileo, "Letter to the Grand Duchess of Tuscany"

**November 28 (M):** Correspondence of Descartes and Elisabeth (selections); Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, §1-12, 17-31, 35-50, 151-156, 211-212

**November 30 (W):** Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Introduction, §1-6, 12-13

**December 5 (M):** Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 14-21

**December 7 (W):** John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, §1-9, 18, 19 \*final review sheet handed out\*

**SECOND PAPER DUE Friday, December 9<sup>th</sup> by midnight**

**December 12:** Locke, "A Letter Concerning Toleration"

**December 16, 1-4pm: FINAL EXAM**